

Latinos/as in Lansing: An Oral History Approach



Rubén Martínez, Ph.D.

A. Rocío Escobar-Chew, M.A.

Lauren Hickman



Julian Samora Research Institute

Acknowledgements...

- Thank you to Dr. Rubén Martínez, Ph.D (Ruben.Martinez@ssc.msu.edu) for his guidance and the great opportunity of being involved in the OHLM project.
- Thank you to the Julian Samora Research Institute for the research and funding opportunity.
- Special thanks to Dr. Pilar Horner (phorner@msu.edu) for her valuable feedback and support in the development of the qualitative analysis of this project and the ideas for this presentation.
- Thank you to Dr. Marsha Carolan (carolan@msu.edu) for her time revising this presentation as well as the important feedback she provided.



Purpose of the Study

- Identify patterns of The Settlement Process* of Latinos/as in Lansing:
 - **Settling Out** - factors that contributed to leaving the migrant lifestyle.
 - **Settling Down**- factors that influenced where they settled (i.e.: social networks and kinship connections).
 - **Settling In** - factors that influenced their participation in secondary organizations (outside of the family).
- * Settlement frameworks (Provinzano, 1974; Piore, 1986; Massey, 1986; Logan, 1991; Green, 1994)
- This presentation includes the preliminary findings from 4 of 18 oral history interviews completed so far in this ongoing research project.



Oral History...

- “The systematic collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences.” (Moyer, 1999).
- The process of analysis that follow includes locating the histories in their appropriate context by corroborating the facts and analyzing the data. (Moyer, 1999).
- Another piece of our project is concerned with the collection of historical records from participants, such as photographs, certificates, pamphlets from Latino past organizations developed in the area, etc.
- These materials are becoming part of the JSRI museum collection, helping to document the contributions of Latinos/as to this community.



Participants

- Senior Latinos/as residing in the area of Lansing, Ingham County (n=18).
- Ages between 57-89 years of age.
- 9 females, 9 males.
- Majority were migrant workers.
- Mexican, Mexican-American (Tejanos), and from other Latin-American countries.



Method

- **Design:** Narrative Study.
- **Recruitment:**
 - Key Informants (community leaders access to social groups and organizations).
 - Snowball sampling (trust).
 - Self-selecting sample (volunteered).
- **Data Collection procedures:** Oral history interviews and collection of artifacts.
 - One-on-one interviews, minimum: 2 hours long, participant's residence or organization.

Method (Cont.)

- **Criteria:** purposive sample (50 year or older/ at least 3 years living in MI).
- **Data Analysis:** Inductive/Deductive inquiry.
- **Interviewer/researcher location:** shared ethnicity, educational attainment, migration status, age, outsider/insider.



Preliminary Sample Description

- 2 females and 2 males:
 - 1 female and 2 males are former migrant workers (Rosa, Felipe, and Carlos)*.
 - 1 female emigrated from TX to MI, but not as a migrant worker (Dora)*.

* Real names were replaced with Pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy.



Demographics

Pseudonym	Year Born	Gender	Status	Children	Education	Former Occupation	Ever a migrant Worker ?	Place of Birth	Came to MI in
Rosa	1932	F	Widow	11	Elementary	Field & Factory Worker	Yes	MX	1992~
Felipe	1937	M	Married	4	B.A. Admin.	Elected official & NPO Manager	Yes	MX	1952~
Carlos	1933	M	Married	5	Elementary	Field worker / Private Business	Yes	MX	1955
Dora	1922	F	Widow	8	College (1yr)	NPO Commissioner	No	TX	1946



What did we asked?

- Open ended interview guide with a total of 51 questions (no. of questions varied according to being a migrant worker or not). The guide was divided in 3 basic phases:

Settling out:

- How was your life as a migrant worker?
- How did you happen to come to live in MI?

Settling in:

- What where your early experiences in MI?

Settling out:

- At what point did you became active in church, politics, schools (etc.)?



Results

- **The Migrant Lifestyle:**

- Common experiences:

- **Life of hardship:** *“Los trabajos were too difficult, you suffer riding in the back of the trucks.” “We didn’t have bathrooms.” –Felipe*
 - **Constant mobility:** *“[My grandparents] followed the crops every year for 9 months.” –Carlos*
 - **School interrupted:** *“[My parents didn't let me] go to school until the harvesting season ended”. –Felipe*

- Contrasting experience:

- **Enjoyment:** *“We liked traveling and working on la labor. We made it sort of a game. I was with my children, I was happy.” –Rosa.*



Results

- **Settling out:**

- Common experiences:

- **Social networks were essential** *“I knew of a family that came and lived in Lansing, he worked for GM. So I came looking for him.” – Carlos*
 - **Factory work, railroad (language skills/education).** *“Because I didn’t had enough education, I went to [factory name]”, they pay you well. –Carlos.*

- Contrasting experiences:

- Smoother transition: *“We (participant and his parents) came with everything set up because my brothers already had a house, a car, and spoke English” –Felipe.*



Results

- **Settling out:**
 - Common experiences:
 - **Reasons for leaving the migrant stream:**
 - *Improve their quality of life: “We were real poor. We had no insurance, no benefit, nothing.” –Carlos*
 - **Psychological detachment from the migrant stream:**
 - *“When I was 18 years-old, I was able to apply for a job by myself. Then I said: “Yo me salgo” (I’ll leave [the migrant stream]) –Felipe.*
 - *“When I was 16 years-old I said: I don’t want to do this. This is not for me. I wanna do something different.*
–Carlos.

Results

- **Settling out:**

- **A Contrasting experience:**

– *[Due to my husband's infidelity] I decided to separate from him. That is why I came here. Then my son got an operation here. When I came to Lansing I was disabled (back lesion). I received disability and had to stop working. It's sad. I didn't really come to stay, but I ended up staying here up until today. –Rosa.*



Results

- **Settling down: Common experiences:**
- **Pioneers:** *“When I first came there weren’t many Latinos” – Carlos & Dora.*
- **Why Lansing?:** *“Lansing is a good city to live in. Compared to Detroit and Flint, is more peaceful here.” –Carlos*
- **Role of social/religious organizations:** *“I started feeling more as part of the community when I was invited to the church” –Rosa*
- **Acculturation:** *“All my children were born in MI. First, they don’t speak Spanish. I told them: “You have to speak both languages. Spanish is your language too.” –Carlos*
- **Language barriers (English with other non-Latino/a):** *“I don’t know why these gringos don’t understand what I am saying!” -Felipe. “I taught myself English by reading the [Lansing] State Journal” –Carlos.*



Results

- **Settling down:**

- Contrasting experiences:

- Language barriers** (English with other Latinos/as) “Many people that know Spanish speak to you in English.” –Rosa.

- “A lo hecho ya”**: “*We (participant and his parents) came with everything set up because my brothers already had a house, a car, and spoke English*” –Felipe.

- Experiences of discrimination**: “We haven’t feel any marked discrimination over here [like the one] I have seen in Texas” -Dora



Results

- **Settling in:**

- Common experiences:

- Leadership role:** *“I was very much involved in many things with people, the beginning of Lansing with the Mexican people.”* –Dora.

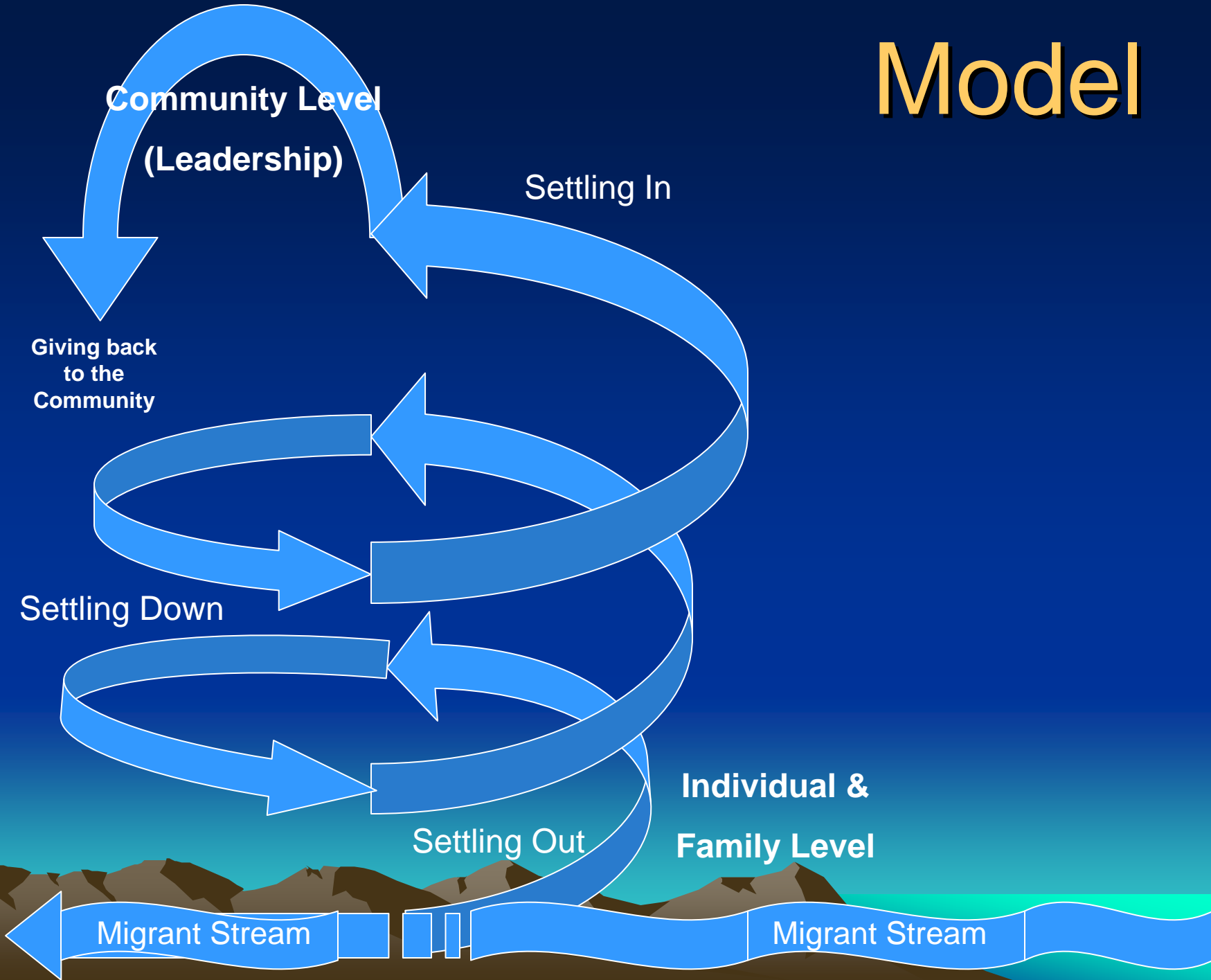
- **Expanded social network:** *“The only way in which one can help our people is to get into politics, get in the newspapers, get into the radio.”* –Felipe.

- **Giving back to the community:** *I left my job, I thought about the opportunity, and the fact that I could do more for our people [as a NPO manager].”* –Felipe.

- Contrasting experience:

- No interested in leadership:** *“They offered me the [elected official position] , but I didn’t wanted to. It’s too time-consuming.”* –Carlos.

Model



Model

**Community Level
(Leadership)**

Expanded
Social
networks

Owned
businesses

Leadership roles

Social Activism

Settling In

Giving back
to the
Community

Social networks

Factory/Railroad
Employment

Diverse transitions
(easy...challenging...all positive)

Language barriers

Settling Down

Social
contacts

Settling Out

Pioneers

**Individual &
Family Level**

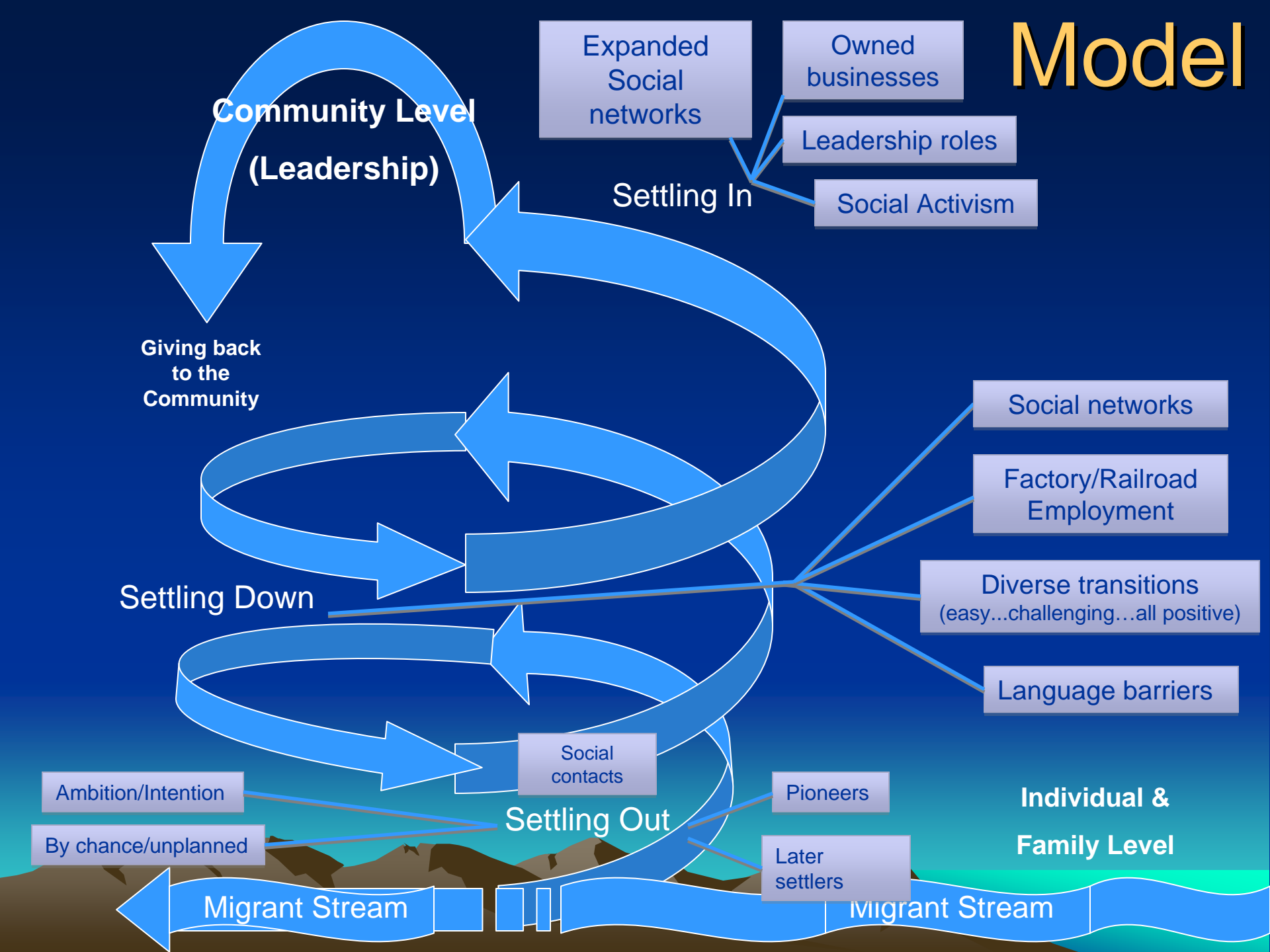
Ambition/Intention

By chance/unplanned

Later
settlers

Migrant Stream

Migrant Stream



Research Challenges

- Careful historic review of the facts and the context of migrant workers and the background of Latinos/as in Michigan.
- The abstract nature of the oral histories allow to explore people's idiosyncratic experiences in their particular context and at a specific time (Portelli, 1991).



Discussion

- In the process of *restorying* (Creswell, 2007) the field text from the interviews we discovered that:
 - Settlement process is an overlapping process that develops in a upward spiral, in a circular fashion.
 - Starts from an individual/family (tight social network) level and develops into a community level (expanded social network), as the individual/family integrates to her/his settlement context.




Conclusions

- The settlement process of Latino/a migrant workers in Lansing can be understood using the **Settlement Phases Model** (Provinzano, 1974; Piore, 1986; Massey, 1986; Logan, 1991; Green, 1994)
 - **Settling out** (*Estableciéndose fuera*),
 - **Settling down** (*Estableciéndose en la vecindad*),
 - **and Settling in** (*Estableciéndose en la comunidad*).



Conclusions (cont.)

Within this 3-phase process we find diversity in terms of:

- **Settling out:** different reasons leaving the migrant stream (shaped by context, family, by chance, unexpected life events).
 - **Settling down:** common and contrasting challenges and opportunities when settling down.
 - **Settling in:** a continuum of social and community involvement levels.
- 

References

- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design. Choosing Among Five Approaches*. (2nd. Ed.). United States: Sage Publications.
- Davis, A. (2008). Uncovering the Lives of Women in Post-War Oxfordshire: An Oral History Approach. *Rural History*, 19(1), 105-121.
- Green, S. (1994). Working Paper No. 19. Julian Samora Research Institute.
- Logan, P. (1991). *Examining the characteristics of resettled migrant farm workers and factors that have influence them to leave the migrant stream* (Doctoral dissertation) North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.
- Massey, D. (1986). The settlement process among Mexican migrants to the United States. *American Sociological Review*, 51, 670-684.
- Moyer, J. (1993). *Step-by-Step Guide to Oral History*. Retrieved on October 26, 2009 from http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html
- Piore, M. (1986). The Shifting Grounds of Immigration. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 485, 23-33.
- Provinzano, J. (1974). *Settling Out and Settling In*. Paper presented at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting. (p. 12)
- Portelli, A. (1991). *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (p. 50.)