

The Impact of Latino Immigrants in Grand Rapids' Urban Development: A Social Capital Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the important role that social capital plays in the Latino immigration process into the Grand Rapids, MI metropolitan area. Demographic data published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census shows that the number of Latinos moving to Grand Rapids has increased considerably during the last decade. Data drawn from a survey of 100 Latino immigrant heads of household living in the area were used evaluate how Latino immigrants use social capital in the process of immigration. The results of this study show that Latino immigrants use their social capital, especially bonding social capital, during the entire process. Job opportunities, family members already living in the area, and better educational opportunities for their children attract immigrants to the region. In general, Latino immigrants reported being very happy living in their new community and over 90% reported feeling welcomed by other community members. Churches turn out to be important centers of activities for the Latino community. Besides the religious services that they offer, churches serve as centers for social activities, informational services, primary health care providers, and support for their own schools. A high percentage of Latino immigrants' income is reinvested in the community as a result of purchases of basic items. In addition, approximately 10% of their income is sent back to their hometowns as remittances to support family members left behind. The study concludes that social capital plays an important role for many Latinos who migrate to the Grand Rapids area.