



# **THE LANDMARK THAI COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN LOS ANGELES AS AN EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH**

**By Chanchanit Martorell**

**Executive Director**

**Thai Community Development Center**

**Citizen Ingenuity and Impact Assessment**

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# THE SPARK



## 1992 Los Angeles Civil Unrest

- Manifestation of History of Social and Economic Inequities in Poor Minority Communities
- “Brazilification” of Los Angeles and Polarization between “Haves” and “Have Not’s”
- Police Brutality Compounds the History of Neglect and Disinvestment
- LA Rebuilding Funding and Resources
- Continuing Invisibility Factor of the Thai Community



# THE NEED

- Identification and Documentation of:
  1. Community Demographics
  2. Welfare and Human Service Needs
  3. Social and Economic Characteristics
  
- Advocacy Tool
  
- Raising Community Visibility



# SURVEY RESULTS OF 1992

- Over 600 surveys were collected
- Results from the surveys reflected an overwhelming support for a Thai Town and for Thai Town to be more than just a commercial center
- The majority believes that Thai Town should be located in the eastern section of Hollywood, California



## THAI TOWN AS A COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- It would provide an opportunity for people to take charge of the development process more fully
- Local residents bear the burden of what happens in their community so theirs should be the prevailing voice in the decisions about any plans to be implemented as a matter of simple justice
- Education through focus group meetings and charrettes could serve as the mechanism through which empowerment is fostered



## THAI TOWN AS A COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- Overall, the goal of Thai Town is to improve the financial well-being of economically disadvantaged people through fostering economic independence and self-reliance
- Thai Town emphasizes *exchange* and *equity*, focusing on the community's current skills, abilities and resources
- Thai Town can improve the area's economic and social strength
- Thai Town can develop resources that will *nourish* households and neighborhoods by encouraging for example neighborhood banking and local purchases so that dollars are being circulated in the community
- Entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in the sustenance and vitality of Thai Town



# THE MOBILIZATION

- Thai CDC convened several meetings in the Thai community in 1998 to recruit individuals for the Thai Town Formation Committee which would serve as the representative community body of the Thai Town Designation Campaign



# THE IMPACT

- Set the stage to launch Designation of Thai Town Campaign in 1992
- Findings established the Core Mission of Thai CDC in 1994 and informed its program design
- Preserved the Thai community's cultural integrity
- Enhanced an ethnically diverse area
- Put demands on the greater polity and local institutions
- Encouraged Thais to interact with the greater community
- Asked for concessions not as Thais in Thailand but as Thai Americans residing in LA
- Advanced social and material goals requiring participation and interest from the rest of the Thai community as a united entity
- Act of assertion of one's community consciousness
- Declared that the Thai community exists in LA, occupies a space, defining itself as a community associated with a place in history
- Engaged Thais in a community building process
- Counted Thais as more than just another part of the "rich tapestry" but a united entity that can come to a consensus





# WHAT IS COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

- “Street Science”
- Democratizing the collection and use of data and in the process increasing active citizenship and local leadership

*Source: “Enhancing Data Quality, Relevance, and Use Through Community-Based Participatory Research” by Meredith Minkler, University of California, Berkeley, What Counts: Harnessing Data for America’s Communities edited by Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco and the Urban Institute*



# WHY COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

- Research conducted “with” rather than “on” communities
- Engages the community
- Sophisticated insider knowledge and understanding of community
- Respect community wisdom
- “Relevance, Rigor and Reach” of findings
- Culturally sensitive orientation of research especially in low-income communities of color
- Allow researchers to ask right questions
- Enhance data quality, relevance, and use
- Help identify and use new channels for data dissemination for “end users” of data
- Help build individual and community capacities, leaving behind a community more able to study and address other issues of local concern.
- Increases critical thinking, individual and collective problem-solving abilities, and civic engagement.



# PROS AND CONS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## Community Engagement

- Detailed data instrument
- Improved design and implementation of data-driven interventions
- Higher participation rate
- Useful findings translatable into changes in programs, practices, and policies that benefit the community
- Culturally acceptable data collection tools
- Can learn from community partners
- Successful and effective data gathering
- Legitimize the role of researchers
- Ensure data used to effect positive community and social changes

## Non-Community Engagement

- Lower participation rates
- Data of questionable value
- Reinforce lack of cultural and social familiarity of outside researchers
- Reflect little knowledge of local customs and beliefs.
- Data-driven interventions doomed to fail and at substantial cost
- Reinforce community distrust of outside researchers



# EXAMPLE OF THAI CDC CBPR

- Thai CDC is community-based
- Recruited and trained members from the community
- Trained community members in survey methods and instruments and data entry
- Met with community to present findings
- Organized a campaign
- Recruited community members to sit on a spearheading committee
- The Thai Town Formation Committee was formed comprising of different sectors of the Thai community (business, arts, media, labor, and professionals) and Thai CDC trained them in the participatory democratic process and civic engagement
- Also trained committee in conducting meetings, consensus building, and communications and leadership skills
- They canvassed East Hollywood and collected signatures from mostly non-Thais and got postcards and letters of support from the broader community sent to Councilwoman Jackie Goldberg



# THAI CDC'S CBPR AS AN ADVOCACY TOOL

- Educated policymakers and funders of existing growing unmet needs
- Helped “get the word out” to relevant organizations, policymakers, and funders
- Helped jump start data-driven community organizing and advocacy to effect change resulting in the founding of Thai CDC and the designation of Thai Town



# VICTORY

- After recognizing broad based support for Thai Town, Councilwoman Jackie Goldberg introduced a motion in the Los Angeles City Council on October 27, 1999 and Thai Town was designated by a unanimous vote of the council making it the first official municipal designation in the world.
- A ribbon cutting ceremony to unveil the Thai Town signs was held in January 2000. In attendance were members from various communities, local, state and federal representatives along with representatives of the Thai government.





# MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF THAI TOWN

The success of Thai Town should be measured on how well it contributes to the overall development process and how well it satisfies the basic rights for decent jobs, economic security, and decent and affordable housing.



# OUTCOMES OF THAI TOWN DESIGNATION: LEVERAGED MORE RESEARCH

Thai CDC published/commissioned/completed the following landmark studies and research on Thai Town:

1. The Thai Town Atlas and Community Analysis by Ernesto J. Vigoreaux of the UCLA Department of Urban Planning for Thai CDC, 2000
2. A Land Use Assessment of Thai Town by Jennifer S. Wang and Donna Pang of the UCLA Department of Urban Planning for Thai CDC, 2001
3. Thai Town Area Agency Report by Ernesto J. Vigoreaux, funded by The California Endowment for Thai CDC, 2001
4. Surveying East Hollywood: A Profile and Needs Assessment of the Business Community by Shea Cunningham and Thai CDC, funded by Washington Mutual Bank and Office of Councilman Eric Garcetti, 2002





# LEVERAGED MORE RESEARCH

More studies completed in conjunction with Thai CDC:

5. Public Markets as Sites for Immigrant Entrepreneurship in East Hollywood by Matthew Lum, UCLA Department of Urban Planning for Thai CDC, 2007
6. Marketplace of Purpose: A Feasibility Analysis of Thai Town's First Public Market by Alexander R. Holsheimer, UCLA Department of Urban Planning for Thai CDC, 2009



# OUTCOMES OF THAI TOWN DESIGNATION: IMPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE & AMENITIES

Successfully secured a \$1.3 million *East Hollywood Streetscape Project* from the Community Redevelopment Agency of LA.

Hobart View From Car

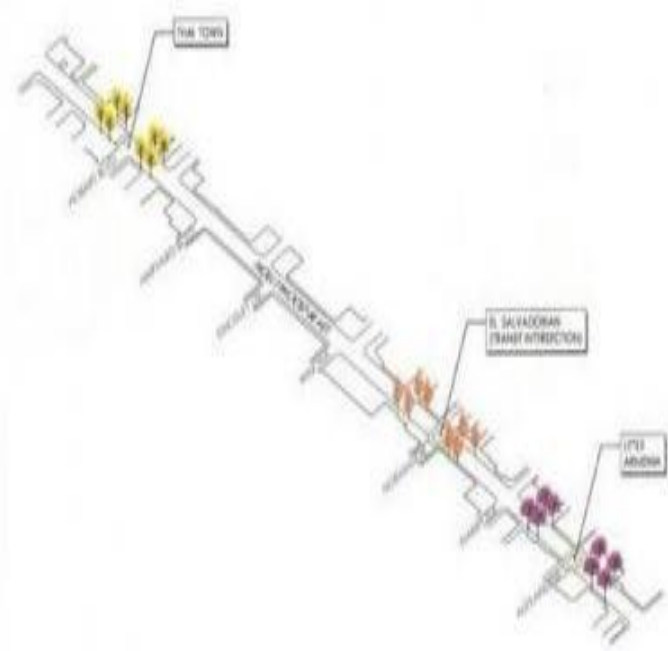


Before



After

Project Sites



# IMPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE AND AMENITIES

Successfully negotiated community benefits from the *East Hollywood Redevelopment Plan* by the Community Redevelopment Agency of LA that included *historic preservation, affordable housing, small business preservation, open space, pocket parks, landscaping, and parking.*



# OUTCOMES OF THAI TOWN DESIGNATION: IMPROVED SERVICES

Organized and held *Live, Work and Play in East Hollywood Consumer Resource and Health Fair* annually in Thai Town since 2000





# OUTCOMES OF THAI TOWN DESIGNATION: PROMOTE NEIGHBORHOOD PRIDE/MULTI-CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND CULTURAL TOURISM

Founded the *Thai Town Festival* in 2001 which has evolved into the annual *Thai New Year's Day Songkran Festival/International Curry Festival* and *5K Run/Walk* making Thai Town a cultural destination and increasing tourism and visitation into the area. The festival now attracts 100,000 visitors.



# OUTCOMES OF THAI TOWN DESIGNATION: PROMOTE BEAUTIFICATION

Installed the *Thai Town Angel Apsonsi Gateway* in 2006 as markers to welcome visitors at the western entrance of Thai Town. Installation of the eastern entrance gateway was completed in 2012.



# PROMOTE BEAUTIFICATION



- Installed a pair of decorative *Thai Kinnara* pedestrian street lamp posts in 2013





# OUTCOMES OF THAI TOWN DESIGNATION: PROMOTE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Co-founded the *Thai Town Rotary Club* in 2007





# OUTCOMES OF THAI TOWN DESIGNATION: PROMOTE UNITY AMONG DIVERSE ETHNIC GROUPS

Obtained the designation of Thai Town as a *Preserve America Neighborhood* by the White House in 2008 placing Thai Town on the map nationally.





# IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Hollywood/Western Metro Station  
**EAST HOLLYWOOD**  
**CERTIFIED FARMERS' MARKET!**  
THURSDAYS 3:30-7:30

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# CREATE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

