

Mapping Spatial Inequality

The New Geography of Poverty and Immigration

By Jasmijn Slotjes

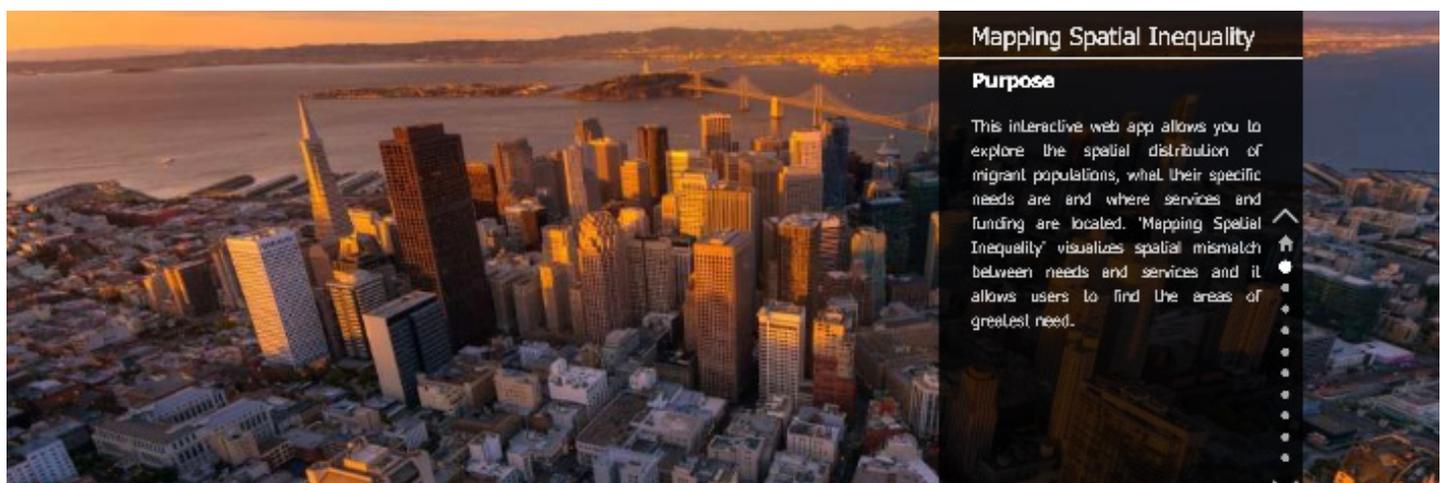
Policy problem: The new geography of poverty & migration

Poverty, immigration and service provision are dynamic spatial phenomena. Historically, immigration and poverty were characteristics of big cities. But now we are witnessing a “new geography” of poverty and immigration in the United States. American suburbs are increasingly diverse, with respect to both residents’ socio-economic and immigration backgrounds. But this shift in geographic patterns of immigration and poverty has not been followed by a parallel shift in the location of non-profit social service providers or community-based organizations.

Research by [Els de Graauw](#), [Shannon Gleeson](#) and BIMl Faculty Director [Irene Bloemraad](#), “[Funding Immigrant Organizations: Suburban Free Riding and Local Civic Presence](#),” documents a spatial mismatch in local governments’ allocation of federal Community Development Block Grant funds (CDBG grants). In San Francisco, a city with a long and continuous history of receiving migrants, immigrant organizations received about a third of Community Development funds allocated to community groups – a share close to the percentage of immigrants in the city’s low-income population. In San Jose, a city whose fast-growing population is fueled by recent immigration, officials did less for immigrant organizations. Although newcomers made up 42 percent of the poor, during the years 2004 to 2007 only 18 to 28 percent of Community Development funds for nonprofits went to organizations serving immigrants. Many migrants in the Bay area are also settling in suburbs linked to the Silicon Valley economy, such as Fremont and Mountain View. But between 2004 and 2007, those suburbs allocated not a single dollar of Community Development money to immigrant organizations. Although the overall rate of poverty is lower in richer suburbs, immigrants made up about half of suburban poor residents, a higher share of the poor than in San Francisco or San Jose. The failure to give money to immigrant organizations is especially striking given that Community Development grants are supposed to make a special effort to help people in disadvantaged households.

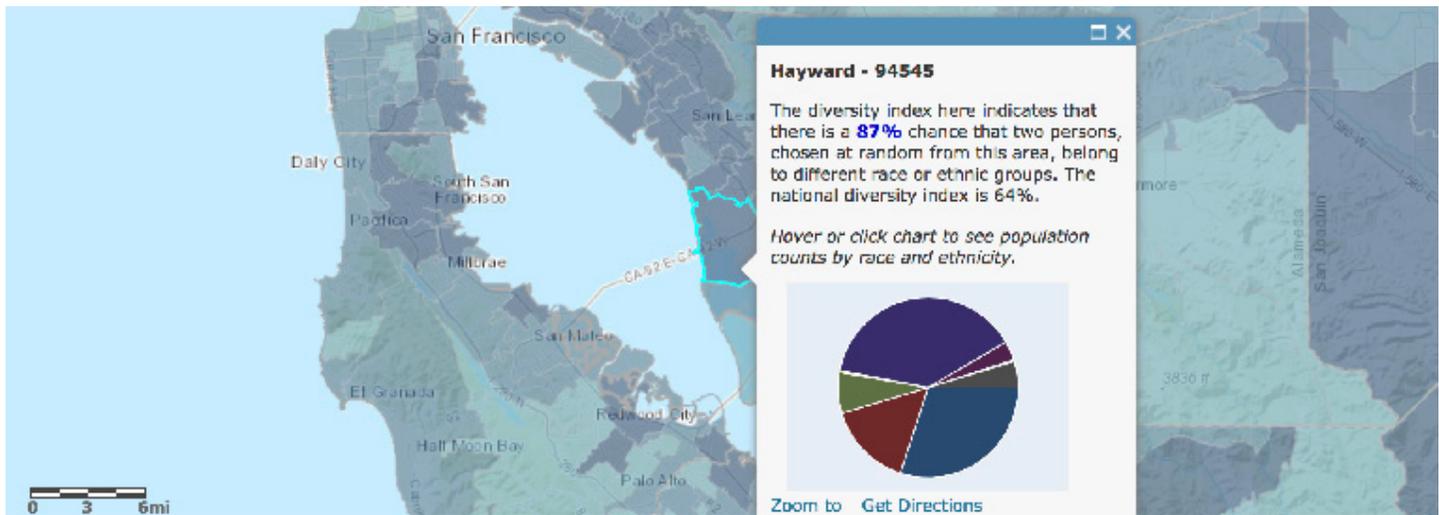
The lack of support for immigrant-oriented social service nonprofits and community organizations carries serious consequences for the well-being of immigrant families. Since the 1960s, American social policy has shifted to a model of public-private partnerships where government funding finances local nonprofit organizations to provide services to the disadvantaged. Today, various scholars argue that nonprofits, due to their localized service functions, are uniquely situated to understand and advocate for vulnerable populations ([de Graauw, 2016](#)). Without organizations located in close proximity to growing immigrant populations, newcomers and their families risk greater food insecurity, more difficult access to health care or legal services, and fewer opportunities to have a voice in their communities ([Bloemraad and Terriquez, 2016](#)).

Fig. 1 Mock-up of the Mapping Spatial Inequality interactive web app



This problem of spatial mismatch in service provision is partially caused by public officials' lack of knowledge of local demographics and immigrants' social needs. In addition, immigrants often have a hard time identifying resources and services in their neighborhood. Language and cultural barriers, as well as fears about immigration enforcement, can further affect service-seeking and community-building by suppressing immigrants' civic engagement and efforts to set up immigrant organizations. This has a direct impact on the well-being of immigrant residents and their families. This research thus identifies three social problems. First, a probable mismatch in the location of funding and services on the one hand and the needs of immigrant populations on the other hand. Second, a lack of knowledge about demographics and social needs among public officials, especially those working in smaller municipalities with limited staff or research-based planning departments. Third, limited information among immigrant populations about local services and resources.

Fig. 2 Mock-up of the Mapping Spatial Inequality interactive web app



Policy implications: Data, building civic organizations & outreach

Bloemraad and colleagues propose a set of responses to minimize the spatial mismatch between immigrants' needs and services. First, we must educate local officials about the needs of disadvantaged immigrants living in their jurisdictions. Second, immigrants must be supported in building civic organizations in their communities. Immigrant residents of traditional gateway cities like San Francisco benefit from a diverse set of organizations with expertise, extensive networks, and a strong belief that they are legitimate stakeholders in city affairs. Similar civic capacities need to be seeded and nurtured in new immigrant locations – a job to be tackled jointly by local governments, nonprofit groups, foundations, and private citizens who want to make a difference. Lastly, municipal officials should do more active outreach. In larger cities, public staffers reach out to underserved communities, including immigrant communities. City employees connect immigrant-serving groups to other officials and teach them how to negotiate access to local resources. Despite budget constraints, key officials in smaller cities need to make similar efforts.

The [Berkeley Interdisciplinary Migration Initiative](#) is actively working to addressing the first recommendation: providing local officials with the facts about immigrant communities and their service needs. BIMi is developing an interactive web map which visualizes the spatial mismatch between immigrant populations' needs and where available services and funding are located (see fig. 1 and 2 for mock-ups of this web map). Over an 18 month period, BIMi will, in close cooperation with UC Santa Cruz and UC Berkeley's D-Lab, develop the Mapping Spatial Inequality interactive web app. It will enable users to spatially, temporally and thematically visualize the (mis)match between resources and immigrants' needs in the Bay Area. The core of the web app will be an interactive spatial map, integrating a unique combination of quantitative, qualitative and spatial data. We are proud to announce that this research project is supported by a Seed Fund Award 2018 from CITRIS and the Banatao Institute at the University of California. Keep track of our website to read the latest news on this project. Want to collaborate? Reach out to bimi@berkeley.edu.