

Places That Shape Us: Public Space and Cultural Identity Formation in Santa Ana

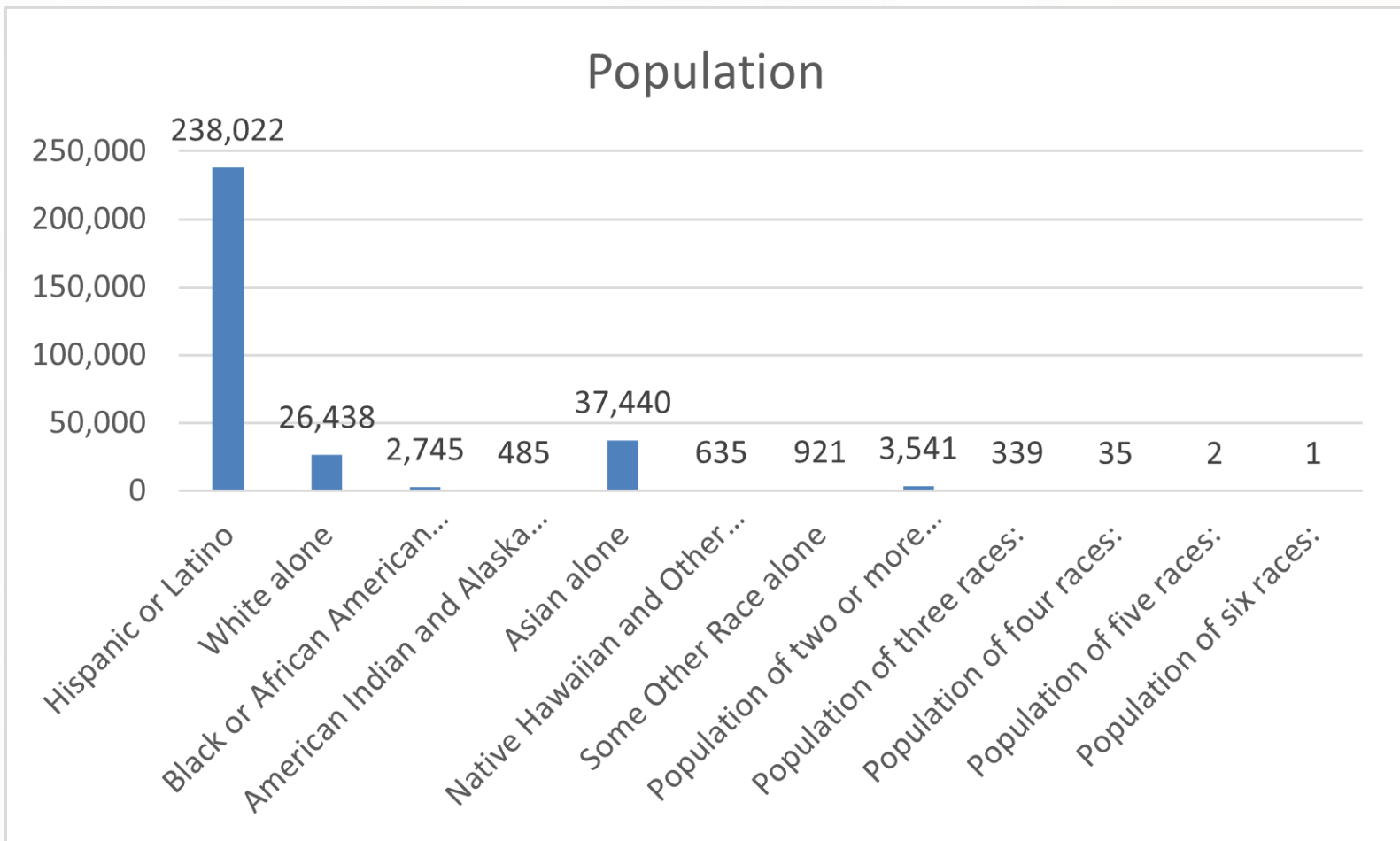
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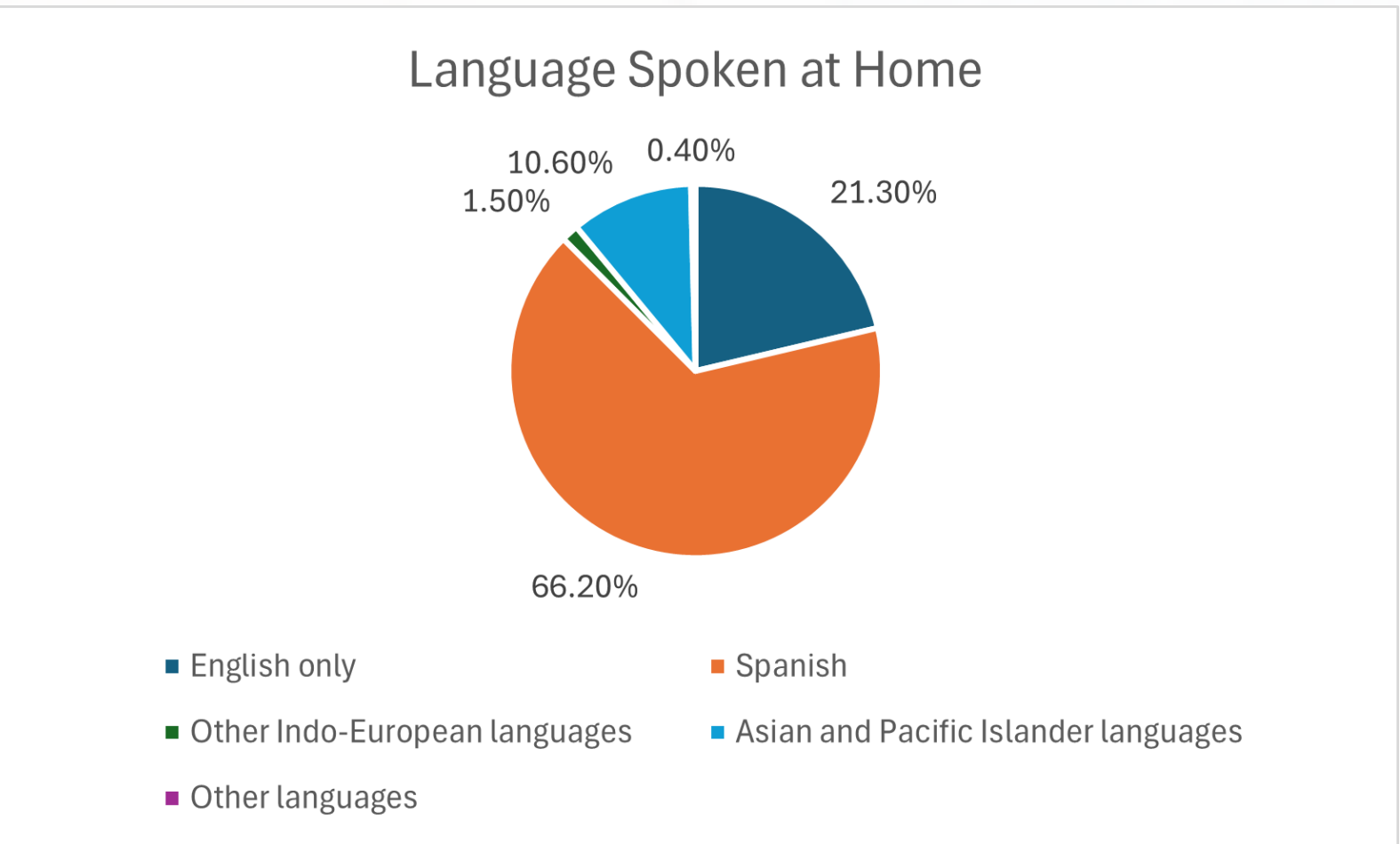
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Introduction & Problem Statement

- Santa Ana, California is an important “third space” for cultural exploration.
- About 77% of residents are Hispanic or Latino, shaping a strong cultural environment.
- Cultural identity is experienced through the city’s physical spaces. This is especially meaningful for second-generation immigrants.
- Bilingual signage and local Hispanic businesses help people feel “at home,” especially ages 18–35.
- **Problem Statement:** Research focuses on assimilation and cultural expression. There is little focus on how urban spaces shape cultural identity. This study examines how places like murals, markets, parks, and plazas support cultural identity.
- **Research question:** How do public spaces with cultural meanings influence cultural identity formation in second-generation immigrants in Santa Ana, CA?

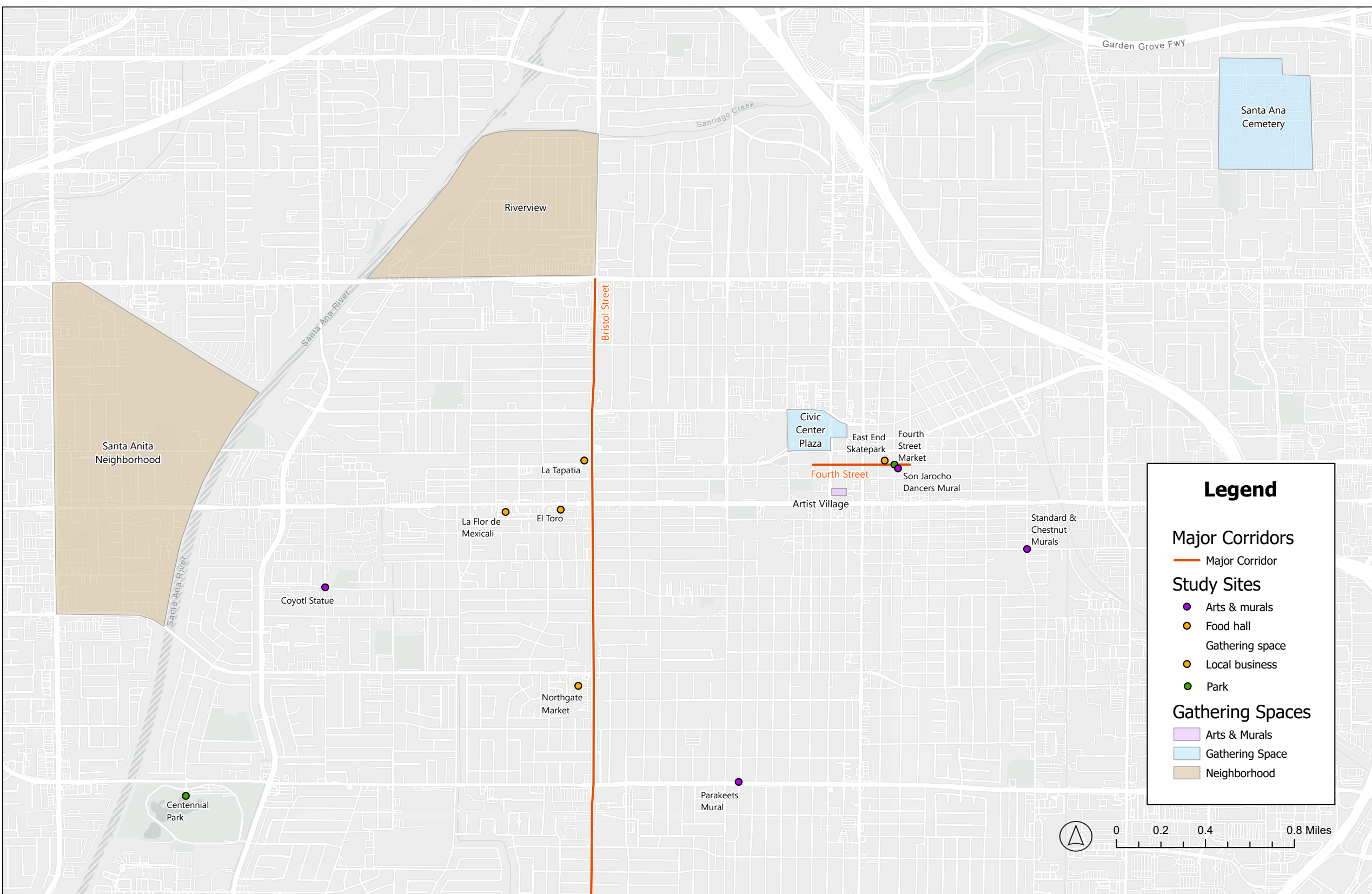


2020 Decennial Census



2024 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Methodology



- **Qualitative approach:**
 - Conducted 30-40 semi-structured interviews (via QR code survey) and field observations at high-activity cultural sites.
- **Key sites include:**
 - Downtown (La Cuatro) & Artists Village → murals and public art
 - Santa Anita & Riverview Neighborhood → Chicano culture
 - Local businesses (El Toro, La Tapatia, Northgate Market) → family traditions
 - Public spaces (parks, plazas, Coyotl statue) → community interaction
- **Research Variables:**
 - Independent: physical features (murals, bilingual signs, vendors, public spaces)
 - Dependent: cultural responses (belonging, identity, connection to heritage)

Key Research Findings



Visual Representation

Bright mural colors mirror the ambience of home. Images of farmworkers, dancers, and Chicano figures create pride and recognition.



Community Cohesion

Events like Día de los Muertos at Santa Ana Cemetery allow residents to “move their traditions” into the public sphere, becoming spaces where residents feel “culturally at home.”



The Power of Language

Spanish and bilingual signage builds belonging and connects residents with cultural heritage, making the city feel inclusive and familiar.



Emotional Anchors

Street vendors, local businesses, and food connect public spaces to family memories. “These vendors have a special place in my heart.” “Tamales mark the winter holiday season and family.”

Conclusion & Policy Recommendations



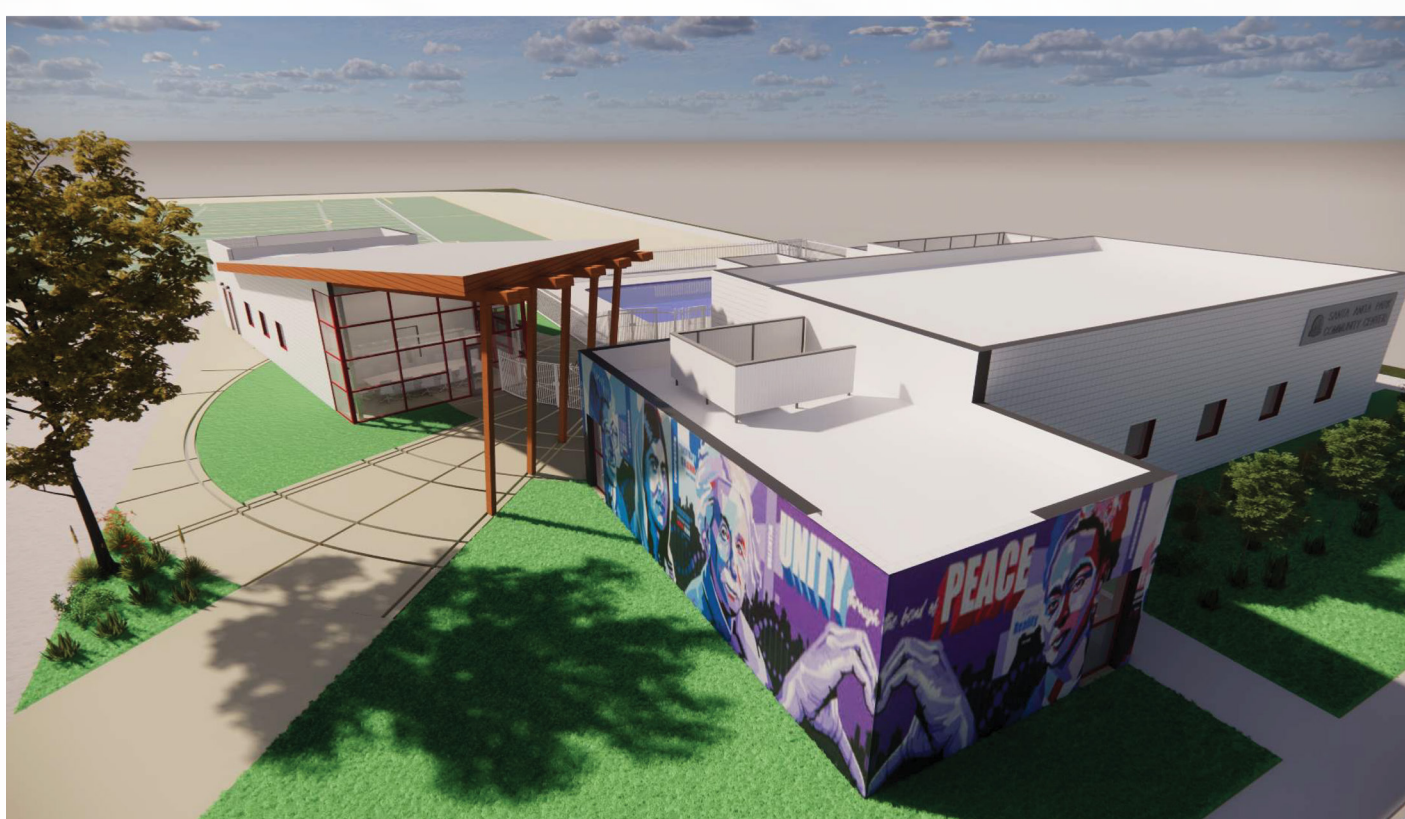
Maintain Cultural Infrastructure

Prioritize the restoration and maintenance of fading murals in key enclaves like Downtown Santa Ana to prevent the erosion of cultural permanence.



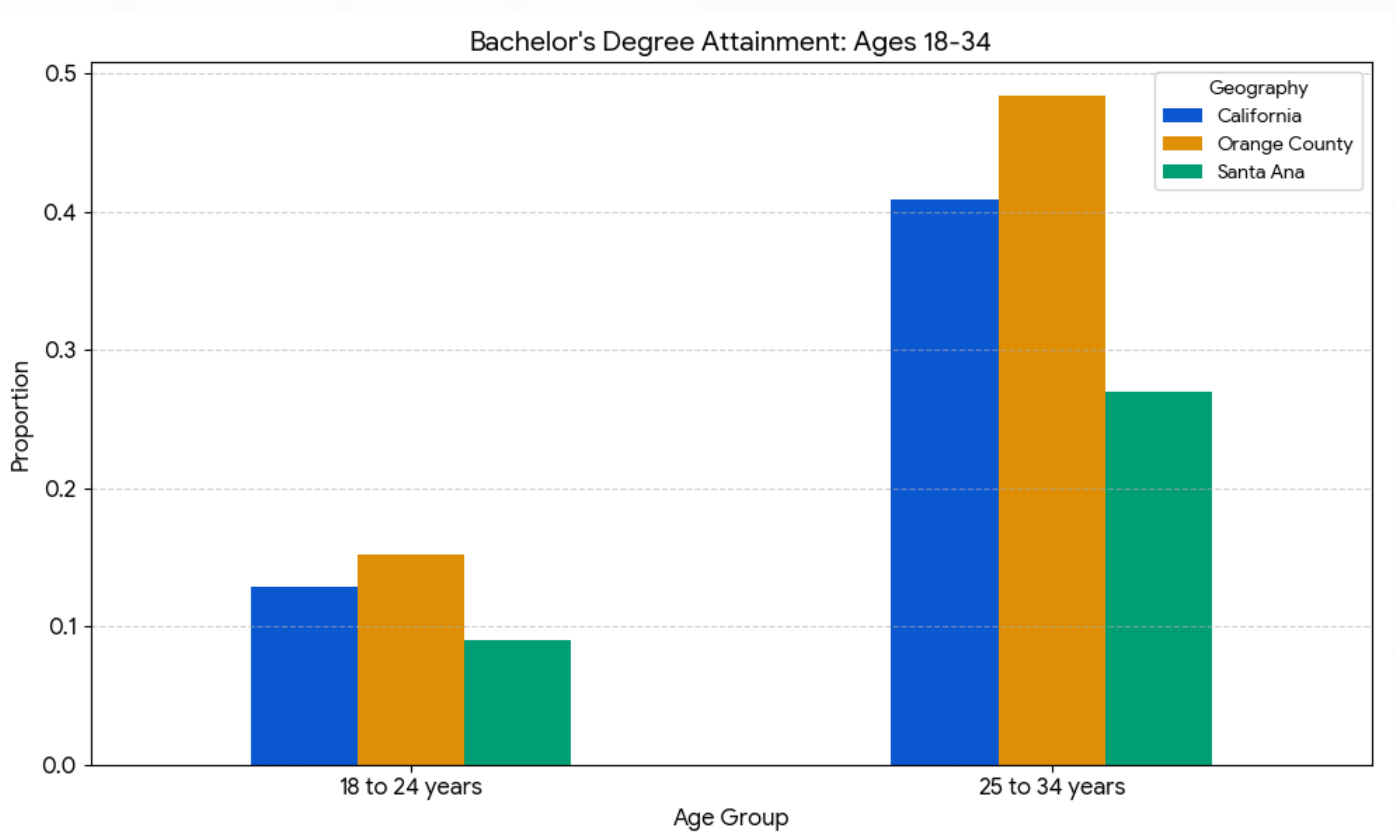
Ensure Authentic Development

New developments should be encouraged to include art and design that reflects local culture and community identity rather than generic styles.



Safety & Inclusion

Investing in design strategies that improve safety in parks and plazas is essential for full community enjoyment, alongside efforts to ensure all demographic groups feel represented.



Social Resource Integration

Cultural spaces should be utilized to improve access to education and social resources, helping to pair cultural pride with economic mobility for the city’s youth.