

How PUBLIC SPACES SHAPE INCLUSION FOR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

The Mariachi Plaza had always had a long standing culture amongst Latinos in Boyle Heights, even long since before its construction in 1992. With its large presence of mariachi musicians, and beloved local vendors it was a thriving community of people. However, the Mariachi Plaza has become a shadow of its former self. This project focuses on how specific design elements at the Mariachi Plaza supports or weakens feelings of belonging among marginalized Latino community members.

During my visits, I observed the lacking care and deterioration of the plaza, its social decline, and absent street vendors. The current state of the plaza now primarily focuses on its use of the metro station and public transportation. Through my findings I discovered many members of the community were in fear of immigration and customs enforcement, and no longer felt safe gathering at the plaza. In my research, I have brought forth recommendations on how to revitalize community belonging and cultural identity in the Mariachi Plaza.

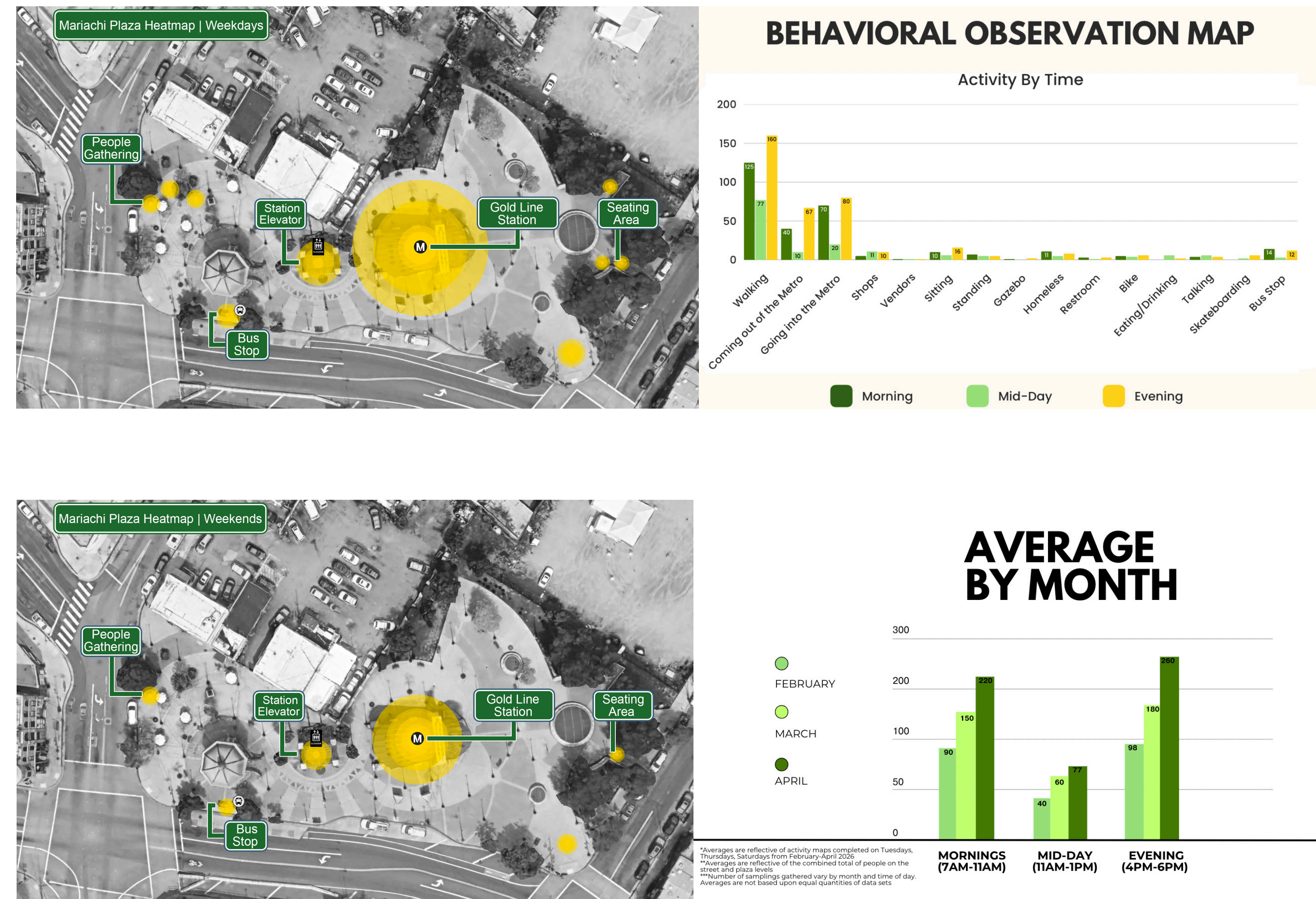
RESEARCH QUESTION

How does the design and redevelopment of the Mariachi Plaza in Boyle Heights influence a sense of belonging among marginalized Latino communities in urban Los Angeles?

STUDY AREA



HEATMAPS / BAR CHARTS



LITERATURE REVIEW

IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT & COMMUNITY FEAR
(Immigration Law Enforcement, Social Support, and Health for Latino Immigrant Families, 2021)
Immigration enforcement increases fear and reduced participation in community life within Latino neighborhoods.

SENSE OF BELONGING & CULTURAL IDENTITY
(Belonging and Its Barriers: A Critical Perspective of Latiné Immigrant Experiences, 2023)
Latino immigrant communities experience challenges with belonging and emotional connection due to exclusion.

BEHAVIORAL CHANGES IN COMMUNITIES
(Recent Immigration Raids Increased Student Absences, 2025)
Immigration raids increased student absences showing how fear impacts social activity.

METHODOLOGY

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
Through my behavioral observations and research it evolved from focusing on public spaces to understanding how social changes have affected community activity and belonging.

INTERVIEWS
Collected community perspectives about cultural identity and changes happening in the plaza.

CASE STUDIES
Compared Mariachi plaza to other communities and public spaces experiencing similar social cultural changes.

SWOT ANALYSIS
Identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats affecting Mariachi Plaza.

NEWS ARTICLES
Reviewed local news sources to understand issues related to immigration, redevelopment, and community impacts.

BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATION MAP
Observed how people used the Mariachi Plaza throughout the day.

KEY FINDINGS

IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT
Interviews and local reports suggested that fear related to immigration enforcement has reduced comfort in public spaces and discouraged community gathering in Boyle Heights.

GENTRIFICATION
Redevelopment in Boyle Heights have increased concerns about displacement and the loss of Latino cultural identity surrounding Mariachi Plaza.

SOCIAL DECLINE
Observations and interviews showed fewer social gatherings compared to previous years with much of the remaining activity connected mainly to the Metro station.

SKATEBOARDING


OPEN LOT


MAINTENANCE


RECOMMENDATIONS

Proposed Community Parking Area
Repurpose the vacant lot near Mariachi Plaza into a small community parking area to improve accessibility for visitors. Additional parking could help increase activity within the plaza's commercial spaces.

Improved Plaza Maintenance & Upkeep
Increase maintenance efforts throughout the plaza including cleaning, landscaping, lighting improvements and shaded seating. Improving the physical condition of the plaza could help create a more welcoming environment to encourage stronger community use.

Historical Plaques & Cultural Recognition
Install plaques or public art that recognize the history of Mariachi Plaza. These additions could help educate visitors about the plaza's history.

STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY

Community engagement events
Bring back community-focused events such as farmers markets, cultural performances and night events that will increase plaza activity and strengthen community presence.

Boyle Heights Beat
(Non-Profit organization)
Collaborate with local organizations such as Boyle Heights Beat and other community groups to support the neighborhoods engagement within the plaza.

Information on Immigration
(Help and Services)
Provide access to immigration resources within or near Mariachi Plaza to help residents feel more informed and more connected to community support networks.

