Urban Studies (URBN) 1000
The Urban World
Fall 2019

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Community Study: Part I "Profile"

(30 points possible)

The complexities of cities and urban life discussed in the class lectures and assigned readings are often best analyzed and understood in the context of a single, "real-world" case study. This assignment invites you to do that: to select a single urban community and develop a statistical profile related to some of the issues that will be addressed more generally in the class lectures and readings. The assignment will also introduce you to a number of the basic data sources and analytical tools common to urban studies.

Community Selection: For this assignment, you may select any U.S. urban community you wish to analyze, including your "home" community if you are from the U.S. Selecting your "home" as your case study may prove useful in critically reflecting on your own perspectives on cities and urban life as the product of your life experience, but is not required. You will use the community you select to complete two more parts of your "community study" during the rest of the semester (details on those assignments will be distributed later).

Assignment:

1) **Select an urban community for your profile**. For this assignment, an "urban community" is defined as a zip code area within a city in the U.S. The use of a zip code to delimit your community may introduce some inaccuracies into the characterization of your community, but will facilitate your data collection and may reveal some of the issues involved in using such data to generalize about cities. You can find zip codes at the U.S. Postal Service website (www.usps.com) and many other sites if you don't know the zip code for the community you wish to analyze (in most cases, an easy way to find the zip code is to just "google" a business located in the area you wish to study—e.g., if you want to profile Beverly Hills, just google: "Starbucks Beverly Hills" and use the zip code of a Beverly Hills Starbucks that pops up).

2) **Develop a comparative demographic profile of your community.** Create a table of basic demographic and economic information about your community with comparable data for the (1) larger city in which it is located and (2) the U.S. as a whole.

   The U.S. Census is the standard source for most of the information you'll need—if you aren't familiar with the Census, this is an opportunity to explore some of its resources. The Census is an increasingly important source of a variety of data due, in part, to the widespread use of its maps as the format for many GIS applications. The Census includes a variety of resources (i.e. the official decennial census, various community surveys and special reports, and annual estimates), but for this assignment you may find that most of the information you want is available from the annual "**American Community Survey**" that is integrated into the American FactFinder. "Google" American FactFinder; click on the first entry in the search results to link to the appropriate Census site; in the subheadings under FactFinder, click on "Community Facts" and it will take you to the appropriate homepage; on that page, there is a blank to enter your community zip code, the larger city (by name), and the nation (just type US in the blank and it will take you to the national data).

   As you complete the statistical characterization of your community, be sure to use a consistent date (e.g., consistently use the data from the most recent [2017] American Community Survey; alternatively note the date for each of the statistics you report and avoid making comparisons between data from different dates). As you use the American FactFinder you'll see that the census uses ZCTAs ("zip code tabulation areas") as a surrogate for postal zip codes; there are subtle differences due to how the census creates GIS maps, but the differences aren't significant for this assignment.

   It is up to you to decide what information from the census is most relevant to characterizing your community and contrasting it with the larger metropolitan area and the nation. Go through the various tables in the American Community Survey (click on the various headings on the left side of the homepage where you select the zip code, city, or US to see what data are available). As you record the data you want to use, be sure to use data expressed in a comparative form—i.e.

use percentages, not absolute numbers, when comparing topics that are not necessarily meaningful in absolute comparisons—for example, reporting that Westchester is 60.3% White and the U.S. as a whole is 73.3% White allows for a meaningful comparison; reporting that the White population of Westchester is 24,793 would not allow for a simple comparison to the U.S. total number of 233,657,078. Conversely, data that are meaningful in absolute numbers, such as the mean family income, should be reported accordingly.

The goal in deciding what data you are going to use is to select topics that allow for simple, but meaningful, generalizations about your community and its residents: Are the residents rich or poor? Do most residents rent or do they own their homes? Do they have a lot of kids or is the neighborhood mostly adults? What are the common occupations? What educational levels do they have? Is the community diverse or homogeneous? How does it compare the larger city in which it's located? How does it compare to the U.S. as a whole? Etc.

You might want to consider the attributes of social stratification that Shevky and Bell (1955) and Rees (1971) used in their seminal studies of modern urban communities (that we will be discussing later in the semester). Their three dimensions of social stratification and residential differentiation can provide the outline for choosing relevant data: (1) socioeconomic status is typically measured by looking at income, occupation, and education; (2) family status can be assessed using number of children, age, home ownership or renting, women working outside the home, family composition, etc.; (3) race/ethnic status is obviously measured by race and ethnicity, but can also include languages spoken, country of origin, etc.

When you've selected the data you wish to analyze, create a simple table like the illustration below to present your findings:

(sample topics)	*Westchester (90045)*	*City of Los Angeles*	*U.S.*
Total Population	41,145	3,918,872	318,558,162
Median Age	34.7	35.0	37.7
%male/%female	48.1/51.9	49.5/50.5	49.2/50.8
%White	60.3	52.4	73.3
%African American	13.0	9.0	12.6
%Asian	13.5	11.6	5.2
%Hispanic/Latino	17.8	48.6	17.3
Mean Family Income	$113,297	$82,042	$77,866

(Continue the table as appropriate
to include all your data; note the data above are merely examples,
<u>you select the variables you think are most important</u>)

3) **Analyze the profile of your community**. Based on the comparative data you compile, write a brief (2-3 pages) descriptive analysis of your selected community. As you discuss your findings, you should consider the basic demographics characteristics of your selected community in the context of the larger city in which it's located and of the U.S. as a whole. In the table above, for example, it is clear that the residents of Westchester earn significantly more than the residents of Los Angeles and the United States (earning over $35,000 more than the average family in the U.S.). Westchester also appears to be relatively diverse in race/ethnicity compared to the U.S. as a whole, but less diverse than Los Angeles—especially with respect to the Latino population (only 17.8% Latino versus 48.6% for Los Angeles as a whole).

There are a number of ways to generalize about your community, but again, you may find the three dimensions of Shevky and Bell (1955) as a useful framework for describing your community: (1) socioeconomic status, (2) family status, and (3) race/ethnic status. Another approach to generalizing about your community might be to utilize something like the Claritas PRIZM segmentation (ref. Phillips pp. 227-250) and develop a set of criteria that characterize the "lifestyle" of your selected community/zip code. Like Shevky and Bell, the

Claritas model uses zip code data that are generally available from the Census (e.g., income, education, age, household composition, home tenure, home technology, and "urbanicity"—their term for the geographical context of the community from rural to suburban to urban). It is worth noting that the Shevky and Bell model is simply intended as a sociological generalization about social stratification and residential differentiation in modern cities while the Claritas model is a commercial device developed as a marketing tool to enable businesses to identify "market segments" for targeted advertising. Nevertheless, they both offer some useful general parameters by which your selected community can be characterized.

Several online real estate listing sites can also offer another source of information about your selected community and might be helpful in describing the "lifestyle" of your community. In addition to simply listing homes for sale/rent, many of these sites include community descriptions (e.g. Trulia.com offers "Real Estate Insights" by zip code that may give you some ideas about the character of your selected community that you can further refine by selecting appropriate data—their "Insight" for Westchester indicates that "...a high percentage of the new residents in ZIP code 90045 are college-educated it." That's obviously a statement that you can easily verify and substantiate by checking the relevant Census data). These websites may also provide some useful generalizations about the businesses and services available in the zip code—information you use to select appropriate data to substantiate (or refute) their generalizations and refine your analysis of your community.

As you do your analysis of your community, in addition to comparing your selected community to its larger city setting and to the U.S. as a whole, you should consider how the data compares to your previous perceptions of the community; what surprises you about the community; what standouts about the community relative to the rest of the city, to the U.S., to your assumptions, etc. For example, if you analyzed Westchester, you'd find that 26.9% of the employed adult population works in education and healthcare compared to 20.9% in the State of California—Do you find that surprising? What you'd expect? Why?

In addition to your demographic and economic data, it may be useful to consider the geographical or spatial context of your community. For example, if you select Malibu (90265) as your community, you will find that the average household income in 2016 was $228,635 compared to $82,042 for the City of Los Angeles. Similarly, the average home price in Malibu was $4.9 million while it was $1.6 million in Los Angeles. It would be difficult to explain these disparities without acknowledging that Malibu is a coastal community in one of the world's most beautiful areas.

The local school district is another factor to consider in characterizing your community and comparing it to other areas. In general, "location" (or "situation"—the location relative to employment, shopping, entertainment, etc.) is the most important factor in explaining why people select the community where they live, but the local school district is typically the second most important factor for homebuyers. If you select Malibu, in addition to its scenic location, the fact that its high school district graduates have a 58.9% "college readiness" score compared to 35.5% for LAUSD helps to explain its high property values. If you choose to consider schools in your analysis, there are a number of websites that provide "rankings" or "ratings" of school districts and individual schools within those districts that you can use to assess the quality of the schools.

Ultimately, the goal of your analysis is simply to provide a reasonably comprehensive, comparative description of your selected zip code community—a concise characterization based on objective, factual data that support your conclusions.

Assignment is Due: In class Thursday, Sept. 5. Your completed assignment should include a statistical table (like the example above) and a 2-3 page analysis of the community profile depicted in the table.

For this assignment, each student is to do their own community profile; no group projects will be accepted.