



*An inclusive, modern space in the LES  
where Hispanic Culture and tradition collide.*

*By India Garcia  
Constructed Environment Seminar*

## **Background**

Throughout Bridge 3, my ideas and processes have continued to change. Taking the information that I had already gathered about the Lower East Side and its existing neighborhood I decided to create a space that related to the current community. It was important to me that I represented those who weren't clearly and effectively being represented in the area. Among my research I was able to conclude that over 50% of the people living in the Lower East Side are Hispanic, however, it isn't something that I would've guessed on my own. After about four total walks in the area, I was surprised at how little I saw Hispanic people walking in the neighborhood. It was even more surprising to me that in a landscape as diverse as New York City, we still aren't creating spaces for the people who may need them most.

Being Hispanic myself, I grew up around a very large family. On my father's side, I learned, laughed, and grew with strong women around me at all times. In Santa Fe, New Mexico, traditional Hispanic culture is ingrained in the city itself. Residents and tourists alike are invited to embrace the culture, even if they may not be a part of it themselves. That closeness of community and the sharing among equals is something that I have often craved since moving to the city. While public spaces are innovative in many ways, they also lack in more important areas, like offering culture to those who feel far away from it. In my project I thought a lot about who I would want to address and include in the space. And the answer is everyone. While the space I created is free to Hispanic residents of the Lower East Side, it is also accessible to those of any race, ethnicity, or background, because bridging the gap *begins* with inclusivity.

## **Audience**

My decision at first was to create public space only welcome to women, however, it once again brought me back to the idea of inclusivity and how I could better adjust to the existing environment. I wanted families to feel welcome in the space, and to share special moments with their loved ones in a place of reunion and rich

culture. After much thought, I decided that the space will be open to anyone who wishes to be a part of it, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

### **History/Census**

The Hispanic population in the Lower East Side faced much hardship in the 1970s as a response to the gang violence, drugs, and extreme poverty that was present at the time. The above forced families and children into difficult positions that made day-to-day living an extremely hard task in the city. Throughout the late 1900s, the area began to experience gentrification which affected major streets such as Orchard Street and Delancey Street. Orchard Street specifically was once named the “Bargain District,” but now suits both the middle and wealthy classes through the uprise in upscale boutiques and restaurants. Between the years 2010 and 2019 the Hispanic population has grown from 39% to 50% making it the dominant demographic in LES. The neighborhood is still home to a wise immigrant population, but little to no representation is shown among the area. In the area now we see a multitude of art galleries, restaurants, clothing stores, and nightclubs. While there are a number of bodegas and service shops that are primarily run by Hispanic immigrants, we have yet to see public spaces that cater to them specifically. While gentrification has impacted New York greatly, there hasn't been a shift in the types of services and shops that we provide to people who have lived in the neighborhood for most of their lives. The Lower East Side has become a popular hub for younger generations and has sacrificed its history and culture of its people to recreate its own image, one that realistically only benefits the trend-seekers and the wealthy.

### **Potentials**

There are many potentials for creativity and inclusivity among businesses in the Lower East Side. Just recently I have seen a shift in spaces that are available and perfectly suitable for new business ventures that favor the existing residents in the area. While there may be hurdles to jump in terms of rent in the gentrified

neighborhood, there are still opportunities to build spaces and sanctuaries that can easily benefit the Hispanic community. In terms of my concept for CASA, those who wish to connect with their culture in a neighborhood that doesn't offer much to them on the topic of tradition or preservation of culture, will have a space to call their own. This will bridge the gap that has been present for quite some time between Hispanic people and their own culture. In turn, it will also recreate the feeling of community, as well as offer others an outlet for learning and introspection.

### **Questions/Interviews**

I plan to conduct more interviews moving into Bridge 4. I hope to set up interviews with Hispanic residents, asking them about their history, culture, and hopes for the future of the neighborhood. My two interviews thus far have been inconclusive being that most of the people who are generally in the area play into the existing landscape of bars, restaurants, and boutiques. I found that these people prefer the area how it is now, I would assume because they don't have the background information about the history of the area and its population of Hispanic people. Moving forward I hope to visually create a 2D mockup of the space, with background insights from the native residents who live in the LES. Rather than simply explain my concept, I hope to gain insight on how these people believe that the neighborhood could be improved to promote more inclusivity among all cultures. What are their fears? What are their hopes for the neighborhood? Why have they stayed, what do they enjoy about the space? I believe through these insights I will have a better understanding of how to effectively include the Hispanic community in a space that feels genuine and authentic to them and their families.

## **Inspiration**

I was inspired by a number of businesses, websites, and groups, all of which I will list and showcase below.

My inspirations are not merely related to concept of the space itself, but the components of what will take place inside the space as well.

<https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/new-york/articles/the-10-ultimate-cultural-centers-in-new-york-city/>

<http://hispanicsociety.org/about-us/>

<https://www.rwjf.org/en/blog/2018/07/four-ways-to-build-inclusive-healthy-places.html>

<http://www.interboropartners.com>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/opinion/designing-inclusive-cities.html>

<http://loisaida.org/history/>







CASA is an inclusive space designed for the freedom and function of Hispanic culture. Built solely out of under representation for Hispanic residents in the Lower East Side, CASA seeks to welcome residents of all backgrounds and ethnicities with open arms. The space is meant to provide a means of genuine connection between native Hispanics and their traditions within the comfort of their own city. Through CASA, we believe we can stand at the forefront in creating a city that welcomes and encourages freedom of expression, not only in the realm of Hispanic culture, but in all cultures.

Membership to CASA is free to any and all Hispanic residents of the Lower East Side (excluding CASA Kids). However, the space can be accessed and visited by anyone. For those without a membership, there will be fees for each activity and event — 50% of each activity fees will be donated to The Committee for Hispanic Families and Children (CHFC) in your name. To learn more about CHFC, please visit [chfcinc.org](http://chfcinc.org)

#### CASA Membership Includes:

- Access to our community garden including planting, cropping, and cooking. Free sign ups for our CASA Cooking Nights in which we use the produce from our garden to cook traditional Hispanic dishes.
- Access to our Member Dance Nights where dance classes are taught and performed in our community hall.
- Member Preview Nights — early access to our quarterly art exhibitions, showcasing pieces by local artists in New York City
- Discounted sign-up for CASA Kids, our summer camp for children ages 15 and under.
- Access to monthly performances and events held at the space.