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Reflection on NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE

Through the Neighborhood Profile project, I found that Chinatown is going through a big change. While platforms like Yelp and Reddit show a vibrant food scene driven by social media trends, my field observations showed a more complex reality. Many historic traditional shops are closing down, and new brands that cater to younger people are taking their place. However, the heart of the community is still the elderly population. Data from the Furman Center confirmed my observations that Chinatown faces serious challenges like an aging population and rising rents. My visits to local parks and streets showed the sharp contrast between the viral Chinatown and traditional Chinese culture like Chinese medicine and senior social centers, which most tourists never see.

Using digital tools helped me explore the neighborhood from a broader perspective. For example, the Furman Center data revealed objective issues like rent spikes, while Google Street View acted as a visual time machine that helped me track how storefronts changed over time. These tools were helpful because they provided easy to access data, but they could not replace the hidden information found during in person visits. When walking the streets myself, I noticed more details like the cleanliness of the streets and the intensity of labor. Compared to digital tools, in person observation provided more specific details about daily life.

Combining virtual data with field research was both challenging and meaningful. At first, my perception was dominated by a sense of curated prosperity found in online food reviews. It was only when I walked through the neighborhood myself and looked at things like a local resident that I began to understand the community pulse. This allowed me to discover the stories of the elderly who are often left behind by the digital divide. This combination helped me move beyond being a tourist and truly understand their lives.

The interview process was the most rewarding yet challenging part of this task. I actually interviewed two people for this project. My first goal was to discuss senior service needs, and I interviewed an elderly lady living in a senior apartment. She was satisfied with her medical care and food, but she told me she felt very lonely because her declining health kept her confined indoors. This deeply touched me and initially inspired me to focus my paper on senior loneliness. However, as I began to write, I encountered a significant internal hurdle. I realized that my previous lack of engagement with the elderly in my daily life left me ill-equipped to articulate their plight. I struggled to organize my thoughts. This was a pivotal moment of self-reflection that exposed a gap in my own awareness, so I ultimately did not include this interview in my final paper.

Therefore, I made the difficult decision to change my direction and interviewed a second person, a 52-year-old resident. Her thoughts on sanitation and subway issues were more aligned with my observable data and existing conceptual framework. While my final paper focuses on the tangible infrastructure needs of the Grand Street station, the most impactful part of the process was realizing the intangible needs of the elderly, like their loneliness and the barriers they face when traveling. This shift made me realize that urban planning isn't just about elevators; it's about people with disabilities or parents with strollers who feel trapped without

them. Even though I changed my focus, that first interview was still very important because it made me realize that a community's most urgent needs are sometimes the ones that are hardest to solve. It forced me to be honest about my own shortcomings and realize how limited my perspective really was.

I am most proud of my analysis of community needs, especially the lack of accessibility at the Grand Street subway station. I observed seniors struggling to climb steep stairs, which shows how vulnerable groups have been ignored in urban planning. If I did this project again, I would spend more time focusing on the groups that are easily missed in the noise of the city. I hope to improve my ability to capture and amplify these hidden voices in the future.