

Title: Creating the Mosaic Atlas

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### **Abstract**

Mosaics are comprised of distinct and unique components that are beautiful on their own. Yet, viewing the mosaic, as a whole, is far more impactful than the sum of the parts. With this vision, San José, CA-based non-profit Mosaic America and the Spatial Analytics and Visualization (SAVi) Center at San José State University (SJSU) have embarked on a project to develop a broader and deeper understanding of the diverse communities living in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Founded in 2013 (and formerly known as Sangam Arts), Mosaic America is a non-profit organization that strengthens communities and catalyzes inclusion through inter-cultural and co-created art. Located in one of the most diverse areas of the country, Mosaic America has curated and hosted more than 125 artistic and cultural events featuring over 250 artists and culture bearers representing over 40 culturally distinct communities and reaching nearly 30,000 people in the Silicon Valley.

The SAVi Center at SJSU uses the power of geography and Geographic Information Science to produce impactful research and professional services to serve our university departments, neighborhood organizations, public agencies, and private sector entities in Silicon Valley and the Bay Area. The SAVi Center facilitates knowledge exchange in GIScience by organizing public events, bringing together scholars and professionals with unique expertise to present cutting-edge research findings, and hosting educational workshops on technological advances in spatial analytics and visualization.

These two organizations are currently interacting with over 140 culturally distinct communities to gain insights into their cultural practices, leaders, culture-bearers, artists, and the institutions that serve them. The resulting data, insights, and stories will be presented through the Mosaic Atlas. This interactive geospatial web explorer will offer data, insights, and stories to deepen our understanding of these communities that call the Bay Area home. It will be a powerful tool to

- Support public exploration of their community to learn about services and cultural resources.
- Connect artists and culture bearers with others in the area.
- Support the design and delivery of effective programs to marginalized underrepresented communities.
- Assist policymakers, activists, and community organizations with outreach efforts.

- Connect potential funders with communities in need.

This project unites the cultural expertise and community connections of Mosaic America with the GIS and Humanities scholarship, research, and resources of SJSU to

- Survey and map culturally distinct communities in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- Develop a database of cultural assets, important landmarks, etc., that serve these communities.
- Conduct qualitative research with artists about the work and communities.
- Curate multilingual, culturally appropriate content and stories for the interactive atlas.

The Mosaic Atlas demonstrates technical GIS development and cartographic creativity with a commitment to building bridges across cultures, genres, and geographies. This initiative will identify and amplify cultural traditions and proactively marginalized communities. It engages youth and LGBTQ+ culture bearers, ensuring contributions to this atlas honor traditions and raises awareness of culture within the broader community.

In addition to being a community non-profit-university collaboration, the atlas is an interdisciplinary research effort between San José State University's Regional and Urban Planning Department and the Department of Anthropology. It has created opportunities for deep spatial anthropological research into neighborhoods known for their cultural identity and/or diversity. Blending anthropological insights with place-based spatial statistics and demographics provide a richer and more nuanced representation of the multicultural interactions within each neighborhood under study.

The Mosaic Atlas has four major components. The foundational component is the collection of databases related to each of the 140 cultures. These databases hold the results of secondary and primary research into the area's cultural assets such as individuals who are culture bearers and organizations that act as cultural hubs. They also inform the online interactive map that can be filtered and searched. The map also provides numerous demographic layers against which the cultural data can be compared. Place-specific story maps and oral histories provide a deeper understanding of neighborhoods with significant cultural interest.

Developing an atlas representing over 140 different cultures requires sensitivity and respect for the individuals and traditions practiced within each culture. Leveraging Mosaic America's extensive experience interacting with the diversity of Bay Area cultures, secondary and primary research protocols were developed recognizing the unique value of the interviewee and the culture they represent.

This presentation discusses the first year of this two-year project. It covers organizational roles, project visioning, student-driven pedagogies, spatial and ethnographic research designs, GIS software development, and atlas implications. The session also presents lessons gained as the project evolved through proof of concept to product divisions.