A new study finds that recent Mexican immigrants in Chicago possess a wealth of artistic, cultural, and networking assets and that those assets contribute to the social, cultural, and economic well-being of many neighborhoods, organizations, and institutions in the Chicago area. In fact, the artistic and cultural activities of Mexican immigrants who arrived in Chicago after 1994 stimulate the local economy, especially in the music industry and service sectors.

So say the authors of the “Creative Networks: Mexican Immigrant Assets in Chicago” study, which is a joint project of The (Chicago) Field Museum’s Center for Cultural Understanding and Change and the Science of Networks in Communities (SONIC) research group at NCSA. The Rockefeller Foundation funded the yearlong study through its Creativity and Culture Program.

Researchers began by examining selected suburbs and city neighborhoods. Later, the researchers incorporated comments from Mexican immigrants throughout the city. The aims of the study were to identify the cultural, artistic, and networking practices and capacities of post-1994 migrants from Mexico; to analyze how these practices act to buffer challenges or obstacles immigrants face as they “traverse the transnational landscape”; and to understand how changes in immigrants’ cultural practices and network formation affect their identity, community building, and creative potential. The report recommends increasing networking opportunities through the arts.

Noshir Contractor, director of the SONIC group at NCSA, was co-primary investigator. Hank Green, a research scientist on the SONIC team, was a co-author of the study report.

For more information: http://www.fieldmuseum.org/creativenetworks

This mural is one way Chicago’s Mexican immigrants beautify their neighborhoods and convey beliefs.