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# Peruvian Identity: Food as Culture

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## Abstract

Peruvian immigration in the U.S. has tripled in less than a decade and in Connecticut alone, Peruvians are the second largest Latino population. The Peruvian government would like to document the presence of these emigrants, their impact on the local community, and particularly their professional success. My investigation examines the cultural identity of Peruvians in Hartford through their ethnic restaurants in order to answer, “What aspect of Peruvian culture is being disseminated in these ethnic enclaves?” I concentrate on local and popular Peruvian restaurants and interview the owners, chefs, workers and local customers. Peruvian cuisine for many compatriots is seen as a way to break social barriers and unite not only their comrades (i.e., other Peruvians), but the broader community in Hartford.

## Introduction

**A Government Priority**  
 •The Peruvian government launched the initiative for all Peruvian embassies and consulates abroad to document and facilitate cultural dissemination.

**Specific Cultural Venue:**  
 •Peruvian restaurants abroad became a primary target to document and analyze how Peruvian emigrants create and disseminate their culture.  
 •Local Hispanic Community supported Peruvian restaurant development in Hartford (“Hispanic Community Initiative”)  
 •In Hartford, the community is starting to experience a “boom” in Peruvian restaurants.

➔ **Research Question:** How do different members of the Peruvian Culture view food as “cultural capital”?

**Method**  
 •I used an ethnographic approach, interviewing the different actors of a restaurant: owners, chefs and local customers, to see if each actor answered my question in a different way. I identified those differences and in what ways they illustrated aspects of cultural unity.

## Methodology

Types of Actors	Goal of Interviews	Types of Questions	Duration
1: Peruvian Locals and Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Find out the general socioeconomic cultural identity of Peruvians in Hartford</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The types of Peruvians who are living in Hartford</li> <li>Their cultural values</li> <li>The importance of cuisine in their community/life</li> </ul>	First Semester (Oct-Dec) -Embassy -APAPRO -Club Peru -Peruvian locals (community leaders)
2: Restaurant Owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Find out how the space of cultural dissemination, the restaurants, is structured (was formed)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The layout and physical features of Peruvian restaurants</li> <li>The target customers for this disseminating of Peruvian culture</li> <li>The goals for these restaurants</li> </ul>	First Semester (Oct-Dec) -Piolin -Piolin 2 -Suso -Kerencya
3: Chefs/Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Find out how cultural dissemination is being served and prepared</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The relationship between cuisine and cultural traditions</li> <li>The relationship between cuisine and customers</li> </ul>	Second Semester (Jan-Mar)
4: Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Find out how the Hartford community perceives Peruvian culture and its values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The values that are being taken from Peruvian restaurants</li> </ul>	Second Semester (Jan-Mar)

## Restaurant Profiles



**Piolin -Hartford (3 locations)**  
 •Since 1998  
 •Family owned business  
 •Visited by non-Peruvian locals over Peruvian locals  
 •Train workers on Peruvian Cuisine  
 •Owner owned a restaurant in Peru



**La Kerencya-Hartford**  
 •Since 2011  
 •Family owned business  
 •Visited by Peruvian locals over non-Peruvian locals  
 •Train workers on Peruvian Cuisine  
 •Owner owned another Peruvian restaurant in Hartford



**Suso: Latino Basket-Manchester**  
 •Since 2011  
 •Chef owned business  
 •Visited primarily by non-Peruvian locals  
 •Chefs are professionally trained and come from different parts of Latin America  
 •Owner’s first owned restaurant

## Interview Findings

**Period of Expansion**  
 •Peruvian restaurants are in their **first phase** of building recognition and a reputation.

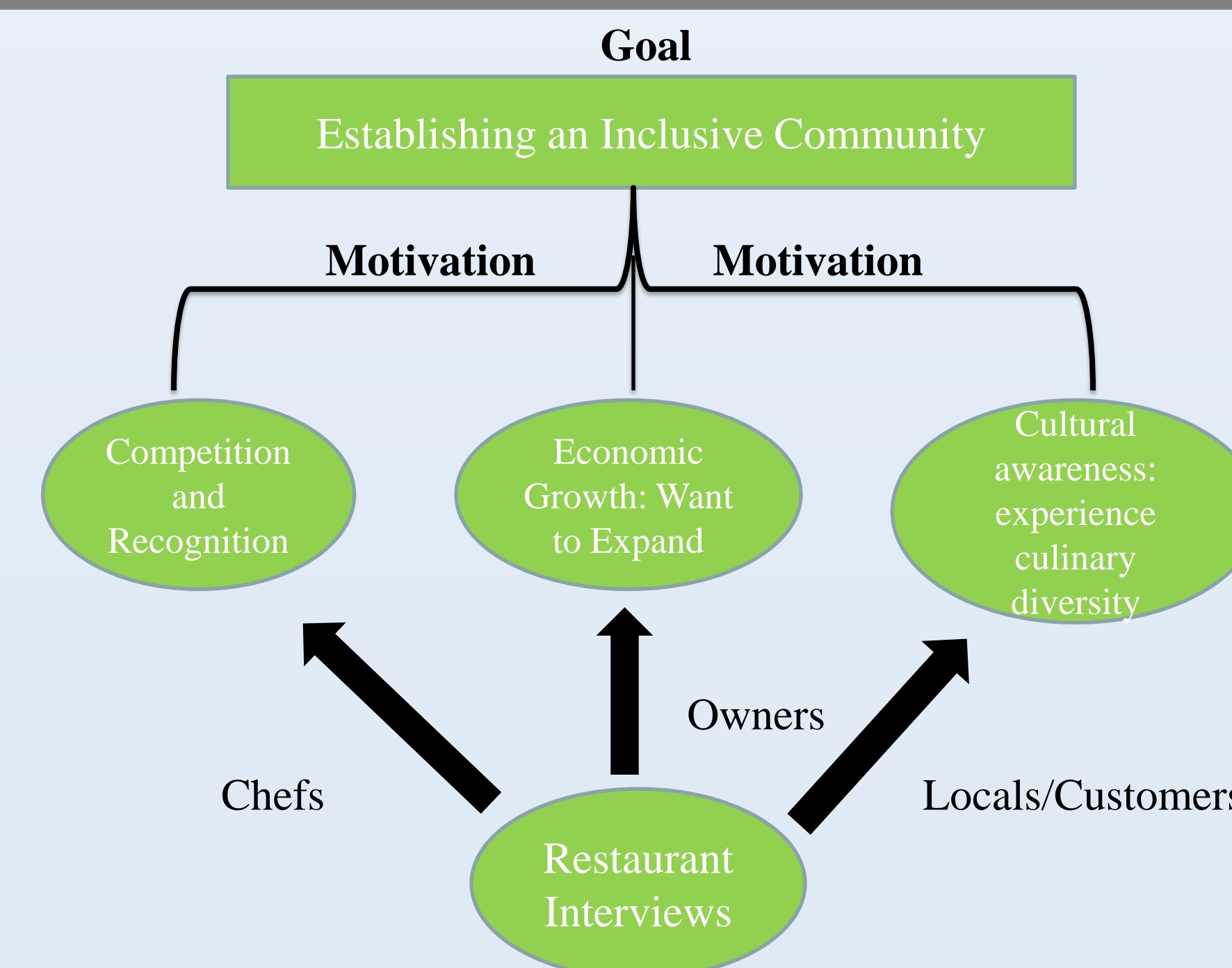
**Fulfills Multiple Functions**  
 •Peruvian’s restaurants bring a **positive** part of Peruvian culture, food and history.  
 •Through the training workshops for workers and their interactions with customers, these restaurants become a space of **learning** about Peruvian culture.

**Communal Identity and Role**  
 •Most restaurants are **family owned** born of community encouragement.  
 •Owners, chefs and local customers of these restaurants become an essential part of a **communal space** that disseminate Peruvian culture.

**Different Actors Goals and Motivations**  
 •The different groups of people interviewed shared a **primary goal of Peruvian unity and inclusion**, but had **different motivations**.

➔ Together these 4 findings suggest, “**una conquista atractiva cultural**” (a positive cultural expansion) of Peruvian restaurants.

## Results



## Inclusive Community



Piolin: A Typical Sunday



Communal Space in Hartford



Kerencya: Inca Son

## Each Group’s Objectives

**Common objective**  
 •Rebranding Peruvian food

**Owners**  
 •To build economic stability  
 •Create a family legacy  
 •Build a career and professional recognition  
 •Expand: reach customers outside of Hartford

**Chefs**  
 •To build a professional career and get recognition  
 •Pass on Peruvian traditions  
 •Sharing culinary practices

**Customers/Locals**  
 •Seeking authentic and inventive spaces for Peruvian food  
 •Provide a space and source of Peruvian knowledge  
 •Build ties with the community: can bring economic benefits for all  
 •Bring in Peruvian traditions beyond food (e.g., music and dance)

## Conclusion: The Beginning

**Power of Food**  
 •All groups of actors see the importance of **food** as a **tool** to disseminate culture  
 •Peruvian restaurants are an **easy access** to Peruvian culture  
 •Peruvians emigrants take pride in their food and view its restaurants as the next unique **communal space** to expand their presence  
 •Peruvian emigrants are establishing themselves as part of a “**Hispanic Community Initiative**”  
 •Restaurants are an attractive approach in creating new ways to share Peruvian traditions

**Limitations**  
 •Access to Peruvian restaurants: getting interviews approved  
 •Peruvian restaurants are still fairly new and limited in number

**For Future Research**  
 •A wider data set (as more restaurants emerge in and outside of Hartford)  
 •Look at the economic success and/or struggles of these restaurants?  
 • Does this cultural space bring communal benefits?

## Acknowledgements

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 •Piolin: Miguel Franco  
 •Suso Basket: Rosario Mosquera  
 •Kerencya: Willie Heredi

**Community Actors**  
 •The Peruvian Consulate  
 •APAPRO (Association of Peruvian American Professionals)

**Specific Individuals**  
 •Silvia and Mario Mesias  
 •Julio Cadenillas  
 •Marco Lovera

