

# ParTour at CicLAvia

**ParTour is a partnership between the Metamorphosis Project, the USC Mobile Lab, and T.R.U.S.T. South LA,** a community-based organization that focuses on giving the community a greater voice in development and land-use decisions. Rooted in participatory action research principles, ParTour uses local residents' ordinary mobile phones and gives them a platform to tell stories about their community. ParTour is part storytelling platform, part advocacy tool, and part research methodology. The stories told through ParTour can help bring awareness to neighborhood issues that everyday residents think are important and can help garner support for the social change initiatives of community organization partners. At the same time, the project allows researchers to think through a variety of issues related to citizen journalism, civic participation, and the role of mobile technology in community development and democratic life. ParTour builds upon the [www.vozmob.net](http://www.vozmob.net) platform, with support from the Annenberg Innovation Lab.

We tested the ParTour platform at the CicLAvia event, a celebration of pedestrians in which over 10 miles of Los Angeles city streets were closed down to cars and opened up to bicyclists and walkers. In just one day, 70 citizen journalists were trained to contribute to ParTour — they were each given a mission to document a specific aspect of the event, and through their mobile phones, they were able to upload photos, captions and geo-location data to a public website ([www.partour.net](http://www.partour.net)). ParTour empowered everyday people to tell their own stories about the communication assets of their community — they served as citizen journalists, mappers, photographers, and explorers. With more than 200 stories and snapshots collected, these community contributors produced a valuable phone-based documentary of the CicLAvia event. They also used the opportunity to advocate for specific community issues, including a call to extend the route of CicLAvia itself deeper into the heart of South LA. From the perspective of the researchers, ParTour's work at CicLAvia gave valuable insight into how partnerships between academics, community organizations and local residents can be forged through a mobile technology platform. Check out some of the ParTour stories and maps online at [www.partour.net](http://www.partour.net).



## WHAT IS the Metamorphosis Project?

The Metamorphosis Project was born in 1992, in large part as a result of the riots that shook Los Angeles. Dr. Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, the developer of Metamorphosis, knew that as a communication researcher, she should contribute to policymakers and practitioners trying to bring about social change that enables stronger communities.

*Metamorphosis is a study of the transformation of urban communities under the forces of globalization, population diversity and new communication technologies.*

The Metamorphosis Project is actively involved with several projects that explore the intersections between communication research, community-building, and neighborhood storytelling. MetaConnects, Communication Asset Mapping, and ParTour are three examples that are in progress and are undergoing expansion — we plan to continue to work with community organizations and local residents through workshops, in online conversations, and at events to make these and other projects even more useful.

*The Metamorphosis Project – Transforming the Ties that Bind* was officially launched in 1998 at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California (USC). Metamorphosis has conducted research on African Americans and Latinos in Greater Crenshaw and South Figueroa; Anglos, Latinos and Chinese groups in Alhambra, Anglos on the Westside and in South Pasadena; ethnic Chinese groups in Greater Monterey Park; Koreans in Koreatown; Latinos in East LA, Pico Union, Huntington Park, Cudahy, and Southgate; and Anglos, Latinos, and Armenians in Glendale.



## Metamorphosis

**HOW TO CONTACT US:**  
For more information on what Metamorphosis has been doing and the projects we are currently engaged in, please refer to our websites:  
[www.metamorph.org](http://www.metamorph.org)  
and  
[www.metaconnects.org](http://www.metaconnects.org)

If you have questions or comments, please contact the Metamorphosis Project research team either via e-mail at [meta@metamorph.org](mailto:meta@metamorph.org) or via telephone at 213.740.1260.



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# MetaConnects: Research, Practice and Social Change

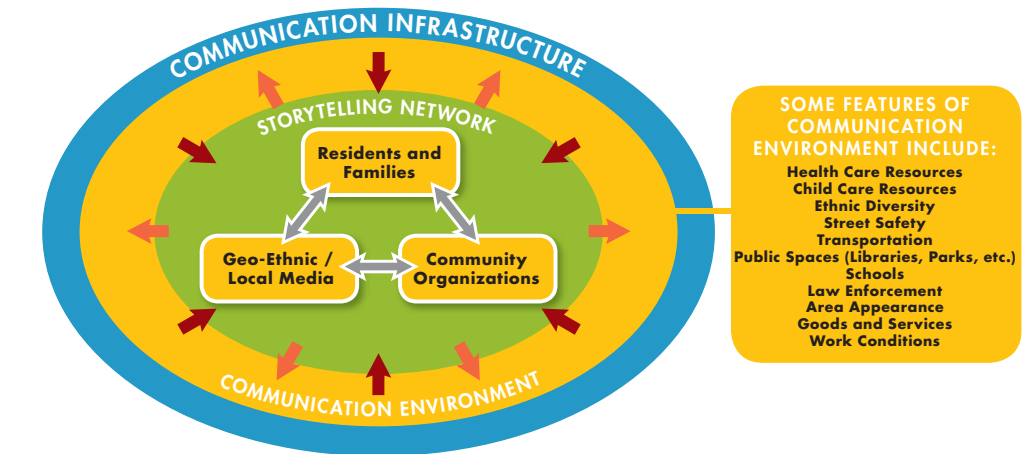
Over the course of more than a decade, the Metamorphosis Project has been studying the distinct communication practices of diverse neighborhoods across Los Angeles. We have learned how strong connections between community residents, community-based organizations, and local and ethnic media can improve the health and civic vitality of communities. At the same time, we know that community-based practitioners in the area have been working tirelessly alongside community members to strengthen the fabric of community and to enhance the well-being of residents. This brochure highlights efforts that bring together the communication and media research of the Metamorphosis Project with

the community-based action of practitioners, organizers, and residents from across the city of Los Angeles. We believe that through a community-based approach — one in which academics and community-based practitioners share strategies, methodological practice, and research findings, as well as develop participatory projects — a collaborative agenda for sustainable social change can be forged. The approach and projects described in this brochure are intended to be helpful to practitioners who seek to maximize the effectiveness of their outreach efforts to local residents, as well as those who are interested in expanding their capacity to work in concert with researchers. This brochure can also be useful for academic researchers who would like to see examples of how community-based research collaborations can become a part of professional academic practice.

## About our Approach

The work of the Metamorphosis Project is guided by the Communication Infrastructure approach. Researchers, politicians, organizers and others often talk about the importance of different kinds of community infrastructures — like the transportation infrastructure or the economic infrastructure — but we believe that the Communication Infrastructure is equally as important.

**What is the Communication Infrastructure? There are two basic components:**



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## Metamorphosis

USCAnnenberg  
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### 1. The Storytelling Network:

- Interpersonal connections between residents and their family, friends, and neighbors.
- Community and non-profit organizations that are located in the neighborhood and serve local residents.
- Local or ethnic media (what we call Geo-Ethnic media) that are targeted to a particular geographic area and/or ethnic group.

### 2. The Communication Environment:

- Any feature of the community's environment that can either promote or discourage neighborhood communication.
- Features include the quality of (1) community institutions (e.g., schools and libraries) (2) public spaces (e.g., parks and streets), and (3) the goods and services available in the community.
- The Storytelling Network can effect changes in the Communication Environment, while the Communication Environment can effect changes in the Storytelling Network.

## Why Pay Attention to the Communication Infrastructure?

A strong Storytelling Network — that is, when residents, organizations, and media all engage in shared conversations around topics of local importance — can be a powerful tool for mobilizing community members to take individual or collective action, and it can also promote strong feelings of community belonging. The power of this network is in full effect when all three storytellers focus on the same neighborhood story — this collective conversation raises awareness of an issue and can motivate people to get involved. Importantly, the Communication Environment can have a big impact on the strength of the Storytelling Network — things like safe neighborhood streets and quality public spaces make it more likely that community members will

be able meet and greet and engage in neighborhood conversation.

From a community organization's perspective, understanding the Communication Infrastructure can help you connect with residents, promote your goals and effect social change.

*Your survey confirmed what I have seen with the people we serve; few find us on the internet. Most clients prefer to receive a phone call or a mailer than to receive correspondence by e-mail. The phone has been the most effective tool.*

**Veronica Lopez**  
Senior Program Officer  
Community Financial Resource Center

With that said, a community's Communication Infrastructure is often invisible. Only by conducting research to see what types of communication resources residents depend upon for information about the community — be they interpersonal connections, specific organizations, or particular media outlets — can one begin to see and, therefore, be able to use the Storytelling Network as a tool for social change. This

need for research opens up an opportunity for useful collaborations between community organizations and professional researchers to develop.

## The MetaConnects Platform is a Centerpiece of the Metamorphosis Project's Community-based Research Initiatives

MetaConnects consists of a website, an E-mail Listserv and ongoing in-person discussions, workshops and events — it has been designed as a space to share research findings, strategies, tools, and innovative collaborative projects between academics and practitioners, all in pursuit of community-level social change. The project's development is informed by feedback and suggestions taken from conversations and focus groups with community practitioners—policy makers, community organizers, financial analysts, executive directors, and others.

Ultimately, MetaConnects is a knowledge sharing space in which the Metamorphosis Project can communicate its theoretical tools and research findings to practitioners in an accessible and actionable format. Importantly, practitioner contributions to the platform give all participants greater insight into the activities, challenges and solutions that grassroots organizations encounter in their everyday practices.

### What you'll find on the website:

**Purpose:** Outline of the Communication Infrastructure approach and how it can help you achieve your goals.

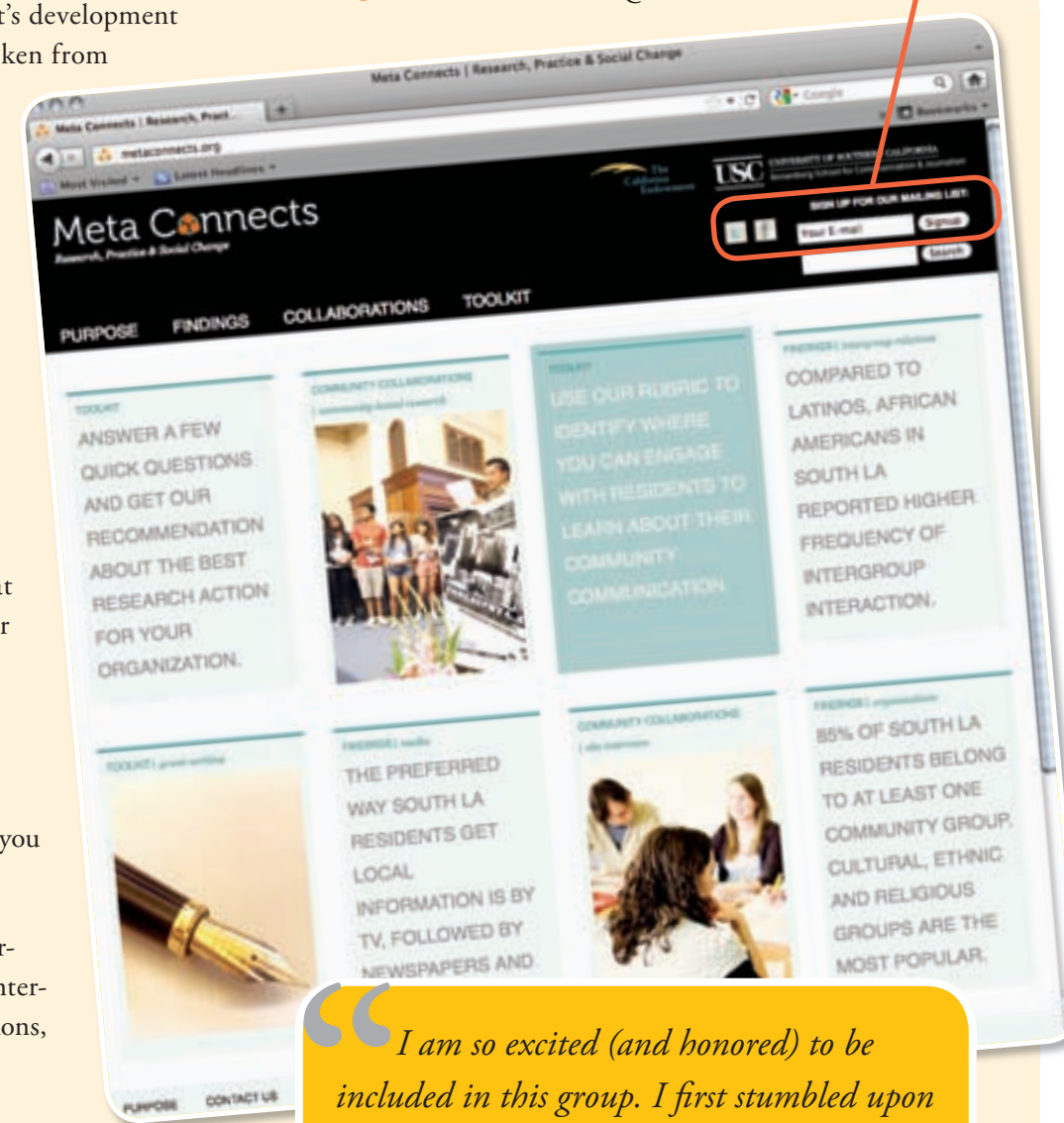
**Findings:** Research results from Metamorphosis Project surveys, focus groups, and interviews with Los Angeles residents, organizations, and media producers.

**Collaborations:** Participatory projects between researchers and organizations, as well as highlights of local community organizations' activities, events and innovative strategies.

**Toolkit:** Practical tips for conducting research to understand the communication practices of local residents, as well as techniques to build organizational capacity and improve strategic planning.

### How to Keep In touch with MetaConnects:

- Visit [www.metaconnects.org](http://www.metaconnects.org)
- Sign up for the e-mail listserv here
- Like us on Facebook
- Follow us on Twitter @MetaConnectsUSC



*I am so excited (and honored) to be included in this group. I first stumbled upon Metamorphosis when I was working as a policy aide for Mayor Villaraigosa, and ever since then, I've always referred any group I've been a part of to your work.*

**Chris Ko**  
Program Officer, United Way of Greater Los Angeles

## Communication Asset Mapping

A viable Communication Infrastructure depends upon a Communication Environment that promotes neighborhood communication and helps build a strong Storytelling Network. Communication Asset Mapping is the process whereby we identify positive features of the neighborhood communication environment that facilitate positive social interaction — spaces we refer to as communication assets.

The central idea is that communication assets can be used as “capacity-building-blocks” for local community organizations, agencies, researchers, and residents themselves, to build stronger communities and strengthen neighborhood Storytelling Networks. Communication assets can be leveraged by practitioners and researchers as places to conduct outreach to local residents and gain a better understanding of what neighborhood spaces are important communication resources for residents. This work is an attempt to move away from a deficit model of understanding a community, where the focus is only on neighborhood problems. We think it is just as valuable to recognize the assets that exist in a community as a way to improve neighborhood vitality.

Who defines what is a communication asset? We believe that different people, coming from different backgrounds and different perspectives, will have different ideas about what a communication asset is. Through our survey, focus group, and interview data, we began the process of identifying neighborhood communication assets. From there, we tested out these hints through a grounded process in which Metamorphosis research team members walked and biked through the neighborhood to identify specific places that seemed to be important spaces of neighborhood communication. With that said, we know that this perspective is only one of many. The Communication Asset Mapping process helps compile different communication asset maps from a variety of individuals — researchers, community organizers, local residents, public officials, and others — to get a complete view of the communication assets that the local

Communication Environment has to offer.

Below you can see photos of and notes about some of the Communication Assets that were identified by Metamorphosis Project researchers in their fieldwork in South Los Angeles.

