A Survey of the Quality of Life in the City of Long Beach:

District-2

A Field Work Research Project

By

Aaron Ledesma
Jonathan Losch

For

Dr. Adrian Novotny
Honors Cultural Anthropology
May 10th, 2009
Long Beach City College
Long Beach, California
Introduction

IN the Spring Semester of 2009, at Long Beach City College, the Honors Cultural Anthropology class was lead by the anthropologist Dr. Adrian Novotny through an inquiry of the quality of life in Long Beach, California. The city of Long Beach is a place of great diversity with residents that range from the people who are just getting by to those who are living in the lap of luxury. The universal concern is no matter the class or categories people are in, their views on life in Long Beach tend to go largely unheard. There is a need, with such a national crisis in our economy, to discern ways to improve the city of Long Beach in ways that meet the interests that are best for the people that live in the city and also will allow the city to thrive and grow economically. The best way to do that is to ask the people themselves. This is exactly what was done in this fieldwork study as people were presented with a questionnaire, extracting both qualitative and quantitative data, which would allow for the people’s views to be heard and allow for decisions to be made that would be beneficial to everyone. What is the quality of life? In tackling this question, the class and Dr. Novotny discussed what elements of life to look at when addressing the topic of quality of life, how to define quality of life, and how to assess quality of life, all being done so that the most significant task can be executed: assessing Long Beach’s quality of life. As a group, we produced several drafts of a series of questionnaires, ultimately to be used to survey the sampling of Long Beach so that the answer can come from the people. The city is divided into districts, and one or several students studied each. We, Aaron Ledesma and Jonathon Losch, were assigned part of Long Beach’s downtown area, District-2. (See map) This fast-paced area of Long Beach consists of impressive, aged buildings and an energy that makes you aware of how
ethnically diverse the city is. There are many tall office buildings, businesses, movie theatres and high-class restaurants. Our sample tended to consist of those of a high social class compared to the rest of the city, due to the high cost of living.

Our formal interviews were meant to create an overview of the essentials of quality of life in the Long Beach area while not being too specific where a long interview would be needed with each subject. Each question in the questionnaire consisted of a Likert scale used to rate each question along with which was used to express their views of on each question along with an option for people to have no opinion on a question as to allow for personal objections. The beginning of each survey has a section of categorizing questions that are used to place the results in their appropriate categories, as the subjects remain anonymous. The students were all given certain areas of Long Beach where they would sample subjects in those specific areas to allow for a broader overview of the people of Long Beach rather than samplings from only certain areas of the city.

The area that was focused in my research was the downtown area of Long Beach, more specifically the District 2 area of Long Beach (see map), which consisted of mainly the Pike area, the harbor, and some residential areas of Ocean Blvd.

**The Fieldwork**

The fieldwork consisted of asking individuals to participate in the questionnaire. We would usually go on the weekends and at a few weekdays as well to the downtown area. There were a few snags that came up when trying to interact with people. We positioned ourselves in a very busy area to begin with, on the corner of Pine Ave Ocean Ave. This intersection is very close to the Pike, a town center like plaza with restaurants, a movie theatre, an arcade and many other stores. We were able to get a few responses
from people near the Pike area, but were soon told that we was not allowed to do the
survey in that area by the security guards. This was a little strange as I wasn’t in front of
any stores harassing customers as they walk out of stores, but simply at the center area
talking to passersby. Either way I was forced not to get subjects from that area anymore.
The main streets of downtown were busy with people walking to and from work or to
restaurants but that mass of people seemed to be a great problem in itself. The majority of
people were in a mad dash to their location, such as their work, restaurant, or movie, and
would not take the time to stop and participate in a questionnaire while a number of
people would not even stop walking while they talked to me to say “no thank you”. The
rate of rejection was very high, as most people seemed to be business type people that
were in a rush. However, when I was able to flag down a person willing to talk with me,
they would be able to spend a considerable amount of time talking with me about their
thoughts and views on the subject of quality of life. They would at times spend much of
their time elaborating on the answers that they would give for each question. This would
cause the interview at times to last thirty or more minutes per person interviewed. These
longer surveys gave us the impression that the subject we were speaking with at the time
cared more. We would even venture to suggest that it seemed they genuinely hoped that
their responses would generate a positive result in what we were trying to gather in terms
of the condition of the city. The night life in the downtown area created a problem in our
data gathering attempts as the people that came out at night were mostly there to party at
the clubs or have a fun night out drinking and eating dinner. This yielded the least results
in gathering data as most were unapproachable due to their rowdy and at times
intoxicated manner or they would just simply not be in the mood to put their night plans on hold to entertain a short questionnaire.

**Results**

Over several months we worked on gathering data from Long Beach’s second district. Although we can’t conclude an overview of the entire city of Long Beach, we have a good view of our area in terms of their views about life in this city. In general, our results from the questionnaires presented many trends that validated and disproved some of our personal views but in all it allowed us to get a clear picture from it. For an example, police protection was seen as coming from certain extremes as either being poor or terrible to being excellent. This could be accounted by the terms that most people encounter police. Many people whose interactions with police are only evident in their watching of cops on TV or hearing about them on the news, while others gauge their responses on their anger of the police by personal experiences or being pulled over. Personal experiences tend to pull the views towards a broader conclusion as one misstep from a cop labels the entire force. On the other hand most people seemed to shy away from the question about fire protection, as most people have no first hand experience in a fire situation to be able to judge them.

The busy energy posed a great hindrance in obtaining our data. We weren’t able to survey as many subjects as originally intended. Ultimately, we were able to survey 80 people in total. When looking at quality of life in total we try and summarize our data to try and discover a trend to influence our decisions. In response to our questions, the ability to afford the things we like and livable neighborhoods was seen as “average” and the quality of life was seen as “average” to “good” along with people’s views about
availability of good education. The fire protection and availability of desirable foods were seen as “good” to “excellent” which was really good compared to the rest of the questionnaire. On the lower part of the Likert scale we have employment opportunities at “some jobs” available and health care being between “poor” and “average”. The confusion comes in the form of the police protection in Long Beach and the affordability of housing which creates many extremes as at times many will see them as being “poor” and others will see them as being “excellent” or “good.”

In reviewing our findings, we found that the significantly largest age group of our sample came in the range of 18-25 years old, making up 32% of the sample. Due to the imbalance of our age demographic, we found it relevant to compare the 18-25 age group’s responses to certain questions, to those of the rest of the subjects, ranging from ages 26-75 or up. The two age groups shared similar feelings toward their own level of quality of life, the younger group rating their quality of life as “good”, or a four out of five on the Likert scale, while the older age groups collectively rated their quality of life as “excellent”, or a five out of five on the Likert scale. However, when asked how often they were able to afford the things they feel are necessary for, what they consider to be a high quality of life, the younger group said they could afford those expenses “sometimes-often”, or three to four out of five on the Likert scale; whereas the older group gave a response of “often-always”, or four to five out of five on the Likert scale. The noticeably different responses to this question between the two age groups raised our attention to the matter of why the quality of life was rated slightly better by our older respondents than our younger respondents. It began to appear that finances play a significant role the level of quality of life of our sample.
We were able to expand on this idea when we looked at what the data showed when our subjects were asked how they would rate employment opportunities in Long Beach. Our younger sample said they were “some” job opportunities, giving the city a rating of two out of five, while the older sample tended to lean toward one side of the spectrum or the other in their response to this question, giving a rating of either a two or a four, with few exceptions. Even with a wider range of responses to this question by our older group, we were able to see the pattern of finances affecting quality of life appear to continue. The younger group’s responses consistently circling around the rating of two, implies a total dissatisfaction with job opportunities in the city, while the older group showed some positive feelings regarding job opportunities, accompanied by the negative responses as well.

Evaluation

After examining our data and the trends they reflect, we learned that our sample found Long Beach to be a great place to live. Still, there are areas that can use improvement. An aid to our review of the city came from a part of the sample we didn’t anticipate: those who live in Long Beach, but don’t identify themselves as citizens of Long Beach. Their responses were universally negative compared to those who do identify with the city. One instance of this indisposition stood out among the rest. When we spoke to a man from Ohio, he expressed a dislike for what he felt was rudeness along with a materialistic perspective from people in Long Beach. By the time we spoke to him, we had already encountered others who were not originally from Long Beach, who shared his same view. However, his case was unique because he was stuck in Long Beach due to a disability in his leg that hindered him from producing income aside from
his disability check. Throughout the entire interview, he repeatedly mentioned that as soon as he had enough money, was going back to Ohio.

What does this say about Long Beach? While those of our sample who are originally from the city, or have spent a majority of their life in the city, had good things to say that reflect the city’s efforts to better itself, those who come from different areas expose a validity to the reputation large cities have. This can simply be a case of ethnocentrism on the part of the man from Ohio and those like him. Still, their contribution to our findings cannot be ignored. If the ones who have spent more time in Long Beach show an overall good feeling for the city, something good is happening. Yet we do not want to stagnate our progress by resting in the comfort of our worldview. One would speculate that every great city ventures to be a good place to live for everyone. Long Beach’s growing size suggests that it is moving in that direction, and the positive attitude of the majority of its inhabitants surveyed reinforces the idea of the city’s progression.

Further Research

The research of this kind is in such a way that many factors can affect the outcome of the results. The main problem as stated before was the actual attempts at trying to obtain data from individuals due the type of area we were located in. For further research future researchers may want to take in account the area of downtown in respect to the people that reside there. The main area of downtown Long Beach is consisted of mainly club, bars, and businesses, therefore, that are is a high traffic area which is good meaning more individuals to gather data from, but most are unwilling to stop. The best way to approach is by having a prearranged speech to introduce yourself in a non
threatening manner and to find areas that people are relaxing such as parks or people who are off of work waiting for the buses. There is a necessity of making sure the area you are at is public property, as we were told not conduct surveys at the Pike by security guards. Our data proved to us that in our area there was a belief in a good quality of life from the downtown perspective but for future studies our research can be a starting point that can be used as a reference for students or city individuals to try and create a better Long Beach for everyone.
References Cited