A Survey of the Quality of Life in the City of Long Beach: District 7

A Fieldwork Research Project

By

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For

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Introduction

Long Beach is distinct and lively city with many diverse cultural neighborhoods. Traveling down one street may lead one to several different scenes of Long Beach. The city of Long Beach has various outlets of arts, sports and recreation, and an active nightlife. With many things to do in such a lively city, there is also a diversity of people. From various ethnic backgrounds to age, the residents of Long Beach contribute to a thorough assessment of the quality of life in Long Beach.

Cultural anthropologists by means of ethnographic fieldwork could research the quality of life in Long Beach. According to William Haviland and the text Cultural Anthropology: The Human Challenge, “ethnographic fieldwork is extended on-location research to gather detailed and in-depth information on a society’s customary ideas, values, and practices through participation in its collective social life. This type of fieldwork involves site selection and research question, preparatory research, participant observation and data gathering” (Haviland 2008: 51-54). During my 2009 spring semester at Long Beach City College, I began to research the quality of life in the city of Long Beach. My Honors Cultural Anthropology class split the nine districts between one or two people surveying the various residents’ quality of life. As a whole class, the city of Long Beach was surveyed and computed of their quality of life. I focused on the 7th district, which is northwest of the downtown area and north to the central city Signal Hill. My research included interviewing and surveying residents of the 7th district on their quality of life in Long Beach. The information I have gathered about the residents of the 7th district is quantitative data and can be used for further research on the city of Long Beach. Quantitative data is statistical or measurable information key to data gathering of
ethnographic fieldwork. The goal of this research project is to present my results and findings to the mayor of Long Beach.

**Before I Went into the Field**

As a class, most of my fellow honor students and I have never conducted an anthropological study. Our professor, Dr. Adrian Novotny, provided us with guidelines, support, and direction in order to conduct a successful research project on the quality of life in the city of Long Beach. The survey instruments we adapted went through a process of pilot questions. As our class formed an overall theme and research question for the project, the surveys began to form into the practical yet expository medium used to measure the quality of life in Long Beach.

When developing the surveys, it is critical to gather information while maintaining anonymity. Before the surveys were administered, pilot questions were devised. Our objective for the pilot questions was to develop a strong questionnaire that made it simple for residents of Long Beach to answer, participate, and recognize their quality of life. To develop these questionnaires one must ask what are the qualities of life? As an assignment, our class wrote out a list of qualities of life. When I was writing my list, I considered what were necessities in my life, my future and those around me. Like Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, I incorporated physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs, which in turn were core questions on the final survey instrument. Some qualities of life that I included were availability of clean water, healthy food, firm family foundation, friendship, faith, security, livable home conditions and motivational life goals. Some qualities I had in common with other classmates for the same or different reasons. From our varying lists, the class came upon a common list of the qualities of life.
From this list, we developed the first set of pilot questions. Included in the surveys were questions about general demographics, open-ended questions, and ratings of the city of Long Beach. I interviewed my family and friends with the pilot survey getting feedback on what questions to include or how to format the survey differently. After several versions of reviewed pilot surveys, my class collectively developed a strong instrument.

When the final questionnaire was complete, Dr. Novotny made sure that we were aware of how to conduct ourselves in public when doing research. One of the main things to consider when implementing questionnaires in the public is informed consent. Informed consent is formal, recorded agreement to participate in research (Haviland 2008:66). Each informant must understand that the information they provided will be confidential and anonymous. If an informant did not want to participate, I was instructed to not irritate or annoy them to get them to participate. For me, I felt out of my comfort zone already having to walk up to strangers and get them to participate in a school research project, so I had no problem not annoying strangers. Another rule to conducting surveys out in the field was to not be in any malls, stores, or go door to door. Agreeing upon these terms, I was anxious to start my fieldwork.

7th District Reviews

For such a diverse population, I came across similar responses for the quality of life in Long Beach. Many valued family, friends, home, work, and love as top qualities. Some of the sample I surveyed had some concern for other parts of Long Beach that could be improved or that were in dire need of attention. They found their own neighborhood was great but other neighborhoods in Long Beach were terrible. As far as rating police, fire protection and other concerns in Long Beach, most were average. As I listened to many
people say their rankings, most of their decisions were based on personal experiences they had with either the police or public works. If they had a bad experience with a department, they usually gave them a lower rating. As far as ranking various departments in Long Beach, my sampling pool of 7th district residents measured many things between poor and good.

The sample size of my research required fifty individuals to answer the questionnaires. To obtain the fifty questionnaires, I wanted to speak with people who were willing to participate and give their views on the quality of life in Long Beach. Our class discussed different places within districts to obtain vast amounts of people to respond to our surveys. The most popular places included parks, coffee shops, and on campus. I considered going to coffee shops and parks near my home for research, but realized that my place of employment was an excellent source for a variety of respondents. I work at local community center in Long Beach where a mixture of people ranging in age and backgrounds come together. It was here where I found the most responsive and corporative sampling. Surprisingly, the people that I surveyed at the community center were more receptive than the sampling residents that were knowledgeable of me.

Part one of the survey was classifying questions including age, ethnicity, household income, religious affiliation, years of education, marital status, sex, and total number of people living in the household. In my sample of 7th district residents, there were many correlations between the various demographics. One major correlation was between age, religious affiliation, and household income. Part of the sampling whom was older, and considered themselves Catholic, Christian, or Jewish, responded to having a higher household income. Many correlations in my sampling involved household income. Another
major and popular statistic was the relationship between household income and total number of year of education and degrees obtained. As many researchers have confirmed, the more education a person receives, the more money that person is able to earn. I agree that more education goes with more money because my experience with a sample of 7th district residents confirms it.

Part two of the survey involves quality of life assessment including necessities for a high quality of life, rating of police protection, fire protection, affordability of healthcare, employment opportunities, affordability of housing, quality of schools and universities, and quality and affordability of foods in Long Beach. Using a basic scale of one through five, primarily terrible to excellent, and no opinion, most of the sampling responses ranged from two to four or poor to good. Although police and fire protection seem to be good or excellent, most of the sample rated the affordability of safe housing, employment opportunities, and affordability of healthcare as poor or average. While it is true that the sample thinks highly of authority, it does not necessarily follow that the sample does not struggle with other issues.

As a third part of the survey, respondents could leave comments or opinions on the subject of the quality of life in Long Beach. While some people left suggestions like clean the beach, some of the sample pool left comments specifically about pollution, urban development, and crime in certain areas. While most of the sample that I surveyed had a higher income, there was an array of views towards the city of Long Beach. There was correlation between the ratings of police and safe livable housing and the opinions mentioned about crime and pollution. Some individuals of the sample rated police protection poorly and commented that Long Beach needs to have more police focused on
gang-infested neighborhoods and other troubled areas. Others in the sample rated safe livable neighborhoods in Long Beach poorly and noted how Long Beach need to improve ways of handling pollution. I agree that Long Beach needs to improve in safety and cleanliness, a point that needs emphasizing since so many politicians and city council members are unaware of the effects of these problems.

**Conclusion of Research**

The quality of life in the city of Long Beach study was very informative and gave me a broad view of a sample’s perspective and concerns about Long Beach. At the same time that I believe Long Beach is an exceptional city, I also believe that Long Beach needs some critical improvements. Crime, whether petty or substantial, is climbing at a substantial rate. Although I grant that state propositions are proposed to increase police and fire protection, I still maintain that other alternatives must be considered to improve city crime rates. The survey instruments were extremely useful because it sheds insight on the difficult problem of hearing public opinion. These discoveries will have significant applications in showing what problems a sample of Long Beach residents face most as well as providing city council with statistics on what to focus on within the city.

**Recommended Further Study**

When surveying a sample of the 7th District residents of Long Beach, I found that people were more responsive when I initiated conversation with them. At my place of employment, some of the sample participated in the survey either before or after their workout. To get their attention was quite easy because in order to get to the fitness area, they had to pass by the desk where I worked at. I offered a towel or water to them and asked how their day was going so far. Most of the members were quite sociable and
returned the favor by asking how I was doing. My reply was positive and I would mention how I was surveying the 7th district of Long Beach for an Anthropology project. To many in the sample, the project seemed interesting and they were curious for results from the survey. Hence introducing the idea and intentions of the project was a means of receiving feedback on the questionnaires.

My recommendations for continuing further research on the quality of life in the city of Long Beach is not to shove surveys in the person’s face, but engage in conversation and listen to what they have to say. Choosing the right location is also critical in asking people to participate in surveys. An ideal location for this type of research is an area where people are not busy. Sometimes people are waiting for something to happen or looking for something to do. The short and straightforward questionnaires are ways to pass time. These recommendations have important benefits for the broader domain of ethnography.
References Cited