

Venice Beach – Group 4

Throughout our day in we Venice noticed that there was an ongoing struggle to try and maintain the areas independence. This was both in an economic sense, but also culturally and socially. We all noticed that Venice had its own culture and atmosphere that differed from the rest of the city that we have seen. We noticed signs around the area saying “Stop the monster” which is a resistance movement to new housing projects for homeless populations from Venice. However, change in the area. We found out by speaking to a passer-by that the movement is an attempt to build affordable housing in the area

We spoke to an employee at a high-end independent street wear shop called General Admission. He has lived in Venice for a decade and said that an attractive attribute of the area was its homogenised feel and its eclectic community. As an area he feels that it is very proud of its diverse and quirky nature and allows it to stand out within Los Angeles. He feels that it is a progressive area, with the introduction of new wealth in the last decade. We asked whether the gentrification of the area that he described had had an impact on its ethnic diversity and consequently the independence of the areas culture. He felt as though many of the newcomers to the area are from a multiplicity of backgrounds, and even described the gentrification as “colourful.” However, he noted that the communities that had lived there before the gentrification were probably struggling more now, than they did before.

Looking at the architectural style of the buildings in the Venice beach area, you immediately notice the diversity in building style, which directly reflects the feeling of the area as a whole. The diversity in architecture supports the feeling of how Venice beach has always been a massive cluster of communities, where they can come together to co-inhabit, causing the creation of this diverse and inclusive area which has been at the forefront of progressive liberalism in California. As mentioned above, the increasing gentrification and private investment in the area, leading to massive hikes in rent prices are beginning to seriously threaten Venice’s ability to continue to operate as an independent and creative space.

Before arriving in the Venice Beach area, we had previous estimates and expectations on what the area would be like generally. Firstly, we expected a very body-centric environment, with heavy prevalence on Muscle Beach and the ‘green’ culture of the area. We also expected a culturally-superficial environment, with Venice wearing its cultural influences and subcultures on it’s sleeve. For example, we expected huge posters and street arts detailing ‘green’ stores, and advertisements perpetuating the independent, inclusive and liberal nature of the Venice area. Another expectation we had of Venice was that the area would be cleaner and more well maintained then popular culture would make us believe, therefore giving us the expectation that Venice (particularly the beachfront)



would be almost entirely focused on the aesthetic, and maintaining the culturally perceived aesthetics of the area. Another expectation of the area that we discussed as a group was the prevalence of body modification shops, as well as an overall high regard of personal expression through body art and modification. We thought this would also be prevalent in the self-marketing and self-maintained identity of Venice. An expectation of the area we as a group all shared was the general focus on “hippy” culture throughout the area. Some examples of this could be spiritual shops and street vendors, psychic readings and a huge influence on skating culture.

Upon immersing ourselves and exploring Venice beach a lot of our expectations were changed. Venice is often known for its body culture and its superficial nature. However upon exploring it further despite both these elements being major aspects of the area, it is still far less prevalent than we expected. The area as a local shop owner described has a certain grit, an edgy feel stemming from its underground



culture. The area has a few very specific subcultures that we were surprised to learn about when exploring the area. As well as the fitness and body culture the area had a distinct skate and surf culture not as prevalent in other parts of the city. The beach was lined with skate and surf focussed shops with skaters frequently riding past and plenty of surfers along the beach. As well as this the area had a distinctive hip hop culture with hip hop playing out of many stores and people’s radios, as well as people promoting themselves through mixtapes and plenty of hip hop merchandise. This stems from the areas huge diversity that once again trumped our expectations, the area had a large mix of different races and people from across the world with both African American and Latino inspired businesses as well as a selection of global restaurants. The local population is proud of its diversity and locals describe it as a very progressive and liberal society. A local shop owner telling is that it was the first Californian community to allow African Americans to buy property. However with its recent income of wealth and due to its liberal society homelessness is become a bigger problem within the area. We couldn't help noticing the number of homeless people both along the beach and on it, it was far more than we expected and is indicative of the homeless issue across Los Angeles. Lastly the Venice is flooded with spiritual, alternative and ‘hippie’ shops with a prevalence of stalls dedicated to psychic readings, crystals and Native American ornaments. The heavy spiritual/alternative presence in the area was expected, as this lifestyle is often talked about and shown in various pieces of media such as movies etc. This lifestyle is then paired with the carefree nature of the people living in Venice.

The Venice economy seemed to be based around retail, with the beachfront promenade being filled with shops and various stalls. The retail facilities on the beachfront appear to be aimed at tourists due to the nature of the products they were selling being mainly souvenirs



and Venice branded clothing. Furthermore, there were also many restaurants food stalls that could be used by residents but appear to be mainly being used by tourists. Further out into Venice, there were more shops that appear to be aimed more at locals such as small cafes, but these were minimal compared to the shops for tourists. There was a high diversity of shops which reflects the cultural diversity of the area as there were a variety of global cuisines and products

being sold. Additionally, this is a good selling point for tourism as there is something for everyone and the cultural diversity will attract those interested in an alternative area. Tourism is a large part of the economy as most of the people walking around appeared to be tourists rather than locals, and many of the shops being aimed at tourists.

Most of the shops were independent stores, mostly small stalls that were locally run and independent businesses. There was evidence that larger corporations are moving into the area through the presence of a couple of chain stores, such as Starbucks. Speaking to a man who worked in a local business, we found that many of the independent shops were being pushed out due to the increasingly high rents which were up to \$70,000 a month which are unaffordable for many small businesses. Furthermore, the small stalls that we saw on the boardwalk may be as a result of the high rents for properties due to the small square footage of these stalls. Many of the shops were also related to drugs as cannabis is legal in California which may be a big draw for certain groups and the number of these stores suggests that they are popular.

From this, we can infer that the economy is focused around retail and tourism in general but there are also many other things that the area that contribute to the economy.

The man we spoke to in the shop also mentioned that the residents of Venice beach lived a much more liberal lifestyle as

they were more laidback in terms of their working styles than in other areas of the US, especially the East Coast. They tend to work much less and have a lot of recreation time, which may contribute towards the economy. There is also increasing amounts of wealth in the area, and the industry that we saw would not be making the level of wealth that we



were told exists there, and is evident people have from the types of property, particularly around the canals. This suggests that many of the residents work outside of the area in high earning industries and are attracted to Venice for the lifestyle and atmosphere rather than for economic purposes. They are therefore bringing money into the Venice economy through living and spending in the area, despite earning outside of it.

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