Are Adult Live Performance Venues Helping or Hindering Tourism? Community versus Stakeholders’ Perspectives in a U.S. Historic District

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Are Adult Live Performance Venues Helping or Hindering Tourism? Community versus Stakeholders’ Perspectives in a U.S. Historic District

Introduction

Cities must carefully construct and aggressively promote strong images to attract visitors. New Orleans, Louisiana, has a well-known reputation for vice and mystery that dates back to the late 1800s. Though the laissez-faire culture of the city and community distinguishes New Orleans from many other destinations, it is arguably Bourbon Street with offerings of risqué entertainment and 24-hour access to bars that put the city on the map. Ranked fifth in Conde Nast Traveler 2016 “Best Big Cities in the U.S.” New Orleans consistently appears as a top tourism destination (LaGrave, 2016).

New Orleans is home to the second oldest historic district in the United States, the Vieux Carré Entertainment (VCE) District (Sauder, Wilkinson & Wilson, 1989). The iconic Bourbon Street extends 13 blocks through the heart of this historic French Quarter neighborhood, providing music venues, restaurants, bars, shops, souvenirs, people watching, and strip clubs. Zoned for adult use, the Vieux Carré Entertainment District contains 14 Adult Live Performance Venues. The New Orleans Annual Visitors Survey placed Bourbon Street as the fourth overall most popular activity while visiting New Orleans (University of New Orleans, 2016). As the New Orleans City Council and Planning Commission work to uncover the cause of increased crime, drug dealing and prostitution plaguing the popular VCE District, it becomes apparent that the city is desperate to enhance the reputation of one of its most vital assets. The purpose of this study is to explore how Adult Live Performance Venues (ALPVs) on Bourbon Street affect the overall attractiveness and perceived safety of a popular tourism destination. Analyzing and understanding residents’ and stakeholder’s attitudes toward tourism development is especially important for the future of a destination.

New Orleans is both a tourist destination and a city with a complex and rich cultural identity. From servicemen escaping the daunting reality of World War II, to modern day tourists, lured by the common attitude of a place to “let go,” Bourbon Street remains an integral part of what makes the city so captivating. While the essence of this world-renowned entertainment district has not changed since the street became popular in the 1920s, a recent proposal to change zoning ordinances has left the future of Bourbon Street uncertain.

“Operation Trick or Treat,” an investigation the Louisiana Office of Alcohol and Tobacco Control conducted, discovered nine French Quarter strip clubs and bars were involved in illegal activities, such as prostitution and drug dealing (Bullington, 2015). Shortly after these findings were made public, city officials started to discuss current legislation and suggest possible changes (see below).
**Current Legislation**

Adult Live Performance Venues, the city’s official designation for strip clubs, are permitted in the VCE District, meaning they did not need to request permission to open (Head and Williams, 2016). There was no limit to the number of strip clubs that could operate.

**Proposed Changes to Legislation**

1. Enforce the current regulations without creating additional land use regulations.
2. Make Adult Live Performance Venues a conditional use and add use standards.
3. Reduce the number of venues through imposition of a cap.
4. Enforce the current regulations without creating additional land use regulations.

Source: (New Orleans City Planning Commission, 2016)

**Literature**

This research explores the perceptions of stakeholders and potential travelers to New Orleans regarding the neighborhood, image, and activities that take place within a Historic District. An Adult Live Performance Venue, defined in the New Orleans Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance of 2015, is “an establishment that features dancers, go-go dancers, exotic dancers, or similar entertainers or live entertainment, where persons regularly appear in a state of nudity, or where live performances are characterized by the exposure of specified anatomical areas or by specified sexual activities as defined below. Such establishments specifically exclude minors, or minors are specifically prohibited by statute or ordinance, regardless of whether or not any such business is licensed to sell alcoholic beverages.”

Vesey and Dimanche (2003) explore the effect of nostalgia and tourism, focusing on the idea that tourists are seeking a commercialized version of the host destinations past, rather than an accurate portrayal of daily life of the destination. They describe Bourbon Street as a representation of Storyville. Tourists are drawn to New Orleans, in particular Bourbon Street, because of the perception of vice and openness to sexuality. They seek an authentic representation of New Orleans’ past, which they feel they are experiencing as they walk from bar to strip club, open container in hand. Adding to the feeling of authenticity are the buildings in the French Quarter that remain stuck in time, reminiscent of the French and Spanish colonial periods (Sauder, Wilkinson & Wilson 1989). Though the tourist may feel a strong sense of history and culture, it is important to note that they are experiencing only one aspect of New Orleans’ past. In fact, Bourbon Street was originally predominantly residential in the 1800s. It wasn’t until Storyville closed, around the 1920s, that Bourbon Street started to gain popularity as an entertainment district (Campanella, 2014). A thoroughfare now devoted to tourism, Bourbon Street has morphed into a space that attracts visitors.

**Stakeholders**

Understanding who the stakeholders are in tourism planning is critical in order to understand the impact changes in policies have on a destination. Timur and Getz (2009) note
that while tourism can be beneficial for a local economy, it can also have negative impacts if not properly developed. Potential deterioration of culture and quality of life for residents are risks of tourism development associated with poor planning. For a city to be successful in adopting a sustainable tourism development approach, all members of the host community should be considered. This includes government entities, private organizations, residents, and businesses.

Focusing specifically on policy changes in the VCE District, stakeholders’ differing values, goals and concerns should be addressed in order to promote sustainable tourism (Timur and Getz, 2009). People most affected by potential zoning changes in the VCE District are ALPV owners and employees, surrounding businesses not associated with adult use, residents in the area, local government and private organizations.

**Residents Perception of Tourism Development**

Analyzing residents’ attitudes toward tourism development in the area is especially important for the future of the destination. Considerable research has been conducted providing insight on residents’ perceptions of tourism development and the potential link between their acceptance or rejection of such development based on how knowledgeable the individual is on the subject matter. Harill (2004) suggests that residents can turn hostile toward tourists without a certain degree of planning. Many planners focus on understanding public perception as a way to avoid controversy and gain momentum for tourism initiatives (Harrill, 2004). Research determines that the best way to gain support from residents is to educate them on the benefits associated with tourism development (Morais, Pfister and Wang, n.d.). Harill (2004) notes a significant distinction between positive and negative views of tourism development is marked by distance from the tourist attraction. A study conducted in the historic district of Charleston, South Carolina, found that residents who lived closer to the tourism-designated area had a more negative attitude about tourism development than those residing farther away. The study also claims residents who live closer to a tourism zone receive more negative impacts than those farther away and thus develop animosity toward tourism.

The social exchange theory, as it relates to tourism, suggests that residents will perceive tourism in a positive manner if its benefits or personal gains outweigh the costs (Jakpar, Johari, Ling, and Myint, 2011). If residents are not benefiting from tourism development, or do not believe they are receiving a positive exchange, tourism is associated with having negative impacts. Ling, Jakpar and others (2011) state that for these reasons, it is essential to evaluate residents’ perception toward tourism development in order to thrive as a tourism destination.

**Methodology**

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods to determine the community’s overall perception of regulating ALPVs in the VCE District. The qualitative data collection includes a thematic analysis of stakeholders, summarizing a total of 223 written comments submitted to the City Planning Commission. The quantitative data collection include a Survey Instrument designed to evaluate visitor’s perception of the Historic District. The data
will provide empirical research that the City of New Orleans could use to evaluate how to move forward with the proposed legislative changes.

- Thematic Content Analysis (analyzed stakeholder’s 223 written comments submitted to the City Planning Commission website in response to Adult Live Performance Venue Study and grouped according to 6 main themes).

- Survey of Visitors (82 completed Online Questionnaires; 25 questions)

Results

Results of both qualitative and quantitative data provide evidence of varying attitudes toward Adult Live Performance Venues as a local tourist attraction. Qualitative data focusing specifically on stakeholders’ perceptions show overwhelming support for enforcing zoning restrictions. This research takes a deeper look into responses by breaking the data into six broad themes and sorting respondents into a groups of eight key stakeholders (See Table 1: Summary of Qualitative Results).

ALPV dancers are the only group represented that is completely in opposition to any zoning restrictions. Dancers do not feel ALPVs cause secondary effects (i.e. crime) and believe the clubs are the main driving force bringing tourists to visit Bourbon Street. Business owners have varying attitudes for nearly every theme addressed. There are split perceptions among business owners on whether ALPVs increase business in the area or cause secondary effects. Residents, religious affiliates, educators, women’s shelters and the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau unanimously agree that amending zoning regulations is necessary.
Table 1: Qualitative Overview (Stakeholder Thematic Analysis)

| Theme | Resident | Business Owner | Religious Affiliate | Educator | Shelter | CB
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<td>Selfishness</td>
<td>Residents strongly agree that there needs to be a limit on the amount of AUVs that would need to be in the city to prevent crime and other negative impacts.</td>
<td>The majority of business owners feel that the negative effects of AUVs can be managed with proper regulation.</td>
<td>Respondents unanimously agree that the negative effects of AUVs can be managed with proper regulation.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs need to be regulated to prevent negative impacts.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs need to be regulated to prevent negative impacts.</td>
<td>CB's stance is that AUVs need to be decreased as well to prevent negative impacts.</td>
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<td>Community</td>
<td>Residents strongly agree that AUVs are contributing to the decline of the neighborhood.</td>
<td>Residents strongly agree that AUVs are contributing to the decline of the neighborhood.</td>
<td>Respondents unanimously agree that AUVs are contributing to the decline of the neighborhood.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs are contributing to the decline of the neighborhood.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs are contributing to the decline of the neighborhood.</td>
<td>CB's stance is that AUVs need to be decreased as well to prevent negative impacts.</td>
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<td>Regulation</td>
<td>The majority of respondents agree that there needs to be a limit on the amount of AUVs that would need to be in the city.</td>
<td>Business owners strongly believe that AUVs need to be regulated to prevent negative impacts.</td>
<td>Respondents unanimously agree that AUVs need to be regulated to prevent negative impacts.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs need to be regulated to prevent negative impacts.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs need to be regulated to prevent negative impacts.</td>
<td>CB's stance is that AUVs need to be decreased as well to prevent negative impacts.</td>
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<td>Economic</td>
<td>The majority of business owners believe that the income generated by AUVs is a positive benefit.</td>
<td>Residents believe that the income generated by AUVs is a negative benefit.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly disagree that AUVs contribute to the economic growth of the city.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs contribute to the economic growth of the city.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs contribute to the economic growth of the city.</td>
<td>CB's stance is that AUVs need to be decreased as well to prevent negative impacts.</td>
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<td>Safety</td>
<td>The majority of business owners believe that AUVs can be made safe with proper regulation.</td>
<td>Residents strongly disagree that AUVs can be made safe.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs need to be regulated to ensure safety.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly disagree that AUVs need to be regulated to ensure safety.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs need to be regulated to ensure safety.</td>
<td>CB's stance is that AUVs need to be decreased as well to prevent negative impacts.</td>
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<td>Tourism</td>
<td>Residents strongly disagree that AUVs should be made more popular.</td>
<td>Business owners strongly believe that AUVs can contribute positively to tourism.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs can contribute positively to tourism.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs can contribute positively to tourism.</td>
<td>Respondents strongly agree that AUVs can contribute positively to tourism.</td>
<td>CB's stance is that AUVs need to be decreased as well to prevent negative impacts.</td>
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**Quantitative**

To explore visitor’s attitudes toward the proposed policy issue, a Survey Instrument was created to determine perceptions of the Adult Entertainment District and opinions about tourism development in New Orleans’ Historic District. The survey was administered online resulting in 86 completed questionnaires. How many times (if any) the visitor had visited the city was also captured. Partial results are provided in this paper. Table 2 shows an estimated 81.4% of tourists “agree” or “somewhat agree” that New Orleans is best known for Bourbon Street. Gender seems to have an influence with men associating Bourbon Street with New Orleans at a higher rate than women. Respondents over the age of 65 are the only group that are divided in response to New Orleans being best known for Bourbon Street.

Table 3 indicates that 100% of respondents reporting “never visited New Orleans” would “strongly agree” to visit Bourbon Street. An estimated 60% of respondents that have visited New Orleans before “agreed” or “somewhat agreed” to visit Bourbon Street again. Although 48% of respondents “agree” or “somewhat agree” New Orleans is known for strip clubs, only 20% claim they would visit a strip club on Bourbon Street. Based on the descriptive statistics, it appears that visitors perceive Bourbon Street as a popular destination in New Orleans where mystery, vice and strip clubs prevail and where activities take place that are unlikely to be demonstrated elsewhere.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Adult Live Performance Venues on Bourbon Street affect the overall attractiveness and perceived safety of New Orleans as a tourism destination. As the New Orleans City Council and Planning Commission work to uncover the cause of increased crime, drug dealing and prostitution plaguing the popular VCE district and provide solutions, it becomes apparent that the city would like to preserve the reputation of one of its most vital assets, Bourbon Street. Zoned for adult-use, the Vieux Carré Entertainment District of today is home to 14 ALPVs. Although it was not officially zoned the VCE until the early 2000s, history tells a tale of vice and desire that dates back to the late 1800s.

Based on the qualitative findings, the majority of tourism stakeholders would like to see the City reduce and regulate the number of strip clubs allowed in the VCE District. The preliminary quantitative findings indicate that although New Orleans is strongly associated with Bourbon street and adult entertainment, these images do not appear to be detracting from a potential visitation or satisfaction. Rather than actively curtailing adult-uses, as many cities around the United States have practiced, New Orleans is still deciding how to proceed with policy and legislation. Future research is needed to determine how to incorporate both community perspectives and stakeholder’s desires for best practices into the Historic District of a tourism destination.
Table 2. Perceptions of New Orleans and Bourbon St.

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Note: The table continues with similar entries.
| Table 3. Visiting Bourbon St. and ALPVs |

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<tr>
<th>Child drinks</th>
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<th>Child spends</th>
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Note: The city square approximation may be incorrect - expected frequency less than 5.
References


