

LOS ANGELES

“Either exist as you are or be as you look”

By Dr Fatih Eren



Seal of City of Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES (LA) is located in Southern California which takes place in the western part of the United States (US). With its 3,792,621 population, it is the second most crowded city in US. However, LA must be considered as a metropolitan area instead of a city. With 18 million inhabitants, the Greater Los Angeles Area, which includes Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside and Ventura counties, is the largest metropolitan area of the world. Being one of the leading centres in terms of business, international trade, entertainment, culture, media, fashion, science, sports, technology and education makes here the third wealthiest region in the world. It should be stated that some illegal activities in this region have a great role in the creation of this wealth. This region is one of the most important production/distribution centre of drug and adult movie industries, in which large sums of money circuit.





For globalisation studies, LA should be considered as an open urban laboratory because here is a place where is affected very much from varied global flows as well as strongly affecting the world in cultural terms. On one hand, the centre of Hollywood takes place in this region. Most of motion pictures, television productions, stage productions, video games and recorded albums, which dominate the world’s entertainment sector more than a hundred year, are produced here. These productions play a key role in the spread of American culture to the world. On the other hand, LA is one of the most complex and diverse regions in terms of ethnicity and religion in the world. Having a great Mediterranean climate, the dramatic growth of some sectors such as oil, automobile, rubber, motion pictures and aerospace after World War I and ‘the California Dream’ factor attracted many people from different countries to this region. From an ethnic point of view, 62.1% of all immigrants in this region came from Latin and Central America while 28.9% of them came from Asia. From a religious point of view, the region was subject to a Buddhist migration from Taiwan, Thailand,

Srilanka, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam; to a Christian migration from Philippines, South Korea, Eritrea and Ethiopia; to a Jains and Hindus migration from India and to a Muslim migration from Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Iran, especially after 1965. Many people from every nation and from every religion live together in LA today so this region is called as ‘minority-majority state’.

Interestingly, despite ranking at the top of global city indexes every year, from many point of view LA does not display a real global city character because even though it has a power to affect the world culturally, it has no global power to control the world. When examines, it is seen that very few of the headquarters of international companies are accommodated in LA. Here is also not a financial centre. International banks and financial institutions have not settled their headquarters in LA. However, this region is a very important destination for world trade. LA sets down its importance to its twin ports [Long Beach and Los Angeles] and to trade partnerships which are established between LA and several countries



[especially strong Asian countries]. The biggest trading partners of the region are China, Japan and South Korea in turn. The value of two-way trade [import and export] between LA and these countries reached \$190,4 billion, \$53,3 billion and \$24,3 billion respectively in 2010. It should be noted that transportation links in the region are very strong. Despite its advantageous geo-political position and developed infrastructure, this region entertains several natural disaster risks such as earthquakes, drought, wildfires, flood, heatwaves, hurricane, tornadoes, tsunami, volcano and winter storms (Community Emergency Response Team Los Angeles, 2012).

THE IMPACT OF GLOBAL CONCERN FOR LOS ANGELES: ANALYSIS

SOME DEVELOPMENTS which may lead us to make optimistic predictions about the future of LA have been seen recently in this region. For example, the number of small and medium size enterprises is very high; these enterprises mainly display activity in entertainment, food, tourism, furniture and apparel sectors and they act with local economic development principle in their operations in general. Again, LA is like an

incubator centre for small companies who want to show activity especially in information technology, biomedicine and multimedia sectors. Next, thanks to migrations, the region developed into a very rich place in terms of human capital. In addition, it is an attraction centre for individual and alternative sports such as breeds athleticism, surfing, roller blading, skate boarding, bicycling and swimming. Finally, people give very much importance on craftsmanship and hands-on works in LA. All these developments may be considered as elements which will make LA again a self-serving region with an authentic character in the future. However, it is possible to find some other developments which may lead us to make pessimistic comments on the future of LA.

For many decades, US governors tried to dress LA in a certain global identity in a very systematic way. LA has been marketed to the world as a very special place with a perfect weather where very rich and famous people live in. As a result of this systematic attempt, in time, an unreal, constructed common memory regarding LA was settled in the minds of the world society. Movies, pictures, policies, novels and ads on California

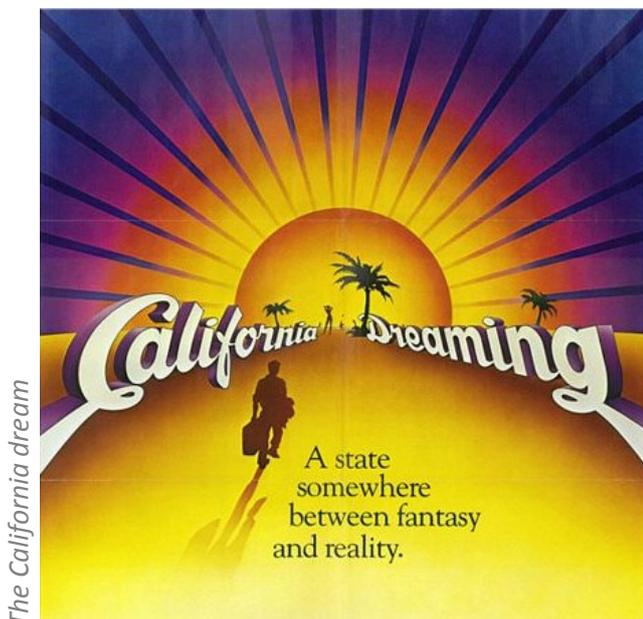
Local food production in Los Angeles



made LA an utopian city which symbolizes a lifestyle of sunshine, large family houses with garden and swimming pool and the Hollywood dream factory. This strong and wonderful image which is called as 'the California dream' attracted too many people to this region in the last 80 years. People came to LA to turn this dream into reality finding a place for themselves in this wonderful place. It is clear that LA benefited very much from this artificial image up to now but we are now in a time in which everybody notices that this image is not completely true for LA. Let's open this issue a little bit.

L.A. Confidential –a Hollywood movie- tells us a story about the 1950s of Los Angeles. One of stars in the movie describes LA as a paradise because of four reasons. These are 'affordable housing', 'cheap land', 'too many job opportunities' and 'happy American family'...

"Come to Los Angeles! The sun shines bright, the beaches are wide and inviting, and the orange groves stretch as far as the eye can see. There are jobs aplenty, and land is cheap. Every working man can have his own house, and inside every house, a happy, all-American family. You can have all this, and who knows... you could even be discovered, become a movie star... or at least see one. Life is good in Los Angeles... it's paradise on Earth."



We don't know very well whether or not these four features which are attributed to LA were valid in the 1950s in the city but this is clear that it is not possible to draw the same picture for LA in the year 2012. Today, it is very hard for an Angelenos to own a house in the region. L.A. ranks at the bottom of the list in which the top 20 largest metropolitan areas in US are compared according to the affordability of housing criteria by the National Association of Home Builders in November 2011. In parallel to the increase of land prices in years, the price of an average house passed \$300,000 in 2012 where it was only \$100,000 in 1987 (National Association of Realtors, 2012). Job opportunities decreased significantly.

Unemployment rate in the region is above 12% in 2012 [the highest figure in 70 years] and despite strong governmental efforts, this rate was not moved down in the last 5 years. Since LA attracted only well-qualified people [professionals and managers] from other counties and countries in the last 10 years, job opportunities for unskilled labour decreased significantly. It is also not easy to say that Los Angeles families are very happy. According to U.S. Census Bureau, 807,000 families are living under poverty threshold in this area. Worse still, nuclear family which is the basic unit of a healthy society is about to disappear. Parents have to work long hours to meet their living expenses so they can't find time to show enough concern for their children. Youngsters become member of gangs, which deal with illegal activities such as adult movie, drug and gun trades to earn easy money and to satisfy their sense of belonging. For example, the 18th street gang, which is one of the most popular LA gangs, has 50,000 young members.

Today, Angelenos face up to the biting realities of LA and discuss urban problems which emerge as a consequence of this fake image, which is clearly expressed in LA Confidential movie. LA can not be managed and marketed with old urban rhetoric and policies from now on. A change is required in the vision, management and planning of LA. The utopic LA vision/image must be destroyed and a real true future vision must be created for LA. However, both the governors and inhabitants of the region are unable to forecast how this change





L.A. gangs



L.A. as a city of diversity



may happen. Therefore, the need for change and the greatness of urban problems [suburban sprawl, high cost of urban life, high crime rates, gangs and disintegration of nuclear family] create a fear for the future among Angelenos. 18 million inhabitants wonder whether or not they will find a place again for themselves in LA which will be governed with a different mentality and vision in the future.

Every government which wants to create a healthy society works decisively for the limitation of spread of drug trade and pornographic broadcasts in the legal boundaries of its country. Due to this global trend, in the next decades, it can be forecasted that limitations will increase against drug and adult movie industries in California. These limitations mean that the urban economy of LA which take nourishment seriously from these two dangerous industries will be shrunk. Dependant on a shrinking urban economy, people may migrate from LA to other growing wealthy regions. Even in today's economic conditions, the region is losing population. About 500,000 people abandoned LA permanently and were accommodated in a different region between 2004 and 2008. As mentioned, the region has also a very high natural disaster risk so it is predicted that the region may experience a large amount population loss in a way in the future.

LA is named 'city of diversity' so changes in its demographic structure are crucial. Due to migrations, the number of whites decreased and the number of Hispanics and blacks increased gradually in the region. When minorities who are generally hungry, jobless and poor take population majority power in their hands, they

may struggle for influence the governance of the region because these crowded communities will want to remove injustice income distribution and want to take more share from the wealth of LA. This initiative may develop LA into an unliveable or uncomfortable place for whites whose population is low but whose economic conditions are good in general. In addition, different social communities who have a demographical advantage may struggle for power in the management of LA in the future. The main reason for the failure of establishment of a regional governance in this region is the demand of social communities for the continuation of their local autonomy and local power in their areas. All social groups fight only for their own ends and they do not support social and governmental integration initiatives in the Greater Los Angeles Area. Contentious and fragmented attitudes of social communities portend that a struggle for power may begin among some minority groups in the near future. On one hand, if some minorities increase their power in the governance of LA, the region may develop into a very different place with a very different identity. On the other hand, if current governors continue to keep their power on LA, a riot then may break out in the region.

In conclusion, Although LA is a region which has got great food, scenery, history, art and people, it is now tired. As a leading global city, it is now struggling with many urban problems which have not been seen yet in most of cities in the world. I believe that Los Angeles will show to the world the way of how plurality, difference and variety can be turned into advantage in an urban society.

NOTE:

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The Greater Los Angeles Area