Methodology Example – Case Studies

This thesis will take a qualitative approach by analyzing case studies in order prove the argument that minority communities are politically and financially vulnerable when it comes to the placement of waste sites. The ultimate goal will be to demonstrate a positive relationship between the placements of waste management facilities and urban, minority communities by comparing two cases: 1) Brentwood, which is a neighborhood in Los Angeles, California and 2) South Gate, which is a city in Los Angeles County, California. As previously mentioned, Los Angeles is the best region to select potential cases because many waste sites are located in urban and densely populated communities (Mennis and Jordan, 2005). Furthermore, both units of analysis are commonly understood to be either an affluent community (Brentwood) or a minority community (South Gate). To gain a general sense of where these two communities are located within Los Angeles, South Gate is located approximately seven miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles and is neighbored by Watts, Lynwood, Cudahy, and Huntington Park; and Brentwood is a neighborhood in Los Angeles city on the Westside section of the county. The process in choosing which cities or neighborhoods would be viable candidates for this analysis depends, firstly, on the location of waste sites, and secondly, census data.

Environmental Protection Agency Data Collection

Because waste management facilities can range from landfills to disposals, it is important to narrow the search to one example to prevent extraneous variables and errors in analysis; therefore, this thesis will focus on superfund sites. Superfund sites are hazardous waste sites that threaten public health and the environment. Although this

definition is rather vague, facilities with negative environmental impacts are determined and categorized as superfund sites through the discretion of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); therefore, regarding this study, the EPA provides less uncertainty as to which facilities to focus on.

The EPA developed a superfund program to clean up superfund sites and better the environment of those living near them. In order to provide transparency, the website www.epa.gov/superfund has a list of all superfund sites in the United States, "including proposed, final and deleted NPL sites and non-NPL Superfund Alternative Approach (SAA) sites." According to the EPA, the city of South Gate currently has 21 superfund sites, 18 of which have a Non-NPL (Non-National Priorities List) status. The three other superfund sites have been added to the National Priorities List and are considered the most contaminated facilities within South Gate. The three NPL status waste sites are: Cooper Drum Co. (NPL 2001), Southern Avenue Industrial Area (NPL 2012), and Jervis B. Webb Co. (NPL 2012). This thesis will take into account all 21 superfund sites, but will focus and highlight the three NPL status waste sites because they pose the greatest health threats to those living in South Gate. As for Brentwood, there are currently no registered superfund sites in the neighborhood. Lastly, the EPA Superfund website also includes updated information referring to various portions of contamination, investigation, and cleanup. This is important information for this analysis because it reflects whether the cleanup process is handled in a timely manner. When concluding this section of methodology, the framework of analysis developed so far is a community with 21 superfund sites being compared to a community with zero superfund sites. Analyzing 2010 census data will further evolve this framework.

Census Data

Census data gives insight to the socio-economic status of a community. When used in a comparative analysis, census data also highlights disparities between two areas. This thesis will use those disparities and analyze how they contribute to the placement of waste sites in minority communities, specifically South Gate. Specific categories to be compared are: population, race, income, education, and unemployment. The categories listed are typically the criteria needed to determine whether a community is considered an affluent or a minority group. Furthermore, collecting information about both communities' square mileage is needed in order to determine population density. Population density is also used as a determining factor for categorizing a wealthy and minority community.

Up to this point, it is a general assumption that South Gate is a minority community and Brentwood is an affluent community. This thesis provides a community assessment in order to clearly define the communities as such rather than relying on an assumption. For example, with using the categories listed above and 2010 census data for the city of Los Angeles, Brentwood is compared to all other neighborhoods within the city. As will later be demonstrated, Brentwood is defined as affluent. The same comparison will be used for the city of South Gate, except 2010 census data for Los Angeles County will be used. Therefore, when compared to other cities in the county, South Gate is defined as a minority community. Both communities' census data can be found with the website www.factfinder.census.gov. Not only is this website able to localize data by city, town, and zip code, but it provides the most updated information

(2010 census data). Finally, the framework of analysis is now this: South Gate is a minority community with 21 superfund sites that will be compared to its affluent counterpart Brentwood, which has zero superfund sites. This framework of analysis is going to be able to provide a stable foundation for results. Therefore, the disparities found between these two communities can be further analyzed in confidence to prove the overall argument that minority communities with waste sites are politically and financially vulnerable.