Community Wellbeing Metrics

New directions in urban wellbeing research and practice

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The Centre for Urban Wellbeing

The Centre for Urban Wellbeing (CUWb) is committed to exploring and modelling inclusive and transdisciplinary approaches to urban wellbeing research and practice. We are developing co-productive processes to include people from across a wider urban system to shape wellbeing. We develop mutually-beneficial ways of working with policy and community partners to help ensure local solutions can be informed by the best global research and evidence to address wellbeing inequalities in urban environments.

This briefing introduces the idea of community wellbeing, and sets out cases where tools for measuring and evaluating community wellbeing have been used effectively. It highlights some key principles for translating wellbeing research into action to address urban and regional inequalities.

The Centre for Urban Wellbeing has five working principles:

1. To question the concept of wellbeing, helping to develop more sensitive definitions and increase the impact of wellbeing research
2. To consider the conditions needed for innovation at the interface between research and practice
3. To investigate the use of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary methods to develop more rigorous and inclusive evidence to inform systemic and complex policy challenges
4. To seek out, support and sustain meaningful engagement with stakeholders at all levels, evaluating the processes and outcomes of co-productive working
5. To work with humility, encouraging reflection and 'slow' working to overcome the biases that hubris and speed are prone to create

For more information: https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/centre-urban-wellbeing/home-page.aspx

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Contents

What is community wellbeing?

Community wellbeing is about how people's relationships with each other and with the places where they live creates a shared experience of living well. Although related ideas such as social capital, social cohesion and community resilience have been around for some time, understanding the intersection of societal drivers and spaces of community wellbeing is an emerging area. In 2017 the What Works Centre for Wellbeing ran a six month stakeholder engagement programme in the UK to find a meaningful and shared definition of community wellbeing [1] and undertook a scoping review of 47 community wellbeing measurement frameworks[2].

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After consulting policy makers, community representatives and other stakeholders they defined community wellbeing as primarily "about **strong networks of relationships and support** between people in a community, both in close relationships and friendships, and between neighbours and acquaintances" [3]. Community wellbeing has also been defined more widely as: "the result of **multiple factors interacting to create a community's overall quality of life**" [4]. Given researchers and policy makers are still struggling to pin down a definition of community wellbeing, it is no surprise that defining and creating indicators and measures is also hard. A significant challenge is to find measures that are about the wellbeing of specific communities rather than general measures of subjective, individual wellness.

> Measures need to capture the wellbeing *of* a community rather than an individual *in* a community (Atkinson 2020)

The majority of existing wellbeing scales focus on individual, subjective wellbeing, assuming the individual to be largely independent, autonomous and intentional. Major shortcomings have been identified in subjective wellbeing scales, since they often fail to acknowledge humans as embedded in multiple geographical, social and interest based communities. Measures need to capture the wellbeing *of* a community rather than an individual *in* a community[5].

Governments, NGO's and academics are increasingly working to find ways to define wellbeing as more of a social, contextual and relational phenomena, acknowledging that people's sense of being well

changes over time, is influenced by their setting, their social and professional relationships and determined by social and spatial inequalities. The current UK Government focus on 'Levelling Up' announced in the March 2021 Spending Review committed £4.8 billion to support priority local areas to invest in high streets, town centres, transport and cultural/heritage assets. But recent research from the Institute of Community Studies asks what has been learnt from several decades of place-based, local and regional regeneration programmes? Why have we seen almost no reduction in spatial inequalities for the most deprived local areas over the past 20 years? Why have communities not been involved in the regeneration decisions, investments and governance structures which most affect them?

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In this briefing we set out some community approaches to measuring economic success, which could reconnect community and place-based policy, by redefining wellbeing as a property of place and putting community wellbeing at the heart of the levelling-up agenda.

What do we know about measuring community wellbeing?

Community wellbeing has traditionally been measured indirectly via economic indicators such as GDP. This is changing and community wellbeing is now regarded as an outcome dependant on multiple factors, which includes the economic but also **takes into account factors such as social integration, the quality of the environment, social relationships and culture.** These dimensions are often referred to as quality of life indicators, and are aimed at identifying the objective conditions necessary to support a good standard of living. There are a very large number of quality of life or social indicator frameworks, each drawing on a particular package of existing indicators. Some 82 frameworks have previously been categorised according to whether they offer an index (weighted or aggregated sum of different indicators), a collection of indicators (disaggregated, goal-oriented), money-denominated accounts (as close alternatives to GDP) and subjective measures, which are growing in number [6].

New measures of community wellbeing are recognising that a meaningful account of wellbeing goes beyond ideas of living standards and life satisfaction. They are also concerned with advancing data and analysis of the more subjective and more collective elements of wellbeing. To add another layer of complexity, we also know that no two communities are the same, so to define and measure wellbeing there is a need to engage with the specific target community, whether it be at a local, regional or national level.

> To define and measure wellbeing there is a need to engage with the specific target community

There are many hundreds of community wellbeing indicators sourced from government, NGOs and peer-reviewed academic publications. These indicators can be packaged into frameworks to assess wellbeing in particular areas and can include for example, housing conditions, mortality rates and unemployment. They can be combined with subjective measures such as individual experiences of living in an area or perceptions of safety. For instance, the National Lottery Community Fund recently commissioned research to identify key outcomes which indicate that communities are thriving. This included individual wellbeing and resilience, strengths of social relationships and connections and people led outcomes such as opportunities to be involved in decision-making and civic engagement. The Wellbeing Measures Bank which includes 30 measures was developed out of this work to assist community organisations, charities and social enterprises to select indicators appropriate to their programme evaluations.

> Community Wellbeing measures can be useful in comparing places and prioritising social investments, yet the sheer number of indicators can also feel overwhelming.

Whilst a framework of measures tailored to a context is a significant improvement on using GDP as a proxy for societal wellbeing, **community indicator frameworks can still feel like a top down approach** with experts deciding on the relevant indicators. Community Wellbeing measures can be useful in comparing places and prioritising social investments, yet the sheer number of indicators can also feel overwhelming. In the future development of community wellbeing measures, we recommend that more attention is paid to the unit of analysis in order to provide insight on the stark socio-spatial inequalities which exist within local neighbourhoods. A more bottom-up and collective approach would seek to engage with a community to find out how they understand and maintain wellbeing at a community level. **New research on neighbourhood wellbeing aims to capture shared experiences of community**, including evidence of how a resident might perceive their neighbours' satisfaction with the community (as opposed to only their own)[7].

However there remain gaps in evidence and understanding of **how places and spaces shape community wellbeing, how social, economic, cultural, environmental and political/civic processes intersect, how they operate across spatial scales, and how structural inequalities become embedded and layered in places over time**. This means that the measurement and evaluation of community wellbeing needs to take into account multiple factors which operate both beyond the immediate locality, and which precede the current moment.

What makes community wellbeing measures effective?

Community wellbeing measurements work best when they are supported by a theoretical framework which make sense of the indicators which have been included. The Centre for Thriving Places' 'Happy City Index' (2016; now the 'Thriving Places Index')[8], for example, is a framework with three headline elements of sustainability, local conditions and equality.

These reflect that in order for people to be well and thrive, the right local conditions need to exist within environmental limits and in a socially just way. The inclusion of wellbeing, health and economic inequalities as indicators is distinctive in the Thriving Places index, and reflects calls to acknowledge the negative impacts of social and spatial variations in wellbeing [9].

Measurement frameworks are also more effective when the metrics and indicators are practical, easily accessible and relevant to the area. National and international frameworks, such as the World Happiness Report [10] tend to work with national indicators which are less accessible and useful when working locally. In contrast, the 'Measuring Humanity' initiative outlined below attempts to overcome this by working closely with a community in a local area with community groups to first co-design a relevant definition of wellbeing as a basis for identifying meaningful and relevant indicators. Working in this way overcomes the 'expert' bias, where citizens, public officials, and experts in the same community may see the relative importance of indicators quite differently. In one study, the community and public officials prioritised physical health when experts placed it further down the list and put employment at the top [11]. Such examples make a case for all stakeholders to be involved in defining and applying measurements, particularly citizens who are often ignored due to the resources needed to collaborate well.

Frameworks have also been shown to work best when they are applied, designed to connect evidence directly to improvements in public policy and if they are linked with specific goals [12]. One project described below, Community Indicators Victoria found measurement was more likely to lead to improved policy when it was both participatory and directly linked to local policies.

Community wellbeing measurements work best when they are:

- supported by a theoretical framework
- practical, easily accessible and relevant to the area
- applied, designed to connect evidence directly to improvements in public policy
- linked to specific goals

Research also points to the potential for including internal dimensions of wellbeing and relational capacities as mediators of external dimensions or local conditions [13]. Capacities such as self awareness and reciprocity facilitate good relationships and work alongside elements such as decent housing, landscapes and safe spaces to support wellbeing.

How we might go about collating, measuring, analysing and shaping these elements through existing survey data, observation, behaviours and creative engagement, is described in some of the projects, frameworks and tools outlined below.

Eight tools for measuring and shaping community wellbeing

Co-produced wellbeing indicators

1. Measuring Humanity, Scotland, UK
https://measuringhumanity.org/

Collaborative and creative methods to define community wellbeing

The Measuring Humanity project, based in Edinburgh University School of Health, and working with public health initiatives in Scotland, offers an interesting example of research working closely with a community to coproduce definitions of community wellbeing. The project set out to find new ways of collecting data which could represent the voice of diverse communities. In Scotland this aligns with efforts to strengthen communities, increase community assets and improve participation in local services through the 2015 Community Empowerment Act [14].

The initiative used collaborative and creative methods to develop an Asset Based Indicator Framework to measure the impacts of creative community engagement on health and inequalities at an individual, community and structural level. Initial research scoped an area of Glasgow with high levels of deprivation, using ethnography in local neighbourhoods and interviewing practitioners working with the community. This revealed the complexity of the problem with high levels of cultural variance and a reluctance to share information related to health and wellbeing [15]. The researchers then identified a community of Roma people to work with. Community singing and music facilitated discussions about community identity. The process also revealed experiences of prejudice and inequality. Once they defined themselves as a group the group planned an initiative using trusted resources to better support them to address addictive behaviours. To overcome differences in the community members and between professionals it was decided that indicators should be flexible, that each time they are applied it is up to the professionals and communities to decide which ones are most meaningful in that context [16].

The process resulted in the 13 indicators including: personal meaning, spirituality, self determination, optimism and physical health. The   Asset Based Indicator Framework training recommends first exploring the context, then engaging with the community to understand them in more detail, then to identify the most useful and relevant indicators to measure progress.

The project is unusual in its bottom up approach and its use of creative media to both engage with communities, reflect on the change process, and share data and learning. This includes sharing the tensions between attempting to apply a structured methodology and capturing lived experiences, as expressed in an innovative hip hop video which formed the basis of a publication in The Lancet [17]. A major drawback of the approach, common to much community engagement work, is a lack of resources for sustained engagement, with limited funding, staggering from one small grant to another and a lack of capacity, time and resource in the community.

2. Bromley by Bow, London, UK
https://www.bbbc.org.uk/insights/research-and-evaluation/research-and-evaluation-outcome-measurement-and-evaluation/

A community-informed outcomes framework

The Bromley By Bow healthy living centre, based in Tower Hamlets, London, brings together a Charitable Community Centre and three local GP practices in a neighbourhood hub that provides both social and clinical support. Using a social prescribing approach, linked directly to clinical service, it provides access to arts and horticulture activities, welfare advice, social enterprise incubation alongside access to primary care and population health.

The project recognised the importance of creating a localised, community-informed outcomes framework which could shape social prescribing service design, delivery and measurement. A two year qualitative study, Unleashing Healthy Communities used methods including historical research charting Bromley By Bow's development and participatory workshops with both Hub staff and the local community. They identified that the service model was attempting to address central tensions between maintaining stability and creating growth, meeting needs and creating opportunities. From that understanding the Hub staff set out three core outcomes: concrete change, confidence and connectedness. Meanwhile the core 'growth' outcomes identified by the community were: 'feeling good in myself', 'connection to others', 'giving and getting back'.

Having understood the tensions in the community and the outcomes identified as desirable by the Hub and the community, the researchers came up with six stretch outcomes. Each outcome has a

development aspect, for example the 'Basic Needs Met' outcome starts with being supported with practical tasks, moves to securing tangible resources and then develops to needs met an further opportunities sought. The other stretch outcomes were: 'connection to others', 'connected to place and community', 'strengthened personal resources', 'build knowledge skills and opportunity' and 'contribute to the community'. Each outcome had its own developmental trajectory establishing stability first ('I have what I need to cope') and moving to growth ('I am trying new things') [18].

These six stretch outcomes have been further operationalised into an outcomes framework with 40 indicators, a logic model and an outcome measurement/user data journey map. Underpinning the evaluation tools are evaluation principles valuing each person, using inclusive methods, paying attention to how they work, making evolution feel natural to day to day work, using knowledge to learn, and being consistent and rigorous.

The Bromley By Bow model and theory of change are underpinned by the voice of the community, and the root causes of health inequalities, unemployment, income deprivation and social isolation. By creating an integrated centre, GPs and community development are seamlessly linked making it easy to prescribe non-clinical interventions. The project is a pioneer of this approach, which appears to be extremely successful, it has been described as "One of the most impressive displays of social entrepreneurship anywhere in Europe" [19].

Hyper-local and neighbourhood measures

3. Power to Change – Empowering Places Programme, UK
https://www.powertochange.org.uk/research/measuring-the-impact-of-community-businesses-at-neighbourhood-level/

Measuring the wellbeing value of community businesses

Power to Change is an independent charitable trust facilitating community development by supporting the growth of community businesses. They aim to improve wellbeing through supporting socially focussed organisations, informed by a hypothesis that improvement in such organisations will influence

in measurable ways on their surrounding neighbourhoods, with a direct positive impact on resident's health and wellbeing [20].

To demonstrate change, their Empowering Places Programme, included the development of a measurement framework, The Neighbourhood Life Survey, to capture wellbeing and related outcomes created by the development of community businesses. The survey replicates at the hyper-local level The Community Life Survey, a government survey which collects information on behaviours and attitudes related to social cohesion, community engagement and social action.

Given communities are complex, and attributing change to the development of a community business is difficult, the framework adopts a two-stage methodology. First, it uses propensity score matching to select individual responses from the national Community Life Survey that combine to create synthetic counterfactual comparison groups for each of the Empowering Places areas. It then uses difference-in-difference modelling to measure change in the target neighbourhoods against their matched comparison groups. This helps to support evidence on causation which is frequently desired in policy decision-making.

In one example the 2017 baseline survey showed 34.7% of respondents had been involved in some sort of civic participation in the previous 12 months in the neighbourhood directly surrounding Bramley Baths, a community-run leisure centre in Leeds. This was significantly lower than the comparison group, implying the neighbourhood was worse than expected. When the area was surveyed again in 2019 positive responses to this question increased by 5.5% in Bramley, whilst at the same time falling in the comparison sample. This analysis supports the hypothesis that local involvement in the operation of Bramley Baths had created an increase in civic participation [21].

The Power to Change approach to measurement and evaluation including not only specific measurements but comparisons across areas has required significant investment of both time and money. According to Richard Harries, then Director of Research and Development, this is a more 'mature' response to impact evaluation and one which needs wider take up. Whilst funders and projects understand the need for project evaluation, many are not prepared to invest money in well formulated research, believing this is wasteful when it can be spent on service delivery. But as Harries pointed out, "it is in fact the only way to make sure scarce funds are not wasted. It is the only way to make sure things do get better" [22].

4. Community Needs Index, Local Trust, UK

https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/left-behind-understanding-communities-on-the-edge/

Mapping neighbourhood assets, engagement and connectivity

Responding to and questioning contemporary public debate about so-called 'left behind' places, Local Trust commissioned the Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) to develop a community needs index as a tool for mapping social and cultural factors beyond those indicating an area's economic deprivation, which play a role in shaping political disaffection, trust and engagement. Local Trust is a national charity which has since 2012 delivered the Big Local programme of community-driven budgeting and decision-making using Big Lottery funding.

The index is made up of 3 domains: civic assets, connectedness and an engaged community [23]. These are defined in terms of accessibility/proximity to key public spaces such as pubs, libraries, education institutions, green spaces, community centres, swimming pools; connectedness through health services access, transport accessibility and travel time to areas of higher job density and digital infrastructure such as broadband speeds; and engagement in terms of active charities in the area, voter turnout, self-report measures of civic participation and strength of local social relationships. Data sources were checked against the established Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) commonly used in social research to avoid duplication of measures. A key finding was a strong correlation between high community needs and the leave vote in the Brexit referendum, which the researchers found to be stronger than the link between deprivation and the leave vote. This suggests that the measure is novel and useful in identifying neighbourhood characteristics which are associated with political disaffection.

The results have been used to identify 225 local places in England which are both the most deprived according to the IMD and have high community needs. The main finding is that these wards with high community needs tend to have worse socio-economic outcomes than deprived areas. They are areas of high and increasing unemployment, low job opportunities, skill and qualification levels, low pay rates and incomes, low car ownership, and require longer journeys to areas of higher employment. Benefit claims rates are higher than the English average including benefits relating to illness and caring. The child poverty rate is significantly higher (double) than the national average, and people are more likely to suffer poor physical or mental health. These 'left behind' areas are primarily concentrated in the North West, North East of England, Yorkshire and the Humber, the Midlands, Thames Gateway and north Kent coast.

Local Trust are currently developing a specific 'urban' community needs index to better capture the specific characteristics and challenges of high density urban areas. This involves removing some

community indicators which may be less relevant in urban areas, re-weighting the index to reflect domains which have a more urban focus, and using data sources which can capture the internal diversity within local areas – more at the neighbourhood level of Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) used in the UK Census.

5. The Co-Op Community Wellbeing Index
https://communitywellbeing.coop.co.uk/community-wellbeing-index-reports/

Defining wellbeing through place-based communities

In 2018 the Co-Op teamed up with the Young Foundation and geospatial analysts Geolytix to develop a neighbourhood index of community wellbeing, mapping 28,000 sub-local authority scale areas across the UK, to support community organisations, researchers, policy makers and funders and to develop more place-based approaches to funding interventions. Their index was specifically developed to address the shortcomings of the individually based wellbeing metrics which had shaped wellbeing public policies to date. This aimed to bring together the relational social and contextual factors which interact with personal factors to shape a 'good life' [24].

With 3 pillars of relationships, people and place at its centre, the 9 domains included in the index are: relationships and trust; equality; voice and participation; health; education and learning, economy, work and employment; culture, leisure and heritage; housing, space and environment; transport, mobility and connectivity. The indicators which are used to evaluate wellbeing across these domains are derived from data including the 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics, OpenStreetMap, data.police.uk, Index of Multiple Deprivation, Geolytix, Land Registry, Co-op, NHS, OfCom, Department for Transport. The sub-local data scale – 'Seamless Locales' – is somewhat unique, and intended to be meaningfully connected to neighbourhood communities (in between the scale of middle and lower layer super output areas – representing on average 973 homes and 8.7 square km). A free and user-friendly web-based interactive scoring tool provides a useful way of comparing the community wellbeing scores of different neighbourhoods at a very fine level of granularity and detail.

The weighting and ranking of the domains was influenced by 15 workshops held in locations across the UK, with a total of 387 participants, albeit the fact that there was no clear consensus on ranking meant that all the domains have been weighted equally. One potential limitation of the spatial methodology is that the Seamless Locales unit of analysis is a proprietary product of Geolytix and thus not easily replicable. Some of the data sources (e.g. Census 2011) are quite old so it is difficult to assess changes

over time, or for community organisations to evaluate the potential or actual wellbeing impact of any wellbeing interventions.

The research team here usefully established a set of valuable principles for the development of community wellbeing measures, which involved considering whether the final domains identified met the following criteria: a balance between breadth and depth, feasibly able to inform local action, understandable, valid and meaningful to people's own understandings of wellbeing, reflecting diverse perspectives, quantitatively measurable, and availability of data available at a neighbourhood scale.

National and regional initiatives

6. Canadian Index of Wellbeing, Canada
https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/

Citizen consultation and the challenges of defining communities

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing was one of the first to create a comprehensive national alternative to national GDP metrics to measure "real life, for real people" . They also were innovative in their approach to developing the framework, using a national participatory approach which initially involved 346 citizens in 40 discussion groups across Canada over a two week period in October 2000, with the process reiterated a number of times in consequent years. Organised by the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), the outcomes of the original "Asking Citizens What Matters for Quality of Life" process was used both to track Canada's progress towards a good quality of life and inform the basis of a prototype set of national indicators [25].

Participants involved in the process were briefed beforehand and the group sessions included building a collective portrait of quality of life in Canada, then identifying and setting priorities for national life indicators, with each individual voting for their top five. A common theme among all the groups was rights, responsibilities and values, with a number of groups identifying civil or human rights as a foundation for a healthy society. Health was a second dominant theme followed by education and environment.

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing is recognised to have several strengths, one of which is it communicates results effectively, giving easy to understand indicators which are comparable to GDP

in showing change. Unlike some other national frameworks they also include environmental indicators. They do not include subjective measures which some see as a disadvantage [26].

The first report based on the indicators was published in 2011, it showed that, despite robust economic growth increases picked up through GDP measurements, improvements In the national wellbeing measures were not comparable. Regular reporting against the indicators has demonstrated that everyone suffers decreased wellbeing in unequal societies. The index is underpinned by the notional Canadian value of "shared destiny" and collective action. Attempts were made to inform the development of the index with a clear values statement. These include fairness, inclusion, economic security, diversity, health, democracy, equity, safety and sustainability.

The Government of Canada now has its own Community Well-Being index, consisting of four components: education, labour force activity, income an housing. These have been chosen because they can be drawn from the national census and National Household Surveys which also attempt to compare different communities [27]. One significant challenge the Government has faced is in negotiating the 'national' Canadian values in light of its settler colonial history and present, and setting out who is included in named communities. This has involved considering how its measurements might be informed by and support marginalised groups such as First Nation and Inuit peoples. Researchers have highlighted how colonial conceptualisations of wellbeing and the factors that support it can shape frameworks and indices in unhelpful ways, particularly for those living in urban areas[28]. Critics also suggest that whilst the Canadian Index of Wellbeing offers an innovative framework at a national scale it has failed to be taken up by national governments to inform policy suggesting it is "an impressive flag, but as yet with no castle to fly on" [29].

7. The Healthy Liveable Communities 'Urban Liveability Checklist', Australia
https://cur.org.au/project/the-healthy-liveable-communities-urban-liveability-checklist/

Shaping the built environment to promote health and wellbeing

Between 2006 and 2017, Community Indicators Victoria (CIV) was developed using a participatory approach involving communities, local and state government and academics. It provided community indicators for all 79 Victorian municipalities through an online web platform and was supported by a community wellbeing framework which included five broad domains: wellbeing; healthy, safe, and inclusive communities; dynamic, resilient local economies; sustainable built and natural environments;

culturally rich and vibrant communities; and democratic and engaged communities. It also had a strong social justice and sustainability focus. Two large scale surveys of 25000 Victorians supported the development of the metrics, they included place-based and relational questions on community connection, perception of safety, citizen engagement and arts participation [30].

An important part of this project was to create indicators that were truly 'community' based, by using a participatory community process which recognised the different interests and challenges of stakeholders, and instigating "shared responsibility for governance" [31]. This was based on the understanding that effective indicators alone do not change policy but need to be developed with an understanding of the fiscal and political barriers that influence policy making. Groups were encouraged to engage with the measures to support both learning and dialogue, helping educate groups and mobilise them into action. This aspirational process proved challenging and critics argued that policy and political institutions 'crowded out' community engagement, suggesting that wellbeing measures as a community development process comes with significant challenges [32].

While the Community Indicators Victoria project ceased in 2017, the Healthy Liveable Cities Group at the Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University in Melbourne have set out to address these challenges, to learn from this project and to maximise the impact of community based indicators. Researchers have outlined key lessons in the evolution of community indicator systems including the "need to translate and disseminate data to practitioners while contextualizing it within a policy framework and local community setting"[33].

Key principles to translate community wellbeing research into action:

- a clear purpose
- a robust theory to underpin indicators
- valid measures which identify causes not symptoms
- citizen engagement
- a pathway to budgets and decision-making
- ownership and participation
- stakeholder involvement
- research independence
- early policy success
- supportive champions

Source: (Davern et al 2016)

The Healthy Liveable Cities Urban Liveability Checklist itself include a number of built environment indicators which shape health outcomes, and is intended as a tool to support urban planning and public

health in developing or re-developing urban areas. As such it has become a more hyper-local framework than its predecessor. Domains include walkability, public transport, education facilities, employment, food, housing and open space [34]. There is an increasing research and practical focus on making community wellbeing indicators more spatially sensitive – through mapping indicators at the micro-level such as access to transport connections or mapping street networks leading to supermarkets, schools or open spaces. These researchers argue for the development of "measurable spatial policy standards" to assess and monitor progress on health and wellbeing [35]. Their focus on 'social infrastructure' defined as "life-long social service needs related to health, education, early childhood, community support, community development, culture, sport and recreation, parks and emergency services" thus attempts to close the gap between social and subjective wellbeing [36].

8. Thriving Places Index, Centre for Thriving Places, UK
https://www.centreforthrivingplaces.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/HC-TP19-short-report.pdf

A tool to support place-based policy and budgeting decisions

The Thriving Places Index was developed by The Centre for Thriving Places in partnership with the New Economics Foundation to measure not only the local conditions that create 'sustainable wellbeing'[37]. Because it uses national data sources the Index can be updated regularly. Indicators are published on a public website, such that anyone can search their local area to get a summary score of the headline indicators[38].

Unlike some of the other frameworks described in case studies here, it does not use participatory processes to inform indices, but has drawn on a wealth of existing available data sources. The rationale for this is to make it both consistent and comprehensive. Data can be accessed and applied in the same way across local authorities in the UK using multiple easily accessible sources. An important feature of the framework is that it can be easily used by regional and local government as an alternative to GDP to inform decisions.

Each of the three headline elements of local conditions, equity and sustainability are then subdivided into 13 domains which are further developed into a set of 60+ indicators. Included in the framework are indicators reflecting equality of opportunity for both present and future generations together with evidence of initiatives designed to mitigate climate change, such as recycling and the use of renewable energy.

There is ongoing work to help expand its application in the UK. To that end the Centre For Thriving Places works directly with local places (local government, funders, voluntary and community sector partnerships and more) to adapt the core framework for use against local plans, priorities and needs. It has also worked with national government to adapt the work for use for the specific needs of rural policy and practice and to develop better methodology for applying the framework at the town level. Their work in towns across the UK, *Building a Wellbeing Economy Roadmap for Towns* explores how such a wellbeing outcomes framework can support the work of leaders, the community as well as local authority officials to consider the barriers to integrating the framework and a broader wellbeing approach into their work developing and measuring initiatives.

The Thriving Places Index was developed by combining academic knowledge with widespread and deep community participation on what matters most for local wellbeing. The focus is on provision of tools to support a wellbeing economy approach. However, because all the data is drawn from existing sources, factors which might be relevant to the wellbeing of a particular area will not necessarily be picked up by the national data. However, Centre for Thriving Places uses the Index as a building block when working with local places and combine these accessible data sets with community consultations to develop a richer picture of local strengths and needs and a more bespoke set of tools to support implementation. This, of course, requires significant resources which are often simply not available.

Summary and further research

This review of community wellbeing definitions, current frameworks and measures suggests that there is a strong field of research, evidence and innovation which is developing new insights to inform policy decisions and budget priorities. These could support and strengthen the more collective, social and place-based dimensions of wellbeing which are increasingly a matter of core concern for policy-makers and governments who recognise the limitations of traditional economic indicators, and who want to address the significant wellbeing inequalities which characterise a spatially and socially uneven experiences of life in towns and cities across the UK and within those urban areas.

There are a range of existing methods which can be readily adopted by local and regional authorities, community organisations, policy makers and researchers to undertake this important work. Some of the frameworks outlined here are focussed on critically questioning the idea of community, for instance co-producing indicators which matter for specific groups in a creative and participatory way. These prioritise local context, meaning, diversity and inclusion as a precursor to measurement. Other indicator frameworks draw on existing national datasets and rework these to provide objective evidence and identify correlations linking specific social, economic and cultural factors to community wellbeing. Some do this at a regional level whilst others can be useful in providing evidence to support calls for hyper-local funding and neighbourhood change.

The cases outlined here also demonstrate that there are an accessible range of tools, training and guidance available to support local analysis of community needs, asset mapping and to inform decisions on what local spaces, relationships and investments can provide the necessary social infrastructure to address inequalities in community wellbeing.

future research could usefully address:

- potential barriers and facilitators to organisational change

- shifts in thinking, political commitment and conflict

- challenges in implementation

The research has outlined how indicators and data driven approaches work best in situations in which there is citizen engagement and a clear route to policy making. While there have been recent efforts to evaluate and guide this route from community wellbeing indicator to policy decisions [39], future research could usefully address the potential barriers and facilitators to organisational change, shifts in thinking, political commitment and conflict, and the challenges of implementation which will determine the potential for successfully adopting community wellbeing measures in local policy making, budgeting and investment decisions. Independent research on the potential spin-off benefits as well as the unintended side-effects of applying community wellbeing indicator frameworks is also key to advancing this field.

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