

Research summary

A feasibility study to measure the impact of community businesses

This research tested a new way of measuring the social impact of community businesses on their local community, through a ‘hyperlocal’ version of the Community Life Survey in six pilot areas with strong community businesses.

The Community Life Survey (CLS) has been carried out annually by Kantar Public since 2012-13 on behalf of the Office for Civil Society. It provides Official Statistics on issues that are key to encouraging social action and empowering communities, including volunteering, giving, community engagement and well-being. In order to explore the feasibility of measuring the success (or otherwise) of place-based community business initiatives, the national CLS was undertaken in six hyperlocal areas around established community businesses.¹ This data was compared with match areas constructed from the national survey data.

Key findings

The approach was successful, producing good comparator data for four of the six areas, and it was possible to identify through the pilot study the ways in which data quality could be improved in future iterations.² This study has produced a useful baseline for a comparative longitudinal approach. The data itself showed a mixed picture, with areas showing both higher and lower results than would be expected. The key findings (key differences between the six areas and their matched comparison samples) are summarised below.

Personal well-being

- Individuals living around b-inspired (Leicester) were more likely to rate their anxiety at the lowest level, while those living in the area surrounding the Ivy House (London) were more likely to report higher levels of anxiety.
- Respondents living around Homebaked (Liverpool) were more likely to report that what they do in life is worthwhile and that they could call on people to socialise.

Levels of volunteering

- Individuals in the surrounding areas of Bramley Baths (Leeds) and Burton Street Foundation (Sheffield) reported lower levels of volunteering compared with the matched comparison sample.

¹ These were: Homebaked (Liverpool), b-inspired (Leicester), Bramley Baths (Leeds), Burton Street Foundation (Sheffield), Youth Enquiry Service (Brixham) and the Ivy House pub (London).

² The quality of the match for the London and Liverpool community businesses was described by the researchers as ‘fairly poor’.

Community cohesion

- Those living in the area around the Ivy House (London) had a more favourable perception of community cohesion. Conversely those in the area surrounding Bramley Baths (Leeds) had a less favourable perception of community cohesion.
- Individuals living around the Ivy House (London) were more likely to agree that people in the area pulled together. Conversely those living in the area around Bramley Baths (Leeds) and the Burton Street Foundation (Sheffield) were more likely to disagree.
- Respondents living around Youth Enquiry Service (Brixham) were more likely to have a friendship group of all the same ethnicity. This differed for those living in the areas around b-inspired (Leicester), Bramley Baths (Leeds) and the Ivy House (London) who were less likely to have a friendship group of all the same ethnicity. Similarly, those living in the area near to Bramley Baths (Leeds) and the Ivy house (London) were less likely to have a friendship group of all the same faith group.
- The strength of community networks was weaker in the areas around the Ivy House (London), Bramley Baths (Leeds) and Burton Street Foundation (Sheffield). Lower levels of trust in people was observed around Homebaked (Liverpool), b-inspired (Leicester), Bramley Baths (Leeds) and Burton Street Foundation (Sheffield). Contrastingly, people living in the area surrounding the Ivy House (London) reported higher levels of generalised trust.

Satisfaction with the local area

- Those in the area surrounding the Ivy House (London) reported favourably across all measures.
- At least half the community business areas reported higher levels of satisfaction with local services and amenities compared with the matched comparison sample (Bramley Baths – Leeds; Burton Street Foundation – Sheffield; and the Ivy House – London) and that the area had got better in the past two years (Homebaked – Liverpool; the Ivy House – London; and the Youth Enquiry Service – Brixham). Contrastingly, those living around Homebaked (Liverpool) and Burton Street Foundation (Sheffield) were less likely to report higher levels of satisfaction with the local area as a place to live and with local services and amenities.

Social action and community empowerment

- Low levels of involvement in local activity were reported across three of the areas (Leicester – b inspired; Leeds – Bramley Baths; and Burton Street Foundation – Sheffield). Awareness of involvement in local activities was higher in the area surrounding the Ivy House (London).
- Low levels of involvement in civic participation and civic consultation was reported in the area around b-inspired (Leicester) and Bramley Baths (Leeds). Contrastingly, those living in the area around the Ivy House (London) reported higher levels of civic participation.
- The area surrounding Homebaked (Liverpool) was the only business area to have higher levels of civic activism. Individuals in the area surrounding the Ivy House (London) generally felt that they were able to influence local decision-making.

About the research

The report was researched and written by Kantar Public. The findings in this report are based on data from the 2017 national Community Life Survey, alongside survey data generated by Kantar Public.

The full report can be found at www.thepowertochange.org.uk/research/research-publications/