

Understanding the needs of a community



To effect meaningful change in a neighbourhood takes more than an idea and good intentions. It is vital to establish a clear picture of the needs of the community in question, then to collect data and information about how an area is improving once projects have been introduced. With a benchmark in place, a project can understand its level of success and communicate this to all stakeholders. Crucially, this data and measurement needs to be generated by and for local citizens..

To this end, the Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) has created the Prosperity Index, a tool that measures what matters to the prosperity of local communities in London. The 15 headline metrics that the IGP has included in the tool to assess a neighbourhood's prosperity have been created through extensive research with people embedded in local areas. The pioneering approach was piloted in East London and can now be applied to communities around the UK.

Interview

**Saffron Woodcraft — Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP)
Prosperity Index Research Lead**

Can you start by introducing your work with the IGP?

SW: I run the Prosperity Index, IGP's citizen-led research in East London and we are also starting a project in Camden. The main focus of our work over the last four to five years has been to develop citizen-led prosperity metrics. The project initially began in 2015 in partnership with the London Legacy Development Corporation with the aim of working with the local communities in and around the Olympic Park to explore what prosperity means to them. Initial locations that the work focussed on were Stratford, Hackney Wick and the East Village.

The idea is to bring different voices into the ▶

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conceptualisation and measurement of prosperity. Economic measures dominate conversations about prosperity but when you talk to communities they talk about it in very different terms. So it is about trying to bring quantifiable, subjective measures into policy making.

How does the process work?

SW: It primarily involves working with citizen scientists. We recruited and trained a number of people who lived in the neighbourhood where we wanted to work. We worked with two groups, one group of 10 in 2015 and another group of 10 in 2017. Citizen scientists are included in the research team so that they can bring their knowledge of the local areas and networks into the research design process. They help us design the research, collect the data, interpret the findings and then to share the findings locally.

From a findings point of view, the main objective of the work was to develop an in-depth qualitative understanding of what prosperity means to people living in different areas of East London. The primary output from that piece of work is what we call a Prosperity Model for East London which identifies a range of factors, conditions and experiences that people in those neighbourhoods said were important to their

prosperity, what supported it and what inhibited it.

What are some of those factors?

SW: There were three closely linked things that people said needed to be addressed together: secure and affordable housing, secure and good quality work and inclusion. Inclusion means inclusion in their neighbourhood but also inclusion in the process of change in the local area.

How do you find and engage the citizen scientists?

SW: We advertise for them through community groups, networks and local authorities. They don't need any particular qualifications, just an interest in their neighbourhood. We put them through a research training programme and a research ethics programme. They work alongside the team at the IGP on a three-month paid contract.

What are the next steps for the Prosperity Model?

SW: The qualitative model was turned into a set of quantitative metrics. We ran a survey in 2017 to test the model and the metrics and to index them. We now have a very local level index which reports on how well people in a particular place are doing in relation to the idea of prosperity.



We are now launching a ten-year study which will use the same model but in an expanded number of areas to measure changes in prosperity over time.

Who do you work with to deliver this project?

SW: We work with a multi-stakeholder collaborative partnership called the London Prosperity Board which comprises the LLDC, the East London boroughs, the GLA and various community groups and businesses, all of which have a vested interest in enhancing prosperity in East London. We've worked very closely with these different groups to develop the set of metrics and then to support them in the use of those metrics.

Where else are you developing Prosperity Models?

SW: IGP as an institution works with citizen scientists everywhere that we do research. The current locations of our projects include Beirut, Tanzania and Kenya. In each location we produce very locally specific articulations of prosperity.

How do you re-in bed the Prosperity Model back into the community?

SW: That is the longer-term objective. So far we

have tested a method and turned that into a way of measuring local priorities. The London Prosperity Board will support organisations to use it internally for their own planning but will also share it with their communities.

In areas undergoing regeneration such as Stratford, how important is it that a community model such as the one you have developed is introduced?

SW: It's crucially important. The fundamental challenge is how to make regeneration projects inclusive. They are often set-out with the best intentions but they do not achieve what local people understand inclusivity or prosperity to be. You need to have lots of different organisations aligned and moving in the same direction and a shared idea of prosperity so that it can then be embedded in lots of different policy programmes and practices.

Understanding prosperity in a local community has to be grounded in the lived experiences of what is happening in the neighbourhood. This requires you to be willing to listen to people and take on board the insight that you gather. ●

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