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# **RETHINKING PROSPERITY: PERSPECTIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN EAST LONDON**

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The IGP's vision is to help build a prosperous, sustainable, global future, underpinned by the principles of fairness and justice, and allied to a realistic, long-term vision of humanity's place in the world. The IGP undertakes pioneering research that seeks to dramatically improve the quality of life for this and future generations. Its strength lies in the way it allies intellectual creativity to effective collaboration and policy development. Of particular importance to the IGP's approach is the way in which it integrates non-academic expertise into its knowledge generation by engaging with decision-makers, business, civil society, and local communities.

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Hackney Quest is an independent charity which has been supporting young people and families in Hackney since 1988, through positive youth engagement activities, family support, education support, mentoring, recreational trips, multi-agency support, food bank provision, and youth advocacy. We proactively engage with a range of partners in the local area to ensure that young people's voices and perspectives are both heard and responded to, and that young people are treated as the community experts that they are. We're delighted to have worked with UCL on this project, which we hope is the start of a much bigger piece of work investigating what prosperity means for young people, and holding power-holders to account on that basis.

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we argue that prosperity is understood and experienced in different ways by different age groups. Young people are typically less involved in research about their prosperity than adults. Their views and experiences are therefore less likely to be considered in policy decisions than adults'. However, young people – and particularly adolescents between 14-24 years old – are significantly affected by societal transformation, and are capable of reflecting on and responding to that transformation.

We outline a study conducted with young people in Hackney who are mostly in mid-adolescence (between 14-17 years old). Hackney is a borough in east London which has undergone significant social and economic transformation. We draw out the main factors which young people said influenced their ability to live a good life in Hackney and discuss their views of the London Prosperity Index. We argue that there are structural differences and value differences which affect how young people understand prosperity, and which impact their capacity to lead a good life in places which are changing significantly. We conclude by establishing the need for a Youth Prosperity Index, to complement the Prosperity Index and related indexes, which focus on adults' experiences and values.

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## KEYWORDS

youth, young people, east London, re-thinking prosperity, Prosperity Index

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 WHY RE-THINK PROSPERITY?

Economic wealth has dominated definitions of prosperity (Moore, 2015; Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2010). Throughout the 20th century, countries and cities have measured their prosperity by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and rising household income. While GDP and household income do tell us something about an area's prosperity, rising inequalities around the globe show that this model does not support the delivery of sustainable prosperity. Sustainable prosperity is 'the art of living well on a finite planet. It is about the quality of our lives and relationships, about the resilience of our communities, and about our sense of individual and collective meaning.' (Jackson, 2017: 541). Rising annual global temperatures and the continuation of poverty are evidence that sustainable prosperity cannot be achieved by GDP growth and improving household incomes alone.

Rather than thinking about prosperity as an outcome of creating and distributing economic wealth, prosperity scholars suggest that 'prosperity is better understood as an ethical project that is multidimensional, relational, and multi-scalar.' (Moore & Woodcraft, 2019: 289). Globally, nationally, and locally, people are rethinking what prosperity means, and have attempted to incorporate different dimensions of human and planetary wellbeing into single indexes. From the UN's Sustainable Development Goals [<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>], to the Happy Planet [<http://happyplanetindex.org/>] and Better Life [<http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>] indexes, new models are being developed and tested to improve the prosperity of all people in diverse places. The UK utilises a wide range of indexes to support decision-making. London's Mayor has adopted a multi-dimensional approach for the London Local Industrial Strategy: demonstrating an awareness that the prosperity of place is contingent on many different and interrelated factors, such as people's education and employment opportunities and clean growth and green infrastructure.

Whilst these indexes include vital measures of a place's prosperity, their indicators for prosperity are often devised with little engagement with local people. When the experiences and perspectives of local communities are the starting point for investigating what prosperity means, a much wider range of conditions emerge as important (e.g. having a say in processes of change, the inclusion of local businesses in social and economic transformation, having a secure future for young people) (Moore & Woodcraft, 2019). It is important to rethink what makes a place prosperous in collaboration with the people whose lives will be affected by the policies and practices that decision-makers put in place. Doing so will improve the likelihood that policies and their outcomes are meaningful and beneficial to existing residents, by ensuring that policies are attentive to locally-specific dynamics as well as values and needs (ibid).

The Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) at UCL has been working with policy-makers, community-based organisations and community members in

Hackney, Camden, Barking & Dagenham, Tower Hamlets, Newham, and Waltham Forest, to re-think what prosperity means and bring citizens' experiences into policymaking.<sup>1</sup> One way of doing this is to work with citizens to develop new ways of conceptualising and measuring prosperity that reflect local aspirations and conditions. The Prosperity Index (PI) is the only citizen-led index that measures prosperity based on the things that people say matter to them (Woodcraft, & Smith, 2018). The PI was developed from mixed-methods research studies conducted in 2015 and 2017. The research included empirical research (semi-structured interviews and household surveys), and compiled existing secondary data, to inform a PI for east London (hereafter, the London PI). Empirical research was conducted with adults living in Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Barking & Dagenham and Newham: east London boroughs in which residents have varying experiences of transformation. The research team who designed and conducted the empirical research included citizen scientists: residents of the research boroughs who were trained and employed to work with the IGP researchers. The aim of the studies was to learn what a prosperous community means to local residents, and to develop new tools for conceptualising and measuring prosperity in ways which reflect local understandings and values (ibid).

The London PI articulates what prosperity means to residents of the east London boroughs, measures prosperity in each of the boroughs and allows comparison across the boroughs for an east London-wide picture of prosperity. The PI model [see Figure 1] shows the five dimensions and 15 headline indicators which are informed by the qualitative research conducted with residents (Woodcraft & Anderson, 2019). The PI includes measures of human capital (physical and mental

health, education, inclusion in political life) alongside environmental flourishing and economic prosperity.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://londonprosperityboard.org/>

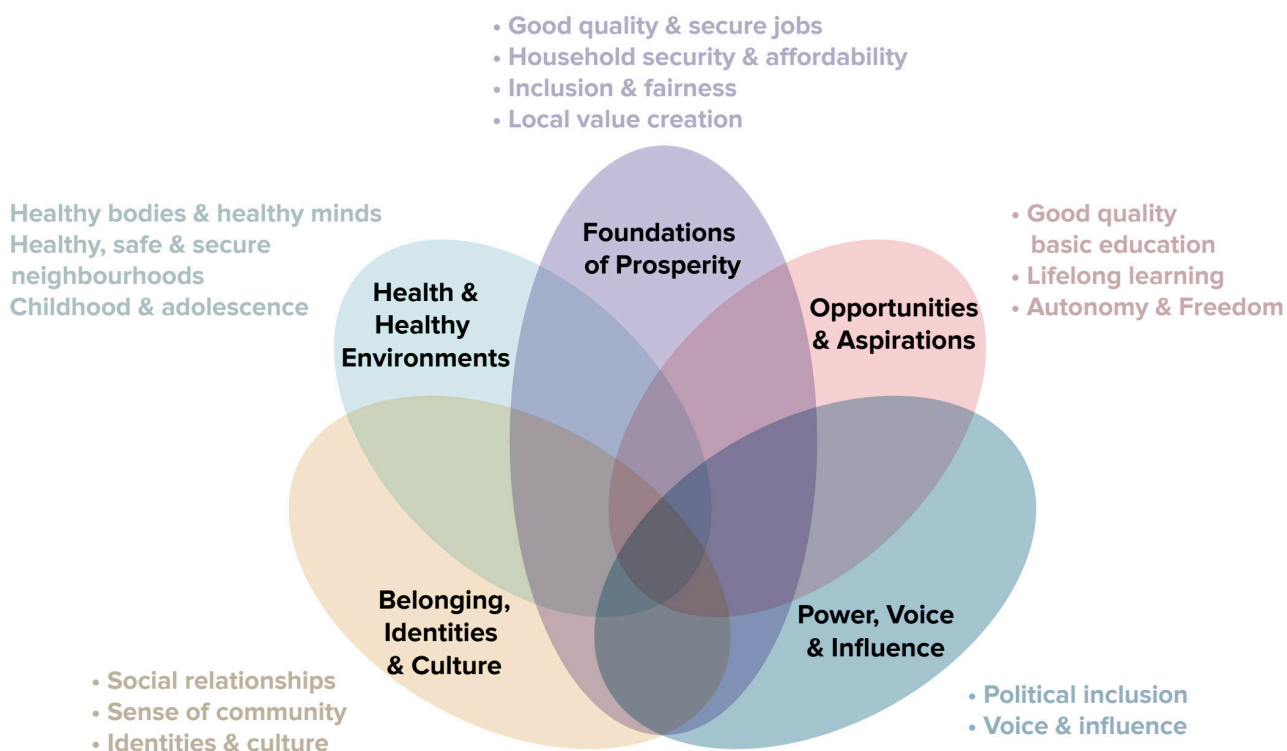


Figure 1: East London Prosperity Model, IGP, 2016

The London PI was co-developed with the London Prosperity Board (LPB): a cross-sector partnership of local government, public sector, third sector and business partners in east London. Members of the LPB have used the London PI to inform policy and public interventions. For example, Hackney Council is using the PI to inform their ‘Inclusive Economy Strategy’, using the Index to understand the complex relationship between actual earnings and feelings of prosperity. The London Legacy Development Corporation is using the PI to inform the local datasets which are used to revise the local plan for the Olympic boroughs, incorporating community-focused indicators alongside economic indicators.

The research which informed the London PI was conducted with and by adults. Although some of the adults who were involved as citizen scientists and as research participants did fall into late adolescence (between 18 – 24 years old), the research was not

able to capture significant moments of transition people under 18 experience, nor experiences of east London that are particular to that age group. In the remainder of this paper, we will explore the arguments for including young people under 18 years old in research about prosperity, methods for developing a Youth Prosperity Index, and initial findings about youth prosperity, focusing on a pilot study conducted in Hackney.



## 1.2 WHY TALK ABOUT YOUTH PROSPERITY AS WELL AS ADULT PROSPERITY?

This report focuses on the lives of young people in east London. Young people's lives are being shaped by major environmental and social issues such as climate change and rising inequality, and the policies and practices adults put in place to navigate these. In spite of this, they are less frequently included in consultations about policy than adults, meaning that results of consultations are unlikely to capture the youth experience or perspective (Jacquez, Vaughn & Wagner, 2013). However, young people are going through social and cognitive changes which 'create unique opportunities for enhanced social motivation and the development of passions to which they can dedicate intense attention and energy' (Ozer & Piatt, 2017).

The London PI includes 'Childhood and Adolescence' as a sub-domain, which has four indicators measuring child poverty and education. Whilst childhood and adolescence are important to an area's overall prosperity, we also know that adolescence is a distinct and important life stage (Sawyer et al., 2018), where relationships and activities which structure young people's day-to-day life are different from those which structure adults' lives. Moreover, most adolescents have a more restricted capacity to make decisions about where they go and what they do, so the same level of decision-making agency cannot be assumed for young people. In this life stage "proximate" factors like supportive family and peer relationships, and good quality education are imperative to healthy development (Viner et al., 2012). We also know that wider societal trends such as social inequalities, poverty, and rapid urbanisation also impact on individuals' development (ibid).

IGP's work with adolescents in Lebanon has shown that young people's mental health and wellbeing are affected by interpersonal relationships and by rapid changes in the local environment (Sender, forthcoming). Whilst the social, political and economic conditions in Lebanon are starkly different

to the conditions in the UK, the impact of rapid urban change is relevant to both areas.

Youth wellbeing can have long-term effects on the individual and on wider society. For example, three quarters of mental health problems begin in adolescence (Kessler et al., 2005). Understanding the specific capabilities, needs and desires of young people is therefore important to coming generations' prosperity. All of these factors suggest to us that youth prosperity is an important element in an area's overall prosperity, but that youth is a distinct time in a person's life, which might make the adult London PI and its methods less relevant for young people.

## 1.3 YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN EAST LONDON

Young people living in east London are facing significant challenges in almost every aspect of life. Young people in general are more likely than adults to face discrimination and experience crime (Office for National Statistics, 2019). They have been hit hardest by the recession and they are facing worsening employment opportunities. In east London, many are facing steep rises in housing costs and there are significant wait times for social housing (Walsham and Sholotan 2016). The east London boroughs neighbouring the Olympic Park (Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham) report levels of deprivation and child poverty significantly higher than the London average (London Poverty Profile 2017 Trust for London).

A rapid review of the literature about young people in east London can be seen to fall into three major themes: (un)employment; rapid social change; and discrimination (particularly against Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) young people). The discussions in the literature tend to link these themes with urban changes happening in east London. Gentrification and state-led urban regeneration programmes (particularly during and after the London 2012 Olympics) are seen as intertwined processes which significantly affect young people's lives.

These changes have exacerbated some of the challenges east Londoners faced before urban regeneration. East London has a history of poverty, deprivation, and disadvantage in relation to the rest of the city that has driven interventions by policymakers and philanthropists for over two hundred years (Moore and Woodcraft, 2019). Regeneration schemes like the 2012 Olympic Games, which promised to ‘close the gap’ in performance and prospects between the wealthiest and poorest residents (Mayor of London, 2011), have been criticised for not doing enough, or even worsening, long-term residents’ situations (Bernstock, 2014; Watt, 2013). Scholars have identified displacement as an outcome of these changes: neighbourhood upgrading means low-income residents have been forced to leave their home and neighbourhoods either directly via housing demolitions, landlord evictions and rent increases, or indirectly via the transformation of neighbourhood facilities, which have become unaffordable and/or inappropriate for long-term residents (Kennelly and Watt, 2012).

This working paper is focussed on the youth of London, specifically young people in mid-adolescence (between 14-17 years old) living in east London neighbourhoods that are transforming rapidly, and the struggles these young people go through in order to get by and to thrive. We draw on findings from a pilot research project - ‘The good life for young people living in Hackney’ and some of the existing literature about young people in east London. We highlight some of the factors which young people say affect their prosperity and argue for a distinct Youth Prosperity Index, including a youth-specific methodology, for use in conjunction with measures of adult prosperity.

#### **1.4 THE GOOD LIFE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN HACKNEY**

In Summer 2019, Hackney-based youth charity Hackney Quest partnered with the IGP on a project about what prosperity looks like for the different generations living in Hackney. We wanted to encourage young people to reflect on the different

factors that make a prosperous life, in conversation with their peers and older generations. This youth engagement project prototyped innovative participatory research methods in which the IGP worked with young people and youth workers to test and develop ways of working with young people in Hackney. Three of the authors of this paper are young people in mid- to late-adolescence (Ocitti, Hannan and Isaacs) and Mohammed Hannan conducted the analytical work and literature review which is the foundation of this paper. Although Hannan is from a different part of London, he empathised with the young people who participated in the research, whilst being well-placed to critically analyse their conversations about life in east London.

Overall, the aim of this project was to understand what the good life meant to young people in Hackney and, using those insights, to explore the differences between the attitudes of young people and adults to challenges and opportunities afforded by the area.

The project developed earlier pilot work conducted by members of the LPB Youth Working Group. The Youth Working Group comprised the following members:

- Greater London Authority
- Poplar HARCA (in Tower Hamlets)
- Community Links (in Newham)
- Hackney Quest youth group
- London Legacy Development Corporation
- Barking & Dagenham Council
- Hackney Council

The group agreed that the aim of a Youth Prosperity Index should be generating data to drive social action and youth empowerment projects, where research is the first phase of a wider, action-oriented project. Since the London PI focused on

adult experience had proven relevant and useful to members of the LPB, the group agreed to support the initial development a Youth Prosperity Index and a framework for action around it.

The group agreed to focus on young people in mid-adolescence (14-17 years old), because members had an interest in the transitions from childhood to adulthood that happen at this life stage, and because aspirations are also emerging as important indicators of individuals' prosperity.

The working group agreed that developing a Youth Prosperity Index might require new ways of conducting research. Young people are highly capable of discussing complex ideas and co-producing research outputs, but the methods used for having that discussion need to be sensitive to the specific capabilities of young people (Ozer & Piatt, 2017).

The team began piloting research with young people in January 2019. IGP and Community Links co-designed and delivered a workshop with 16-24 year olds from Newham and nearby boroughs. We learned that there is some agreement between youth prosperity and adult prosperity indicators, but young people in Newham also highlighted the importance of an emotionally supportive school environment to young people's mental health and opportunities, and freedom from crime. Notable barriers to youth prosperity included harsh punishment in schools, peer relationships which encouraged risky or harmful behaviour, and the threat of street crime. Facilitators of youth prosperity included supportive school environments, including supportive teachers, supportive and honest family relationships, and safe public spaces for sport and leisure in each neighbourhood. Stakeholders in youth prosperity who were identified by young participants are not only parents and peers, but also teachers, policemen and policewomen, healthcare workers, and council staff. The richness of the conversation with participants, and participants' agreement that youth prosperity is different from adult prosperity, supported the need for further research.

## 1.5 THE STUDY

For 'The good life for young people living in Hackney', members of the IGP and a team from Hackney Quest employed two people under 25 years old as Youth Citizen Scientists. The Youth Citizen Scientists designed the project and delivered it alongside a youth worker from Hackney Quest and researchers from IGP.

The project involved two half-day workshops with the same 15 participants, who were students at a Catholic secondary school in Hackney. The students were aged between 16 and 17 years old. 3 of the participants were young black British men. Of the 12 young women, the majority were black British, and one young woman was of Turkish origin. East London is a superdiverse place, and this group is not representative of adolescents who live in east London. Due to the restrictions on collecting personal data for this project, we did not ask for information about religion, sexual orientation or any other personal information. We found that the conversation with these young people was pertinent to our interest in youth prosperity, since they were situated at an important moment of transition from mid-adolescence to adulthood, and were also able to reflect on how their neighbourhoods are affected by the different aspects of life prosperity comprises.

In the first workshop focus group, participants were asked to share their ideas about what prosperity meant for people living in Hackney. This conversation was elicited through several activities:

1. Whole group discussion about objects (e.g. a pillow, a football, a chicken shop takeaway box) and images which convey what prosperity could mean to people in Hackney. These prompts were selected by the Youth Citizen Scientists.
2. Whole group discussion about the question: "If you had a free day, how would you spend it?"
3. Whole group discussion: What is prosperity in Hackney, and have changes in the area affected people's ability to live a good life?

4. Small group work: top 10 things for a good life in Hackney.
5. Whole group discussion about the proposed top 10 things.

The participants were then asked to learn about what the good life meant to other people in Hackney, by interviewing others over the following week. They were trained in interview skills and co-designed a question guide to use in the interviews. The participants were also invited to take photographs which captured the good life in Hackney. They were trained in social documentary photography techniques which encourages an honest look at what constitutes everyday life in a place. The students were then given a one-week task of going out into their communities and finding out what other people thought were the keys to a prosperous life via interviews or social documentary photography.

The students reconvened a week later to discuss their findings. The second workshop involved going through the photographs taken by the students and discussing what these photographs represented about Hackney as a community, and its prosperity. This led to a discussion about what the young people thought of the many significant changes happening in the borough (and in east London more broadly).

Both workshops were recorded as audio files. Audio files were transcribed, and then NVivo was used to code the transcriptions. These codes then formed the basis of sub-domain and indicators for youth prosperity in Hackney. The team mapped out existing secondary data which could inform the indicators, and, where there were no suitable data, a question would be devised that could be asked in a survey. The sub-domain, indicators and survey questions were then collated into a Prototype Youth Prosperity Index. The Prototype Youth Prosperity Index will form the foundation of future research into youth prosperity carried out in east London.

# OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSION

## 2.1 DEFINITIONS OF PROSPERITY

In the first workshop, when asked about what constitutes the good life, students discussed a broad range of subjects which spanned the London PI dimensions (Foundations of Prosperity; Health & Wellbeing; Opportunities & Aspirations; Power, Voice & Influence; Belonging, Identities and Culture). Some of these dimensions of prosperity dominated the conversation, while others receded into the background. Unsurprisingly, there was disagreement and debate about several of the themes discussed. This discussion will give an overview of the themes and sub-themes of youth prosperity, areas of disagreement, and finally, young people's attitude towards the London PI and its adult biases.

Themes which fall under the 'Foundations of Prosperity' and 'Belonging, Identities & Culture' dimensions were dominant in the conversations. Students discussed the importance of money to afford basic goods such as housing, food, and water. They generally agreed that it was desirable to have 'enough' money to afford basic goods and to afford to do some other activities, rather than to have vast sums of cash. 'You need people around you, to spend your money on and to spend your money with', said one young woman. Sleep, food and water also made it into students' top 10 things for a prosperous life: they did not want to take these things for granted. When students said how they would choose to spend a free day, most said they would sleep, rest or spend time on digital devices (social media, games consoles, Netflix).

Several students placed 'faith' or 'God' at the top of their top 10 lists. Students ascribed immense importance to the ethical sensibilities, sense of purpose and resilience that their faith gives them. 'God' was so important that, even though no image referenced religion in the first workshop, one young woman noted its absence and made sure God was recognised as being important for the good life. The high importance ascribed to 'faith' and 'God' suggests that, for many young people, having faith is one of the foundations of a prosperous life, and not an optional addition. Future research ought to investigate the importance of faith further, and its relationship with the foundations of prosperity. Mental health and wellbeing research with refugee youth in Lebanon indicates that faith is fundamental to young people's sense of purpose and resilience in highly stressful conditions (Dejong et al. 2017). One young woman in the Hackney workshops said that God gave people a sense of 'stability'.

# CHALLENGES AND CHANGES

## 3.1 CHANGES IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMUNITIES

Students focused on two conditions which they said threatened their prosperity: a lack of stability in the community, and violence and discrimination.

Instability of the community was talked about in different ways, namely: a process of displacement in which friends, family and neighbours moved out of increasingly unaffordable neighbourhoods, and as broader cultural changes in the kinds of activities, shops and residents that had begun to characterise Hackney. These processes affected young people differently (one was more direct, the other less so), but both speak to a broad social and economic transformation.

When one of the researchers broached the issue of housing, a young woman stated: 'They're stripping down the estates, and people are going, going'. All of the students agreed that housing estates were changing. Though no one talked about a particular former council housing estate having been 'stripped down', the students pointed out general changes to the aesthetic of new housing developments and to the kinds of people who lived in them. One student gestured to a new mid-rise apartment block which could be seen out the window, implying that this was indicative of the kind of buildings being built in the area. Although one young woman suggested that the new housing looked better than the older blocks, all of the students agreed that none of the long-term Hackney residents would be able to afford to live in them. A young man suggested that

people from outside of the area were moving in, and the former community was 'falling apart' as a result.

The young woman's reference to 'the estates' refers explicitly to housing. However, she made this statement in the context of a broader conversation about changes that were happening in the local neighbourhood, which had caused long-term residents and business owners to move out of the area, or to close. One young woman said that shop owners were struggling to pay rent, when they hadn't in the past. One of the shops she frequented ('Afro World') was struggling. When one of the research team asked whether they or their friends had gotten jobs in new businesses, the answer was a resounding 'no'.

The students' experiences of change in the neighbourhood are illustrative of displacement as a 'process of un-homing', characterised by the violent severing of links between residents and the communities to which they belong (Elliott-Cooper, Hubbard & Lees, 2019). According to Elliott-Cooper and his colleagues, displacement refers to a physical displacement of the individual or household out of a place they called home, and to an affective or emotional rupture in the relationship between people and place. In other words, people can be displaced without physically moving out of a place, as the place they have called home is stripped of the resources and characteristics which made it home (Nixon, 2011). Though the students we spoke with still lived in Hackney, they were witnesses to others' physical displacement out of the borough, and experiencing an affective or

emotional displacement of their own (see Butcher & Dickens, 2016).

This displacement is connected to processes of gentrification, but ought not to be reduced to an outcome of gentrification processes. It is a complex process of un-homing in its own right. The young people we spoke with were grappling with this process, and had even begun to incorporate some of the transformations into their understandings of prosperity. Elliott-Cooper, Hubbard & Lees (2019: INSERT PAGE NUMBER) recognise that positive outcomes of displacement can outweigh the negatives for some households. For them, this narrative is problematic:

**The paradox here is then that the 'objective' social good which derives from [a household] moving to a 'better' neighbourhood becomes a form of 'systemic violence' – not always a physical violence directly executed by individuals, but one that 'operates anonymously, systemically and invisibly through the very way society is organised'**

**(Baeten et al., 2017: 643)**

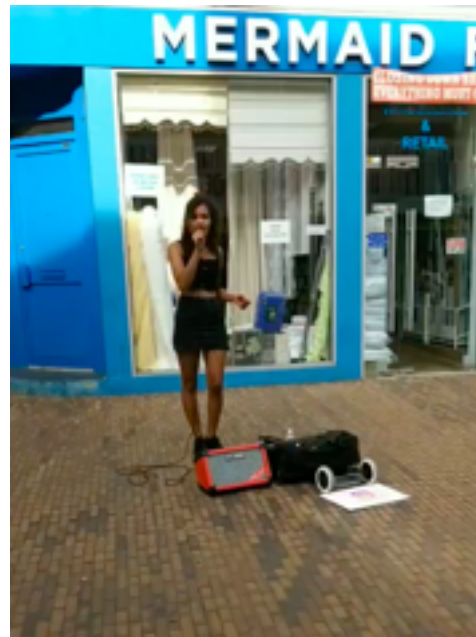
However, the young people in the workshop had not been physically displaced, and they suggest that some of the changes that have happened in Hackney have actually contributed to their own, and others', prosperity. This contribution was therefore not limited to the bettering of a single household, but to the broader area. One of the first things that students suggested was indicative of their prosperity was being able to shop in Westfield Shopping Centre. In the first activity (choosing and talking about an image or object the research team brought), one young woman chose the image of Westfield, and said that shopping here was important for her sense of prosperity, but caveated that she would want to be able to shop for those she loved as well as herself.

Kennelly and Watt's 2012 study with young people about these regeneration projects note similar ambivalence in young people's attitudes to local changes (Kennelly and Watt, 2012). In their study, young people talked about the need for their neighbourhoods to be renewed, whilst showing awareness that their neighbourhoods were likely to face negative consequences of the renewal. Their participants explicitly expressed concerns about the construction of Westfield in Stratford. Westfield Shopping Centre was built as part of the Stratford City redevelopment project, which was executed alongside the London 2012 Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park regeneration project. One of the aims of the regeneration of east London was to "establish high quality neighbourhoods and a new piece of east London, offering high standards of liveability, new homes and facilities for new and existing residents" (London Legacy Development Corporation, 2012). Kennelly and Watt's participants questioned why their neighbourhood, which they knew to be one of the poorest in London, needed a large shopping centre with high-end shops (ibid). The existing Stratford Centre mall contained inexpensive grocery and clothing stalls and discount shops as well as chain stores, and as such, represented affordable shopping suited to low-income households (ibid).

We asked the students to consider what their attitude to these changes reflected about their understandings of prosperity. They suggested that trust within the community, face-to-face contact with people who are not relatives but who share a sense of community, and their capacity to stay in contact with people who leave the area, are all important to their sense of prosperity. This confirms the general principle of the London PI: that people's sense of prosperity is collective and relational, rather than an individual's property or pursuit. Family and friends were mentioned equally in the conversations. This was expected, given the research on adolescent development which shows growing importance of peer relationships relative to the family in adolescence (Viner et al., 2012: 1648).

The kinds of changes which young people discussed ranged from the personal, direct experiences of change (family, friends and neighbours leaving) and broader social changes happening in the borough. The word students used most to describe and debate these changes was 'culture', i.e. 'the culture of Hackney'. When the researchers tried to understand exactly what they meant by 'culture', the students talked about modes of self-expression and collective activities, such as music, carnivals, festivals, and marches. These activities were mentioned a lot in the second workshop: most of the photographs taken by the students were said to represent the significant diversity in Hackney and the different methods people used to express themselves (see image below). The dominance of this theme might have been because the workshop was held at the beginning of the summer, just before Summer Holidays, and there had been several events in Hackney in the weeks prior to the workshop.

All of the students agreed that Hackney was a very diverse community, that diversity gave people a chance to 'learn from each other', and that there were lots of opportunities for people to express their diversity in different forms. However, the mention of these celebrations elicited mixed reactions from the group. Some festivals were welcomed as opportunities to connect with families' heritage, whereas Black Gay Pride (which had been held the weekend prior to the first workshop) had prompted some resistance among the students and their families. Some students expressed their uncertainty about the value of celebrating every identity (particularly LGBTQ identities) and implied that older relatives' more conservative views influenced their own thinking about LGBTQ celebrations and expression. It is worth remembering that this workshop took place in a Catholic school, and is therefore likely to reflect values associated with this faith. However, none of the students were forthcoming about their own position, and tended to agree that people ought to be able to deviate from the norm, and to express their identities.



#### Footage from film taken by participant

This footage documents the talent of young residents of Hackney, and their determination to share their talent and culture with others. The participant chose to document this moment to indicate her pride in Hackney's cultural life.

### 3.2 VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST YOUTH

The second challenge students mentioned was bullying, discrimination and police brutality. The students did not speak at length about bullying, though it was mentioned in relation to social media. However, discrimination within the community and police brutality was a dominant issue. Most of the students in the discussions were BAME students. They described the systematic abuse of BAME people by police, which they often observed on social media. At a different moment, one student said that she had overheard a visitor to the school express surprise that the majority of the students were black. Although she did not explicitly say that their surprise was discriminatory, she was implying that BAME young people are treated differently from white young people.



These concerns echo others' research with young people in Hackney. In the report, 'Hackney Wick Through Young Eyes' a 14-year-old participant is quoted as saying, "Young people are always judged by appearance". A 16-year-old participant stated that if they were to wear a tracksuit and walk around Hackney Wick, "people just assume like 'look at her, they probably don't have the right home'... as much as we are supposed to respect you as adults, we need that respect back and I don't feel like... not every adult has that respect for us" (Hackney Quest, 2018). A 13-year-old participant claimed that being treated unfairly by the police was one of the main problems for young people in Hackney Wick. It is evident that challenges like prejudice and stereotyping can limit the number of opportunities a young person in east London might have, and potentially lead to incarceration (Hackney Quest, 2018).

### 3.3 OPPORTUNITIES AND EMPLOYMENT

One area of the London PI was significant in its absence: work, opportunities and aspirations. While the importance of qualifications was discussed, students did not talk much about opportunities to succeed in careers and their future aspirations. When one student did bring up qualifications, and their importance for getting to the next stage in a career and 'getting paid more', another quickly asserted that education was important in its own right. She said education made people 'more aware of what's going on'. Therefore, although education was discussed as being important, its meaningfulness for young people differs. This implies that measuring education by educational attainment at GCSEs and A-Levels is not sufficient as a measure for a youth index.

On the subject of education for improving career opportunities, another young woman pointed out that education doesn't necessarily lead to better work: 'there's some unnecessary education; you go to university to end up in a Transport for London apprenticeship', the implication being that a university degree did not necessarily lead to a 'good' job. In other words, there is a mismatch

between the level of education young people are getting and the work opportunities they are offered. Educational attainment is not a predictor of prosperity for young people growing up in east London.

We know from other research that one of the main challenges young people living in an East London neighbourhood face is underemployment. 75% of the promised 11,000 jobs as part of the 'Olympic legacy' still don't exist (Bartholomew, 2018). The London Legacy Development Corporation's Socio-Economic Policy paper of 2012 presented the idea of core work programmes, in order to "promote growth and economic development, attracting businesses, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, and creating thousands of jobs", and also "build legacy careers, generating choices by establishing pathways for local people to access the jobs, apprenticeships, training and other opportunities created by our development" ('Socio-Economic Policy', 2012). The development of Westfield Stratford City mall promised 10,000 to 18,000 new jobs, according to the Chairman of the Westfield Group and the Mayor of London at that time, Boris Johnson (Kennelly and Watt, 2012).

A study by Kennelly and Watt with a focus group of young people suggested that the promises of new jobs was more of a white lie than a promise. Some of the young people involved were as cynical as to say, “the promise of jobs was essentially a public relations campaign” (Kennelly and Watt, 2012). The same paper also mentioned the role job centres played amidst all the confusion as to whether new jobs were really being created or not. One of their participants stated:

**“You go to Job Centre, they promise you, maybe, a job. Now they’re promising everyone a job in Westfield. So, they make you do some course like retail, SIA, something [...] you devote your time to that, get top grades, come out and they’re like ‘sorry, now you’ve got to do some other stuff’. And maybe they ignore you for some time”**

**(Kennelly and Watt, 2012: 155)**

In ‘Hackney Wick Through Young Eyes’, a 15 year old participant is quoted as saying: “There is not many work opportunities – people don’t wanna give young people a chance” (Hackney Quest, 2018). In the same study, a 16-year old said “They [employers] should be open to employing young people. I think some people just close it off, they’re like ‘no, we don’t trust them, they’re not old enough, we assume they’re not old enough”” (Hackney Quest, 2018).

Two of the main reasons given as to why young people are in an employment crisis are that they are not given the right guidance and are not provided with enough opportunities to be successful in some industries. The report implies that these challenges cause young people to become susceptible to getting involved in illegal activity. A 16-year old said: “The way we can tackle the problems with young people is definitely trying to find ways to get them jobs [...] they just wanna earn money. That’s why people are selling weed [...] Before they get

into selling and all that, they will try to find a job” (Hackney Quest, 2018). According to this young man, young people’s failed attempts to find work, and experiences of rejection, make informal and illegal work not only more attractive, but sometimes necessary.

Education to get into university, to get an apprenticeship or a job, was not much discussed beyond this in the workshop. The research team believe this might be something to do with the timing of the workshops, which was just after examinations and a week before the summer holidays. Young people’s minds did not seem to be on their future careers, but on their summer plans.

### **3.4 MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH**

Mental and physical health were not dominant themes in the discussions but were mentioned sporadically in relation to other subjects. Playing sports and being outdoors were mentioned in the initial workshop and again in the photography session (see below). One young woman initiated an interesting conversation about having a ‘good mindset’, being able to cope in difficult times, and that being a foundation that would ‘get you far in life’. When the subject of social media was broached, mental health did emerge as a sub-theme (see below).



**Photograph taken by participant on a bike ride through London**

This photograph documents the participant's experience of outdoor spaces in east London, and a moment of pride in herself for taking on a new personal challenge: to cycle in the Ride45 sportive.

### **3.5 SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media pervaded almost every theme we discussed. Young people treat social media as a part of their everyday lives. It was discussed in relation to police brutality and online protest against police brutality, to communicating with friends and family, and to work. When researchers seized on social media as a theme in its own right, the students expressed strong views about the impact of social media on young people's lives. One young woman had harnessed her social media knowledge to build up a personal beauty business. 'People can reach out to you. if you didn't have social media, that wouldn't happen'. She had managed to get

clients via social media, and to share her skills with her friends. Others have family abroad and were connected with them via social media. One young woman has family in France and was able to 'keep tabs' on them, without actually speaking to them. Another said social media was 'entertaining'.

However, one young woman noted that people had committed suicide because of bullying over social media. A Youth Citizen Scientist offered the insight that social media could be a place where 'drama' played out between friends, and many students agreed. Greater social media use among adolescents aged 14 (i.e. in mid-adolescence) has been related to vulnerability to online harassment, poor sleep, low self-esteem and poor body image, which in turn relate to higher depressive symptom score (Kelly, Zilanawala, Booker & Sacker, 2019). Whilst it is important to recognise the negative side of social media use, it is interesting that these young people, who are about to enter late-adolescence, presented a balanced view of it.

In terms of information, one young woman said that social media was 'biased', only to receive the response that newspapers are also biased. This quick exchange is indicative of young people's low level of trust in the information that they receive, almost regardless of the source. It illustrates the dominance of the 'fake news' discourse which was prominent at the time of the workshop.

# UNDERSTANDING PROSPERITY ACROSS GENERATIONS: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ADULT AND YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

The students agreed that many of the indicators in the London PI were relevant to young people. Like adults, the participants regularly brought up feelings of precarity, and shared concerns about long-term residents being excluded from processes of change. They valued the capacity to remain in a neighbourhood experiencing rapid social and economic transformation. As with adult participants, having the basic foundations for a prosperous life (enough food, water and shelter) and being close to family and friends, were top priorities.

Moore and Woodcraft (2019: 289) describe adult prosperity as being collective: prosperity can be created and shared between members of communities. This was certainly true for young people, who emphasized not only the importance of their family and friends, but the prosperity of local businesses, other local residents, and even the natural environment, as being important to their own sense of prosperity. In this sense, young people described the same 'feedback loop between people and place' that Moore and Woodcraft describe, 'in which the built environment and symbolism of being part of a new community are affective dimensions of everyday life that animate and intensify a collective sense of prosperity' (ibid: 287).

The participants wanted to add some indicators to the PI, and to place emphasis on some indicators more than others. Given that young people between 16-17 years old are nearing the end of their secondary education and contemplating their future careers, we were surprised how little of the conversation was dedicated to the theme of

work. Instead, the issue of work seemed to come up in conversation indirectly, as an afterthought in a conversation about money or education. Young people all agreed that having enough money was fundamental to their prosperity, but, unlike adults, they did not talk much about valuable characteristics of work (such as secure or good quality). However, the students did bring up additional aspects of prosperity which they did not feel were reflected in the London PI. Opportunities for self-development beyond academic education was important to the students, as was education for education's sake (rather than for getting on a career ladder). They also highlighted a mis-match between educational attainment and work opportunities, making the important point that educational attainment does not predict future prosperity.

Participants also talked about the importance of leisure time, sleep and rest, and opportunities to express oneself creatively. Many of the young people were intent on emphasising the importance of their faith to their sense of prosperity, including to their capacity to cope with precarious circumstances. The participants felt that these did not get much emphasis in the London PI.

Although it was not a dominant theme in its own right, social media and internet use did pervade many of the conversations about other topics. We therefore believe it is important to recognise the structural role that social media and the internet have on young people's lives, including how they communicate and relate to others, how they express themselves, and even how they establish

their careers. The subtle importance of social media and the internet ought to be reflected in indexes of young people's prosperity, and might be emphasised in measures of adult prosperity as well.

In terms of how the students spoke about prosperity and the relationship between prosperity's different elements, the students did not talk about 'prosperity trade-offs' (ibid: 288). 'Prosperity trade-offs' describe the strategic decisions people make to attain one element of a prosperous life, understanding that they are foregoing another. For example, Moore and Woodcraft describe how residents of the East Village development in Newham paid relatively high rents (and therefore have less disposable income), for access to good education, green spaces and leisure spaces, and a feeling of safety (ibid).

It is not surprising that such strategic decisions were not mentioned by the students, given that young people were not in the same position as the adults who talked about having to decide what element of prosperity was most important for their family. In fact, the 'relational' character of prosperity was only spoken about at a broad, societal level, in the discussions about regeneration and increased costs of living. As noted above, the students did talk about the 'collective' character of prosperity a lot.

# CONCLUSION

There are some areas of overlap between how young people and adults think about prosperity, but there are also important differences. These differences occur across the five domains of the London PI. These can be divided into i) structural differences, which are about what structures the everyday lives of young people and adults, and; ii) value differences, which pertain to which specific elements young people think contribute to prosperity. Some of the differences in how young people talk about prosperity, and the things they said they valued, can be understood as emerging because the structure of the day-to-day lives of young people, and because their social roles tend to be very different from adults of a working age, across social contexts. These structural differences include the dominance of education, the growing importance of peer relationships, and the emphasis young people place on self-expression. Some other differences (particularly faith) might not have any particular relevance to youth. Structural differences might also be specific to the generation of young people growing up in modern-day east London. In any case, these differences signal the importance of developing a Youth Prosperity Index, in addition to the London PI. Doing so would support our understanding of what matters to young people in a local area, and to identify effective areas of intervention with young people.

One consequence of this proposal to develop a separate Youth Prosperity Index would be a more critical look at the existing London PI. If we need a Youth Prosperity Index, why not have an Index made with older residents, or with women, etc.?

One of the responses to this is practical: conducting research with people under 18 demands very different kinds of processes, bureaucratic (e.g. research ethics, working with schools etc.) and methodological. Another reason touches on the earlier argument that younger people's lives are almost always differently structured from adults, and this difference not only affects their prosperity values but also the interventions which could successfully address challenges to youth prosperity.

The literature review also indicates the importance of understanding how changes in an area affect young people, and of using qualitative methodologies with young people to understand opinions and experiences. Although the literature review has highlighted the negative effects of regeneration and gentrification on young people in east London, participants had a mixed response to changes in the community. Many were proud to live in east London, and remarked on the ethnic, religious, national and sexual diversity as being a contributor to that sense of pride. They also suggested that the infrastructural and building developments in east London made it a nicer place for them to currently live. However, the participants and the literature implied that young people living in east London did not expect that they would be able to stay, because of rising costs of living and low availability of social housing.

# NEXT STEPS

The Prototype Youth Prosperity Index is limited by the timings and scope of the research. The team at IGP and Hackney Quest found it quite odd that there was not much mention about how important careers were as part of the good life. One reason for this may be due to the timing of the workshops. The workshops were conducted towards the end of the school year, a week after the students had finished their mock exams. The students were more focused on the upcoming holiday and cultural events happening in Hackney, than on careers. This might explain the lack of references to careers and why there was more discussion about how important travelling and resting was to the students. Therefore, the next step with this particular group would be to conduct more workshops at different times of the school year. Future research would also need to engage a larger, and more diverse, participant group. Research would need to work with over 16s who are not in secondary school or college, and younger participants.

In terms of themes, future research ought to be undertaken to understand what young people imagine their futures will look like, given the current challenges of staying in east London. It should also be understood what capabilities young people have to stay, if they wish to. Finally, more work should be done to understand what young people mean by 'culture'. Since it was named as an important factor in prosperity, but has no set definition, developing a working definition with multiple indicators would be pertinent to a Youth Prosperity Index.

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