

PRIDE IN PLACE

**Beyond the metrics: Insights from
the Feeling Towns project**



The metrics for measuring “pride in place” are not well-developed, and the language of pride has been used inconsistently across cultural policy and practice.

This brief uses insights from Feeling Towns to make recommendations for UK Government, local authorities and cultural-heritage bodies about the significance of understanding pride in shaping and evaluating policy.



Challenge and context

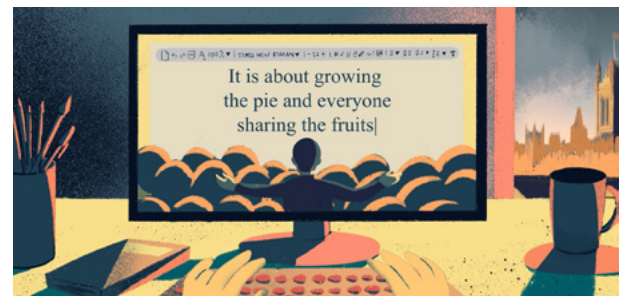
The Levelling Up agenda prioritised “pride in place” as an explicit policy outcome. Yet the methods that are being used to measure pride in place are still in their “infancy” and not fully developed (HM Government, 2022: 35).¹ This paper engages with the UK Government’s need to identify and work with different methods that capture the richness and variety of pride in place.

Beyond econometric approaches

Current measurements of pride in place rely on limited, quantitative assessments of proxies that include housing, crime and wellbeing. While these approaches can identify and give some economic value to sources of pride such as parks, heritage sites and community facilities, they do not capture the deeper, personal and shared feelings that are not so easily seen or quantified. Alternative methods are needed to fully account for pride: to understand its meanings for different communities and its greater potential for policy programming and evaluation.

Pride in place is a complex emotion

- It works at various interconnecting scales, e.g., national pride, civic pride, and local pride.
- It interacts with other forms of pride, such as pride in one’s job or in one’s group identity.
- It has a fragile temporality: it comes and goes quickly; it can lay dormant for a long time.
- It is the product of many overlapping, complicated relationships and histories.
- It can be felt individually and collectively.
- It has both positive and negative connotations.



“We don’t have the language to do a Levelling Up evaluation [because] the Towns Fund metrics don’t match the vision of our plan.”

¹ HM Government (2022a) [Levelling Up the United Kingdom: Missions and metrics](#). HM Government. (Accessed 28 Jan 2025).

Feeling Towns

The **Feeling Towns** project successfully trialled place-based methods in towns across England, which revealed discrepancies between people's understanding of pride in place. We suggest that new ways of accounting for pride in place are possible.

- **Where:** 7 English neighbourhoods: Harefield (Southampton), Sandown (Isle of Wight), Ledbury, Northgate (Darlington), Southend, Boscombe (Bournemouth), Dorchester
- **When:** 2021 – 2024
- **Project partners:** Institute of Historical Research, Historic England, Rural Media, Arts Council England, Creative PEC, Centre for Towns, Southampton City Council, Isle of Wight Council, Herefordshire Council, Darlington Borough Council, Dorchester Town Council
- **What:** Interviews, focus groups, ethnographic study, creative workshops with > 500 people
- **Who:** Residents, local authority officers, elected representatives, place professionals

Our creative methods place-based **Think-Kit**[1], co-designed with local stakeholders, enabled:

- Participants to express feelings and ideas that are not easily put into words.
- Researchers to ask deeper questions about participants' distinctive experiences and account for the fact that every place is different and has different stories.
- Partners to understand how pride influences people's attachments to where they live, work and volunteer.

We developed bespoke **'Pride and...'** reports and recommendations for each place and community. These methods and findings can help policymakers **to understand the drivers of pride 'on the ground' and develop effective policy programmes and evaluation frameworks.**

Case study findings

- Residents desire accessible community spaces: they find value and create meaning in the memories associated with community centres, scout huts and parks. Residents want to understand how changes in social infrastructure occur, such as **the purchase, sale and demolition of properties.**
- Local pride is sometimes felt in opposition to other types of pride. In some suburban wards, many residents felt strongly disassociated from the idea of being from the wider town or city. Some wards feel cut off from the city centre due to **their geographical distance and poor public transport links.**
- Because key areas in some city centres have "civic" in their titles (e.g. civic centre, civic car park), many residents have developed negative associations with the word "civic". For these residents, the enhancement of **"civic pride", as understood by the authors of Levelling Up policy, is unlikely.**
- When exploring the relationship between pride in place and civic engagement, we found that pride was expressed differently for different age groups: young people volunteered to learn skills and receive training relevant to the local job market; older people volunteered **to build friendship networks and to contribute to the wider community.**
- Though there was a shared commitment to the volunteering activity, motivations varied, upsetting the often-assumed relationship between "stayers" and "goers". Pride in place was not necessarily attached to longevity in an area, but rather to agency: **people wanted to be involved in their local area and to participate as a collective.**



Recommendations for policymakers



Develop more flexible processes that allow local authorities to self-define key place-based terms such as “pride in place”.



Sustain open and accessible qualitative reporting for local authority data observatories to articulate the many complexities of pride.



Provide training in place-based methods with local government officers and other stakeholders. This programme should include place-leadership skills and strategies for identifying future place leaders.



Support innovative research partnerships to represent felt responses to place. This work should include negative feelings, conflicting notions of “community”, and multiple versions of pride.



What next?

- Our outputs include a **short, animated video** which foregrounds the social setting of our research and what it might mean to measure pride in the context of people’s daily lives.
- A peer-reviewed **academic article**[2] has been published, and an international co-edited collection on pride, place and policy is being developed for Manchester University Press.
- A current project, **Neighbouring Data**, is co-producing **principles, models and frameworks**[3] for local authorities who are seeking to use and share qualitative evidence.
- Future research collaborations will develop the **And Towns** network of projects, focusing on housing, place, identity, culture, wellbeing, and community cohesion.

References

1. Owen J, Marsh N, Howcroft, M (2023) Understanding pride in place: A place-based creative Think Kit from Feeling Towns. [doi:10.5258/SOTON/P1171](https://doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/P1171).
2. Howcroft M, Marsh N, Owen J (2024) Levelling Up, affective governance and tensions within ‘pride in place’. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, o(o), doi.org/10.1177/23996544241268342.
3. Marsh N, Owen J, Ashton D (2024) Lived experience and decision-making: an applied approach to using, connecting and representing qualitative evidence. [doi:10.5258/SOTON/P1164](https://doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/P1164).

Authors

Prof. Nicky Marsh University of Southampton
nm8@soton.ac.uk

Dr. Michael Howcroft University of Glasgow
Michael.Howcroft@Glasgow.ac.uk

Dr. Joseph Owen University of Southampton
J.G.Owen@soton.ac.uk

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All the images in this policy brief are stills from How Proud? (2023). This animation is a collaboration between the filmmaker Annlin Chao [www.annlinchao.com], the poet Ella Frears [ellafrears.com] and Feeling Towns.



Watch the full video

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