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Citation:

South, J and Bagnall, A-M and Southby, K and Freeman, C and Pennington, A and Corcoran, R (2020) Community Wellbeing Case study synthesis: study protocol. Leeds Beckett University, Leeds. (Unpublished)

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## **Community Wellbeing Case study synthesis: study protocol**

### **Communities of Place (CoP) Wellbeing Evidence programme**

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# **Community Wellbeing Case study synthesis: study protocol**

## **Introduction**

As part of the Communities of Place (CoP) Evidence Programme, at the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, we are conducting a scoping review and qualitative synthesis of the methods and approaches of community-based practices in supporting community wellbeing. This ‘Community Wellbeing Case Study Synthesis’ will have two areas of focus (i) development of a method to synthesise learning and outcomes from community-based wellbeing projects (ii) collection and review of a sample of projects that are focused on promoting wellbeing through a place or neighbourhood.

There is considerable interest in the knowledge and learning that can be obtained from practice-based case studies, but no consensus on how to synthesise that evidence. This study will therefore aim to provide a ‘proof of concept’, laying the foundations for synthesising learning from community wellbeing practice. This protocol sets out the process that we will use to develop the methods and then apply them with a small set of community wellbeing case studies.

## **Background and rationale**

The Community Wellbeing Evidence Programme development phase and later public engagement methods, including the two public hearings held in Oct 2017 and May 2018, revealed a wealth of contextual information and learning about approaches to promote wellbeing undertaken through community projects and organisations. This practice-based, experiential evidence is under-reported and under-utilised (Savage et al, 2009), yet may provide a rich source of data on how community wellbeing can be built at a neighbourhood level (McClean & NcNeice, 2012). Attention to social context and engagement with underserved groups is typically a feature of community practice in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE), however outcomes are not always easy to capture resulting in evidence gaps (NCVO, 2016). There is now growing interest in developing robust methodologies to gather and review case studies of community practice, as this has the potential to complement the formal evidence base captured by systematic reviews. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing is interested in what can be learnt from wellbeing practice examples that provide vital, but typically missing, information on context, implementation and local impacts. This study will begin to address these knowledge gaps in terms of (i) synthesising practice-based case

study evidence on community wellbeing to complement the formal evidence base and (ii) identifying the most robust methods to collate, review and synthesise that evidence. In particular, this review will build on and complement the findings of the recent systematic review that synthesised research on interventions to boost social relations through improvements in community infrastructure (places and spaces) (Bagnall et al. 2018). The results will be used to further develop the initial Community Wellbeing Theory of Change (South et al., 2017).

## Study Aims

- To conduct a scoping review and qualitative synthesis of the methods, approaches, reported outcomes of and learning from community based practice in supporting community wellbeing, with a focus on projects aiming to improve community infrastructure (places and spaces).
- To scope, develop and pilot a robust method of qualitative review and synthesis for these practice-based projects.

## Research questions:

- How do community projects aimed at improving wellbeing contribute to the success of the areas they serve? What outcomes result and for whom?
- What can be learnt about project engagement, implementation and sustainability from case studies of community wellbeing projects in context?
- What are the best methods of identifying, reviewing, synthesising and reporting methods and approaches of community-based practice?

## Study Scope

A priority is to develop robust methods to collate and review the potential wealth of data from community-based projects that target wellbeing in the UK. We are defining these as:

Community-based projects developed and/or delivered by community hubs or community based organisations that explicitly address wellbeing outcomes in neighbourhoods. Projects need to actively involve community members in design delivery and/or evaluation (as opposed to using community merely as a setting) and can involve geographical communities or specific communities of interest experiencing disadvantage.

In order to develop the ‘proof of concept’, this pilot study will focus on community-based interventions that aim to improve social relations and community wellbeing through better

community infrastructure (places and spaces). This will build on the evidence from the recent Places & Spaces systematic review (Bagnall et al. 2018).

There are various types of case study, ranging from research-based studies through to illustrative stories used for communication (McLean & McNeice, 2012; Simpson et al. 2013; UK Health Forum, 2016; Yin, 2009). This study is concerned with practice-based case studies that report learning from community-based activity in a reasonably systematic way. Our working definition of a case study is:

“[...]an in-depth, possibly longer term investigation of a single or very limited number of people, event, context, organisation or policy. A case study might be used when seeking to understand a significant or novel situation and to provide particularly rich data.” HM Treasury (2007)

Following the review of methods, this definition may be further refined.

## Methods

The study will be based on a scoping review methodology to identify potential community wellbeing projects and also appropriate review/synthesis methods. There will be 4 connected phases

1. Methods review – to scope and select appropriate methods for collection and synthesis
2. Gathering a collection of practice-based case studies
3. Analysis and synthesis of sample (using agreed methods)
4. Application & recommendations - review of methods and recommendations for future development, implementation and dissemination.

We are drawing on scoping review methodologies (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005; The Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015) to approach this pilot in a staged way. This protocol sets out review questions, methods, search and sampling strategy and exclusion/inclusion criteria; however, the process will be further refined based on the findings of Stage 1 - Methods Review.



## 1. Methods review

Stage 1 Methods Review will lay the foundations for the study. We will seek to identify review methods for qualitative case studies and practice based evidence to inform our protocol, in particular analysis and synthesis methods. There are a range of methodological challenges and definitional issues around how practice-based evidence is collected, analysed and reported (Daykin & Joss, 2016; Puttick & Ludlow, 2012; Simpson et al. 2013; UK Health Forum, 2016). Work by the UK Health Forum on public health case studies (UK Health Forum, 2016) and Public Health England (PHE) on developing practice examples (South et al., 2017; Public Health England, 2018) will be drawn on as these two initiatives have developed common templates for collecting secondary data from projects in a systematic way. Additionally, advisory group members, who represent a wide range of governmental and non-governmental organisations, will signpost to key collections and methods; for example, Learning from Growing Livelihoods projects (Carnegie UK Trust, 2018) or the National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing (2018) APPG Inquiry Submissions.

The methods review will involve (a) a rapid review of methodological literature and (b) a scoping of websites and other collections in order to identify common processes and solutions to methodological issues.

### *(a) Rapid review of methodological literature*

A rapid review of what methodologies are used to collect, analyse, synthesise and report on practice-based case studies. The focus will be on identifying robust methods for undertaking secondary analysis of case studies from practice that can be applied in this study. There appears to be limited literature on secondary analysis and synthesis of multiple case studies from policy or practice, so this will be a major area of interest in the review. As well as methodological papers, the review will scope examples of where secondary synthesis of practice-based case studies has been undertaken using either qualitative, quantitative or mixed analysis methods. A search strategy has been developed which uses a combination of forward citation searching using key methodological papers, searching of relevant websites and key journals, and contact with experts in the field (see Annex A).

### *(b) Scoping of websites and case study collections*

A scoping of websites and other forms of case study collections will be undertaken to identify how organisations typically collect, curate and display practice-based case studies and if any synthesis is undertaken. PHE Libraries has a list of 12 websites where collections of public health/health and wellbeing case studies can be accessed, for example Think Local Act Personal, SCIE and Cambridge

Institute of Public Health. This will be supplemented by websites, databases and collections in documents identified by the Communities of Place evidence programme team, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing hub, and the advisory group. Examples include the work from the Arts and Health field (National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2018) and collections by organisations such as Carnegie UK (Carnegie UK Trust, 2018) and Glasgow Centre for Population Health (McLean & McNeice, 2012). Key features and the main information fields used for each website/collection will be mapped in a matrix. Information on processes, quality assurance and use will be noted. This exercise will inform the development of a template for data extraction.

Findings from the Methods Review will be drawn together into a briefing on case study synthesis methods covering definitions and types; data domains/fields; selection; quality assurance; analysis methods. We will also develop a set of options and preliminary recommendations that will guide how we undertake Stages 2 and 3 and these options and recommendations will be presented to the advisory group for discussion. Stages 2 & 3 will test how the selected methods work and iterate where problems or gaps occur. One key decision is whether and how we apply quality criteria to select case studies and what the proposed criteria are.

## 2. Gathering a collection of practice-based case studies

The next stage will be gathering a collection of a sample of practice-based case studies through existing collections, or through What Works Wellbeing partner organisations. As this is a pilot study, the sample will be limited to around 20-25 case studies. We will use the broad intervention types identified in the recent Places and Spaces systematic review (Bagnall et al. 2018):

- Community hubs
- Events
- Local neighbourhood design
- Green & blue space interventions
- Place-making (defined as the role of arts, culture and heritage in helping to shape the places where we live, LGA, 2017)
- Alternative use of space
- Urban regeneration
- Community development.

Potential practice-based case studies will be identified in two ways, which will offer a point of comparison:

- (a) Through contact with intermediary organisations, as identified by the Advisory Group, or through websites, databases or documents that hold collections of community wellbeing case studies. Working through intermediary organisations will prevent a large number of case studies submitted from practice that cannot be processed. All case studies identified through this route must be already written up and in the public domain or with permission to publish.
- (b) Locality, a national network organisation and key civil society partner in the Communities of Place evidence programme, has a database and contacts with over 600 community anchor organisations, which will form a practical route to identify and gather examples. We will work with Locality to gather five case studies through their network. These will be focused on the role of community hubs in promoting community wellbeing. A template developed from the Methods Review will be used to gather information. Early mapping work shows that there are common domains that should be included in practice-based case studies.

#### *Study selection*

The main inclusion criteria will be community wellbeing projects that aim to improve social relations and community wellbeing through better community infrastructure (places and spaces) (Bagnall et al 2018). If there are a large number of potential practice-based case studies, we will filter using one or more of the eight intervention types identified in that review. Selection criteria (inclusion and exclusion) for the published case studies will be further developed based on the Methods Review findings. For example, inclusion could be based on a minimum standard of information on goals, context, characteristics of participants, barriers and facilitators to implementation and wellbeing outcomes. We will ensure that the final sample has a spread across the devolved nations as well as England.

We want to incorporate some point of comparison, so the sample is likely to include different approaches to gathering case studies; for example, independent process for documentation versus collection by project staff.

A key methodological issue at this stage is the value of incorporating quality assessment (based on strength of evidence or levels of confidence) in addition to selection on the domains/information fields. Stage 1 Methods review will have identified potential quality criteria, such as method of collection, level of evidence, scope of reported outcomes and measures taken to achieve reliability and credibility. We will quality assess case studies against our chosen quality criteria; however, this will be an iterative process as we seek to understand what methods work best. All decisions will be documented.

### 3. Analysis and synthesis of sample

Having gathered a sample of case studies of community projects that have rich descriptions, the data extraction stage will cover common fields including: aims and objectives, social context; project rationale and needs; intervention methods; implementation; outcomes and documented learning. This will produce a set of project descriptors and all data will be mapped and presented in tables. There will be an opportunity to follow up with intermediary organisations where information is missing.

Stage 3 will involve a cross case qualitative analysis of the sample and then a narrative synthesis. The choice of synthesis methods for practice-based evidence will be determined by the Methods Review. An analytical framework based on the research questions will be developed to support the analysis. Given the limited methodological literature on synthesis of practice-based evidence, we will draw on qualitative multiple case study methods (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Yin, 2009) and also narrative review synthesis (Popay et al., 2006 ) to develop matrices and finally a narrative account. Findings will also be mapped to our interim Theory of Change (South et al., 2017). Additionally, there will be an analysis of the strengths and limitations of included case studies, based on our quality assessment.

### 4. Applying learning from this study

The final stage will be a review of methods and recommendations for future development, application and dissemination. This is an important stage as it will re-evaluate the ‘proof of concept’ for community wellbeing case study synthesis.

In order to evaluate the methods and the outputs from this study we will:

- Document the process of gathering, processing, analysing and synthesising. The research team will keep an email log to record reflexive notes, and this will be used to inform a report of the process, what worked and what didn’t.
- Identify where there are differences in the type, method and reporting of case studies that might limit the quality of the synthesis.
- Compare the data sources (websites, collections in reports) and Locality case studies to see if there are differences in scope and quality of findings.

- Compare the evidence statements in the Places and Spaces review and the Case study synthesis to see if complementary findings are presented and any new information is added.

One of the benefits of case studies is their appeal to policy and decision makers and to practitioners as sources of learning. Although we will not be able to conduct an extensive evaluation during this pilot, we will gather feedback from the advisory group and other key stakeholders about their views of the case study synthesis and outputs. We will be particularly keen to find out what they find useful, what is less useful, how the findings could be applied and any points of learning regarding the process. Going forward from this proof of concept project, we will work with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing in exploring opportunities to develop the case study review methods further and engage with audiences who may be interested in testing the approach.

## Outputs

- A full report with summarised case studies, synthesised results, key approaches and learning
- Recommendations for review methodology and a common process/template and reporting framework
- Accessible versions of a sample of practice-based case studies to be published on the What Works Wellbeing hub.

## Advisory Group

Ingrid Abreu Scherer, What Works Wellbeing (Chair)

Ruth Breidenbach-Roe, Locality

Norma Daykin, University of Winchester, Culture and Sport Evidence programme

Daniel Gill, DCMS

Katie Green, DCMS

Angie Hart, University of Brighton

Graham Kinshott, MHCLG

Louise Mansfield, Brunel University, Culture and Sport Evidence programme

Andrew Mowlah, ACE

Maria O'Beirne, MHCLG

Carol Owen, Public Health Wales

Tamsin Shuker, Big Lottery

Lesley Smith, MHCLG

Andrew Spiers, Sport England

Jennifer Wallace, Carnegie UK Trust

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## Annex A: PLAN (DRAFT) for literature review of published case study synthesis methodology

### Search strategy

- Forward and backward snowball citation searching of key papers:
  - Magenta book
  - Shankardass
  - Simos 2015
  - Simpson, Kelly & Morgan 2013
  - Morestin 2010
  - De Leeuw 2015
  - Ng 2012
  - UK Public Health Forum literature review informing case study templates
  - <https://www.scie.org.uk/prevention/research-practice/getdetailedresultbyid?id=a11G000000CTSG8IAP>
- Text search/ mine a few key journals:
  - International Journal of Social Research Methodology
  - Methodological Innovations
  - International Journal of Qualitative Methods
  - Community Development Journal
  - Perspectives in Public Health
- Look through materials sent by advisory group
- Contact key authors?
- Search/ citation search websites/ guidance of institutions or authors e.g.:
  - Joanna Briggs Institute
  - EPPI-centre
  - ESRC guidance on narrative synthesis
  - Mary Dixon Woods
  - Rona Campbell
  - Nicky Britten
  - CRD/ Cochrane
  - WW Centre for Children's Social Care
  - Early Intervention Foundation
  - Centre for Ageing Better
  - JRF

### ***String 1: synonyms for case studies***

case study/ ies

success stories

anecdotes  
best practice  
case report  
'on the ground'  
'real world'  
Good practice  
Practice examples  
Implementation study

***String 2: synonyms for synthesis***

knowledge synthesis  
cross case analysis  
synthesis  
evidence synthesis  
((((("information dissemination") OR "publishing standards") OR "review literature as topic")) AND  
(("documentation/methods") OR "evidence typology")) AND ((("policy making") OR "health  
policy")))).

*Inclusion criteria:*

- Methodological papers and guidance on synthesis of case studies gathered from practice
- Include cross-case synthesis such as Yin paper, Miles & Huberman
- No date restriction