

**Understanding prosperity in east London:
Local meanings and 'sticky' measures of the good life
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Abstract

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been conceived as a global roadmap for peace, dignity and prosperity on a healthy planet (UNDP 2016). The SDGs challenge the dominant notion of prosperity as material wealth measured by GDP and rising household incomes; instead prosperity is reframed as a shared condition to be weighed alongside ending poverty, tackling inequalities and safeguarding the environment. Cities are identified as having a critical role in generating and equitably distributing prosperity on these terms. Reframing prosperity in this way opens up space for new forms of dialogue about what it means for people everywhere to prosper, asking how material wealth and other forms of value, equity and fairness, and the needs of humans and non-humans are differentially understood and acted on. Yet this article argues that prosperity is under-studied and under-theorized by social scientists. A new research agenda, driven by empirical studies in diverse urban contexts, must form the basis for new theoretical insights and policy formation that will drive action on prosperity in the years to come. Presenting new empirical work from community-led research in three east London neighbourhoods, the article examines prosperity as a lived experience in comparison to policy goal; demonstrating how context-specific meanings and practices challenge the orthodox models and metrics that currently dominate policymaking. The authors demonstrate how situated and engaged research with local residents and citizen scientists provides the basis for developing new prosperity

metrics that reflect issues of specific value and concern to individuals and communities in east London.

Keywords: Prosperity, SDGs, post-GDP metrics, urban studies, citizen science, east London

1. Redefining and localising prosperity: a turning point in global discourse

In 2015, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as “a roadmap for a future of peace, dignity and prosperity for all on a healthy planet” (UNDP 2016). A version of prosperity that is concurrent with the growth of material wealth has dominated economic and political systems for over 200-years (Moore 2015; Cassiers 2014). Since the mid 20th century, this vision has propelled a singular global development agenda focused on wealth creation driven by economic growth. In this context GDP, as the dominant measure of economic activity, has become the default measure of societal prosperity. However, the SDGs reframe prosperity in broader terms than simply material wealth – describing prosperity as a shared and inclusive condition to be balanced alongside poverty eradication, tackling inequalities and enhancing environmental protections.

In the era of global urbanism, the question of how cities can generate shared prosperity on these terms is critical. Cities are recognised as engines of prosperity that concentrate and spatialise power, opportunities, knowledge and innovation. UN-Habitat describes the urban as the “privileged locus of prosperity” (2012, v), arguing that cities have greater scope and capacity to develop creative collaborations and implement new ideas for positive social change than national governments. However, prosperous cities do not automatically produce prosperous citizens. It is evident that cities intensify inequalities, vulnerabilities and risk in diverse ways, and urban scholars increasingly recognise that cities follow trajectories of development that are varied and contingent (Robinson 2006). Reframing prosperity, and reconsidering the complex ways in which cities can engender or inhibit equitable and sustainable forms of prosperity, opens up space for new forms of dialogue about what it means for people everywhere to prosper, asking how material wealth and other forms of value are differentially understood and prioritized; how equity and fairness are considered in relation to resources, space, opportunities and political voice; and how humans and non-humans can thrive alongside each other.

This article argues that prosperity is under-studied and under-theorized by social scientists. The authors call for a new research agenda that engages with the diversity of ideas about

what it means to live a prosperous life in different cities and under different conditions, and brings this comparative perspective into dialogue with the development of policies, metrics and interventions that will drive action on prosperity in the years to come. Describing empirical research undertaken with citizen scientists and communities in east London, the authors present findings that challenge the orthodox understanding of prosperity as material wealth, and argue that empirical research in diverse contexts must provide the basis for new theoretical insights if scholars and policymakers are to understand how situated cultural and political imaginaries, local circumstances and systemic interdependencies intersect to enable or inhibit prosperity.

UNDP - in concert with government, business and civil society around the globe - has made it clear that cities will play a critical role in generating and monitoring progress on prosperity and the SDGs (Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments 2016). This commitment to localising action signals new potential for a shift in the way prosperity is conceptualised – opening up avenues for a diversity of context-specific understandings and aspirations to emerge and shape how prosperity is envisaged in urban policy. Post-GDP discourse (Jackson 2017; Fioramonti 2017; Ostry 2016; Philipsen 2017; Joseph E. Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2010) - which since the 2008 financial crisis has sought to expand the measures of societal wealth and prosperity used by policymakers beyond economic growth and household incomes - has stimulated the development of new measures of subjective wellbeing (Huppert et al. 2009; Diener and Seligman 2004; Adler and Seligman 2016), happiness (Layard 2011; Dolan 2014; ‘World Happiness Report 2018’ 2018) and life satisfaction (OECD n.d.). Indicators are powerful technologies of governance (Shore and Wright 2015; Davis et al. 2012), which makes these developments significant in broadening debates about what economic activity should return to societies. To date much of this intellectual effort has been rather narrowly focused on wellbeing and happiness as individual states, overlooking wider contextual factors (Walker 2015; S. C. White 2015). Furthermore many of these new models and metrics continue to conceptualise prosperity in material terms and seek to correlate levels of happiness or wellbeing with per capita GDP, wealth and income; while approaches that model prosperity, such as UN-Habitat’s City Prosperity Initiative, work with universal conceptual frameworks that enable comparison at

the global, national or regional scale ('2018 Social Progress Index' 2018; UN-HABITAT 2012; The Legatum Institute 2017).

Prosperity itself remains under-studied outside the disciplinary confines of economics. Little research has been done to explore how prosperity is conceptualised differently across places, cultures and between generations, how historical interdependencies and past interventions shape diverse imaginaries of the good life, and in these diverse contexts, how citizen-led visions intersect with, or diverge from, state-led visions of prosperity and the policy frameworks, interventions and trade-offs they generate.¹ New methodological and theoretical approaches are needed that interrogate questions of power, place, contingency, subjectivity and difference, alongside analyses of material conditions, in order to fully account for the diversity of ideas about what it means to live a prosperous life, the multiple ways people act on these visions, and the situated effects of the systems, frameworks and conditions that shape opportunities. Furthermore, a new research agenda must demonstrate a commitment to bringing a diversity of concepts, lived experiences and types of transdisciplinary knowledge to the development of new models and theories of prosperity; a perspective that speaks to current debates in urban studies about the need for new forms of theory that are more global in purview – open to new voices, geographies and starting points that can better account for the diversity of urban experiences and processes found in twenty-first century cities (Robinson 2016; Ong 2011).

As a case in point, this paper examines what prosperity means in a specific context by presenting empirical data from community-based research involving citizen scientists and people living and working in east London – an area with a long history of deprivation and disadvantage relative to the rest of the capital. Since 2009, east London has been the focus of a coordinated strategic programme by national and local government to close the gap in performance and prospects between the wealthiest and poorest communities (Mayors Office 2011) and deliver shared prosperity as the legacy of London's 2012 Olympic Games. The research explored three questions: What does prosperity mean to people living and

¹ Notable exceptions being Fischer's ethnographic work exploring how localised notions of the good life shape individual consumption practices and wellbeing in Germany, Guatemala and the United States (2014).

working in east London? What enables and what inhibits prosperity in east London? What would a prosperity model and metrics look like if they were designed by citizens and communities based on local needs, aspirations and priorities? The paper is organized in three main sections: first, situating this research geographically and in relation to London's Olympic Legacy policy. Second, presenting empirical data about prosperity in east London, which provides the basis for new theoretical and conceptual insights developed in section three. And third, demonstrating how community-led research generates a context-specific 'prosperity model', which provides the basis for developing new metrics that reflect issues of specific value and concern to individuals and communities in east London.

2. Prosperity in east London: citizen science and local prosperity pathways

“The facts remain that people in (East London) earn less, have fewer qualifications, are more likely to be unemployed, live in poor and overcrowded housing, be a victim of crime and die younger than an average Londoner. This has been true since Victorian times and has blighted the lives of successive generations whilst at the same time holding back the performance of the East London economy.”

(London's Growth Boroughs 2015)

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 200 years. In 2007 London successfully won the bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games based on the legacy promise of social and economic regeneration for east London, where the Games would be hosted (MacRury and Poynter 2009). The Mayor's Office and London's six Olympic host boroughs² adopted the Convergence Framework as the strategic policy agenda to guide legacy investments; the goal of Convergence being to close the gap in prospects and prosperity between people living in the poorest and wealthiest areas of the city within 20-years of the Games (Mayors Office 2011). Development-led regeneration in and around

² London's Olympic host boroughs are Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham, and Greenwich. After the Olympic Games the host boroughs were renamed Growth Boroughs.

the Olympic Park is the vehicle to drive this transformation. By 2030 up to 10,000 new homes in five new neighbourhoods, a new Cultural and Educational Quarter and commercial office space to attract major cultural institutions and employers, public realm improvements, schools, shops, community centres and infrastructure will have been provided in the Olympic Park.³ However, patterns of urban development in London and other global cities demonstrate a highly uneven distribution of gains from major investments in the built environment, with low-income neighbourhoods disproportionately affected by rising land and property prices (Imrie, Lees, and Raco 2009) and little evidence that development-led regeneration delivers wider socio-economic benefits to communities ('Estate Renewal Review' 2015). Progress towards Convergence is measured using 22 proxy indicators. Data from 2015/16 reported showed that improvements in east London's physical environment and local economy are not translating into improved prosperity for local residents in several key areas: improving median earnings for full-time workers has not been achieved, while gaps have increased between east London and the rest of the capital on employment rates, qualifications for the working age population, childhood obesity and household overcrowding (London's Growth Boroughs 2015).

In 2015 the authors, as part of a research team from the Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) at UCL, designed qualitative field research in three neighbourhoods surrounding east London's Olympic Park (*the Prosperity in East London Study*) to examine prosperity - as a concept, lived experience and policy goal. The aim was to assess prosperity in context and to identify if, and how, prosperity strategies developed by policymakers converge and diverge from lived experience. The research explored three questions: What does prosperity mean to people living and working in east London? What enables and what inhibits prosperity in east London? What would a prosperity model and metrics look like if they were designed by citizens and communities based on local needs, aspirations and priorities? This section of the paper describes the research methodology.

Research methodology

³ The Legacy Communities Scheme is detailed in a planning application (11/9062/OUTODA - submitted by the Olympic Development Agency in 2011) and several supporting documents, which can be accessed at the Planning Register ('Planning Register - Legacy Communities Scheme' 2011)

The *Prosperity in East London* study involved field research undertaken between June 2015 and March 2016. Qualitative and ethnographic research methods were used to examine context-specific meanings and practices of prosperity in east London. Working with citizen scientists was an important component of the research. Data was collected by a team of 10 academics and 10 citizen scientists. The citizen scientists lived and/or worked in the three neighbourhood pilot sites and were recruited through a publicly-advertised process. Selection was based on 'knowledge' of, and interest in, the neighbourhood pilot sites and social and economic change in east London. No prior research experience was necessary as a training programme was provided at the beginning of the project, which included research ethics, research methods, and data collection, management and analysis. The citizen science cohort comprised five women and five men aged between 18 and 60 from different cultural, ethnic, social and professional backgrounds. The cohort included a community worker, a learning and inclusion expert, a youth leader, an artist, a self-employed music publicist, a stay-at-home parent, a tailor, and two people who worked in cultural industries. Seven of the citizen scientists had lived and/or worked in the neighbourhoods for most or all of their lives, the other three had lived or worked locally for between one and three-years. The citizen scientists brought diverse forms of local knowledge to the project including perspectives on the effects and implications of social and economic change based on experiences of growing up or living locally; embodied knowledge of how local space is used; and insights into local decision making. These forms of knowledge added depth and nuance to 'official' accounts of life in the neighbourhood based on public statistics and government reports.

The two main research methods reported on in this paper are semi-structured interviews and group discussions, of which interviews comprise the majority of the data (see figure 1). Other data including walking ethnographies, observation of public space usage, and participatory methods used at community events - are not reported on in this paper. Research participants were recruited through outreach activities with community-based organisations (such as community groups, housing associations, residents groups, civil society organisations, public agencies) and activities to promote the research in public spaces (such as community centres, sports centres and cafés). Interviews were also

conducted with public officials, civil society organisations, and businesses working in each of the neighbourhoods. Interviews and group discussions were recorded with consent and later transcribed for analysis. All data collected has been pseudonymized. Over 400 qualitative accounts exploring prosperity as an idea and practice were collected by the research team; of these, 256 were included in the final analysis. A grounded approach to data analysis was adopted: data was open-coded by the research team and responses were clustered into themes to reflect general categories of understanding and experience. Sentiment analysis was then applied to the thematic data to identify whether a single theme, such as social inclusion or the quality of local work, was described in positive, negative or neutral terms, and whether patterns in the distribution of sentiment were observable across the three research sites. Frequency analysis of thematic data was undertaken to identify the issues most commonly discussed in each research site.

[Figure 1: Data points by research method for *Prosperity in east London*. Source: IGP, 2015]

Research sites

The Olympic Park borders four London Boroughs - Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. The majority of development related to the Olympic legacy is currently taking place in Hackney and Newham; three small-area research sites in these London boroughs were selected as research sites – East Village and Stratford in Newham, and Hackney Wick in Hackney (see figure 2). Each research site has a different spatial and temporal relationship to the Olympic legacy regeneration programme – East Village is the first new Olympic neighbourhood; Hackney Wick is experiencing considerable new residential and commercial development that is attracting new residents and businesses to the area; Stratford is yet to experience any significant investment in housing and regeneration. The sites were chosen because they are illustrative of different ‘types’ of east London neighbourhood – East Village is a new, planned neighbourhood in the Olympic Park, broadly representative of development-led regeneration programmes that are attracting new residents to east London; Stratford and Hackney Wick are established neighbourhood centres with a mix of housing, commercial and public spaces. Hackney Wick has developed a strong identity as the artistic and creative centre of east London. The neighbourhood has

more than 600 studios and the highest concentration of businesses in the Olympic Park legacy regeneration area.⁴ Consequently, the area has distinct population groups - resident artists, employees in creative industries, remaining light industries, boat dwellers who live on the canals, and people living on the Trowbridge Estate, one of the largest established areas of residential housing in the neighbourhood.

[Figure 2: Map of research sites for the *Prosperity in east London* study. Source: IGP, 2015]

The three research sites are 'typical' of east London in as much as they are super-diverse - reflecting a diversification of diversity (Vertovec 2007) in terms of ethnicity, countries of origin and a multiplicity of other significant variables, such as legal and socio-economic status, that affect where and how people live together. Each has a population that is socially, ethnically, and culturally diverse, with both long-established communities and high-rates of population change. 2011 Census data shows that 55% of Newham's population were born outside of the UK,⁵ while population data published by Hackney Council shows 89 different languages are spoken in the borough.⁶ Each neighbourhood research site has a long, but particular, history of deprivation linked to processes of de-industrialisation and migration, and each is experiencing rapid social, economic and material changes associated with the Olympic Legacy and wider processes of urban development. At the borough-level median household incomes are rising and deprivation levels are falling in Hackney and Newham. However, borough-level data obscures high rates of deprivation and disadvantage that are spatially concentrated in particular neighbourhoods such as the research sites included in this project. Hackney Wick is in the top two per cent most deprived wards in London and the top five per cent most deprived wards in England (LB Hackney Policy and Partnerships 2015). At a borough level Hackney has the second highest proportion of working-age people claiming workless benefits and the second highest rate of childhood poverty in London; it is one of the least affordable London boroughs for housing (ibid).

⁴ Hackney Wick contains 448 businesses, 213 of which are within the arts and culture sector, this represents 98% of all such businesses in the Legacy Corporation's development area. Hackney Wick Neighbourhood Centre Masterplan, London Legacy Development Corporation ('Hackney Wick Neighbourhood Centre - Local History and Heritage' 2015)

⁵ Newham Census 2011

⁶ Hackney Council April 2016 Facts & Figures Leaflet

Newham has some of the highest rates of unemployment, low pay and child poverty in the capital ('London's Poverty Profile 2015' 2015). The strong connection between place and deprivation in east London provided the rationale for a place-based research methodology as opposed to examining prosperity in relation to specific population cohorts or cultural groups. A small-area research site (roughly 250 x 250 metres) was selected in each neighbourhood for the purpose of gathering highly-localised data. The rationale for working in small-area geographies was to test the hypothesis that different neighbourhoods would have different 'prosperity narratives' requiring different forms of action. There is growing recognition that such localised approaches can help policymakers and citizens effectively engage with context-specific social challenges such as the ways in which spatial concentrations of advantage and disadvantage intersect with, and reinforce forms of inequality (OECD 2014a).

The next section presents empirical accounts of prosperity – focusing on the conceptual distinctions people make between the foundations of prosperity (the conditions that support the *possibility* of a good life) and the actions, practices and aspirations that constitute the lived experience of prosperity.

3. Prosperity in east London: local meanings and lived experience

“How can we have a prosperous life for everyone, people of all classes? The situation is precarious for people around here. The combination of unaffordable housing, zero hours contracts, portfolio careers ... people have no security. Jobs are not good quality ... this is a toxic mix.”

Frances, a professional in her 50s working in the voluntary sector,
has lived in Hackney for 20-years

This extract from a lengthy conversation with Frances, a long-term resident who owns her Hackney home, articulates a connection between secure livelihoods and inclusion in processes of change and the social and economic life of the city that pre-occupied the majority of research participants. When invited to discuss what prosperity means to them,

and to identify the factors that are most important to their own prosperity, the most common responses people offered were: a secure livelihood - described as a combination of secure, regular and good quality work that provides a reliable and adequate income; affordable, secure and good quality housing in a safe neighbourhood; the capacity to remain resident in neighbourhoods experiencing rapid social and economic transformation; feeling part of the local community; having a place in the changes underway in east London both as individuals and feeling that other local people are included in processes of change; opportunities for education and self-development; a secure future for young people; other local people and local businesses benefiting from investment in east London; and living in a healthy and safe environment (see figure 3).

[Figure 3: What does prosperity mean to you? Most common responses from research participants. Source: IGP, 2015]

Foundations of prosperity

Material security and stability - described by research participants as a secure livelihood and secure and affordable housing - are understood to be vitally important aspects of prosperity. Yet less than five people from the 256 accounts this analysis draws on defined prosperity solely in terms of material wealth or the pursuit of wealth. Instead the overwhelming majority of people described how a secure livelihood and secure housing are tightly interwoven with social ties and a broad sense of social and economic inclusion to provide the foundations for a prosperous life. Many individuals distinguished between the foundations for a prosperous life (material security, strong social support, and feeling included in the social and economic life of the city), which were discussed as a potential upon which to build a prosperous life; and prosperity as the actions and practices that constitute living a good life, which include being able to take up opportunities as well as the confidence to plan for the future.

Trevor, a long-term Stratford resident in his 50s, described this as the difference between “getting by” and “doing well”. From Trevor’s perspective, having a secure livelihood and affordable home in a neighbourhood where he had grown up and hoped his children would

stay provided the basic building blocks for his family. Yet he, like other participants, made a distinction between basic material and social needs and having the opportunities to “do well”, as Trevor describes: “doing well ... well you know, it’s about living the good life ... about being able to choose the job you take – a decent job. Having time to do something in the community, spend time with family and friends, take a break, have a hobby, feel like you’re part of what’s going on. It’s not just about money.”

What Trevor describes is a model of prosperity that incorporates both a multi-dimensional imaginary of the good life, which accounts for subjective, social and material conditions and aspirations, and at the same time reflects a dualistic interaction between those foundational conditions that provide the basis for a prosperous life and the opportunities to self-determine and pursue that vision of prosperity. This perspective, which was discussed by research participants of varying ages and social and cultural backgrounds, as the quotes below illustrate, is closely aligned with the concept of prosperity as an ethical project in pursuit of human flourishing and the good life. In contemporary Western thought this perspective is most commonly associated with Aristotle’s ethics (Cassiers 2014; S. A. White 1992), in which prosperity is derived from states of *being* (happiness, pleasure, wellbeing, vitality), *having* (affluence and abundance from access to external material goods), and *acting in the world* (knowledge, honour and self-esteem originating from civic participation and social relationships). In this sense, prosperity is a qualitative condition that locates individual aspirations and practices in a higher-order system of ideas and beliefs about the nature of being, the value of material assets over social relations, continuity over change, that generate and shape opportunities (Walker 2015; Sardar 2008; Appadurai 2004).

“Now I have a family prosperity is about having a healthy, happy child and being healthy myself so I can look after my family. Before it was about me! My car, my phone ... now it’s about good community.”

David, late 20s, lives in Stratford

“Prosperity is feeling safe, knowing your neighbours, having opportunities - London offers better opportunities than other places - and having time for family.”

Maria, early 30s, lives with her partner and daughter in Hackney Wick

“Prosperity is different for everyone but for me it means we can feel at home, the kids can grow and learn, we feel safe and everyone in the community sort of feeds off each other.”

Ben, early 40s, lives with his wife and two children in Hackney

Local prosperity narratives

A high proportion of participants felt they were living with multiple forms of insecurity and instability that undermined their opportunities, and those of neighbours and family, to prosper. When describing these conditions research participants spoke of the localised effects of national and global forces that shape prosperity in ways that people have little direct control over. Frances’s reference to the “toxic mix” of casualised labour and rapidly rising housing costs illustrates this point and captures the insecurity experienced by study participants from Hackney Wick. Prosperity in Hackney Wick, as Frances recognises, is shaped by connections to other places and centres of power that include planning and policy decisions taken by central government, international investments in the UK property market, a globalized trend towards the casualization of labour that shapes local job markets, and the presence of Europe’s largest creative community, which attracts regeneration investment and a new and more affluent population to east London. In this sense, opportunities and experiences of prosperity at the individual and neighbourhood level are configured by the intersection between context-specific conditions - such as east London’s post-industrial landscape, history of inward migration and legacy of social housing provision - and social, economic and political forces operating at different scales. Individuals view their prosperity and that of neighbours and local communities through multiple lenses that connect people and places to wider economic and social systems. Consequently, each neighbourhood had distinctly observable prosperity narratives. People in Stratford spoke of insecurity in similar terms to those in Hackney Wick, yet identified how young people in the neighbourhood are disproportionately affected by uncertainty. Insecure work and unaffordable housing make a future in the neighbourhood an unlikely prospect. The possibility of being priced out of neighbourhoods they have grown up in also raises the possibility of losing access to local support networks.

Two prosperity narratives emerged from research in Hackney Wick, reflecting the distinct population groups in the neighbourhood. People who are part of the area's artistic and creative industries connected their feelings of prosperity to a strong sense of identity and belonging derived from the neighbourhood as a creative community with distinct social and economic practices such as strong community support networks, circular and alternative economies, food growing, entrepreneurialism and numerous active forms of civic participation. Hackney Wick's post-industrial urban fabric provides scope for various fluid spatial practices including temporary artist and performance space and live/work studios as common modes of dwelling. Concerns about neighbourhood regeneration displacing the artists and creative community are prevalent among this group, however, they also recognize the valuable contribution Hackney Wick's distinct creative identity offers the Olympic Park and are keen to have an active role in shaping future decisions about planning, economic and cultural development. Consequently, community life and civic and democratic participation are important aspects of prosperity to people in Hackney Wick's creative communities who expressed a degree of optimism about their place in future changes because of current levels of participation in decision-making. People living in other areas of Hackney Wick did not share this optimism or the same sense of identity and belonging to the neighbourhood. Like people living in Stratford, they expressed anxieties about their current and future security and feelings of exclusion from processes of change. Interviews with people living in East Village also identified a locally-specific prosperity narrative, which is shaped in large part by the experience of living in a new community. The next section describes the ways in which material and social landscapes have significance for individual and collective feelings of prosperity.

Affect and prosperity

East Village residents are pioneers; the first wave of people to experience the Olympic legacy vision of sustainable forms of living that promise health, wellbeing and quality of life. Roshni is one of our research participants from East Village, a diverse group that includes families from Mauritius, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, India, Poland, Germany by way of Malaysia, and people who have relocated from other Olympic boroughs and all over London and the

south east of England. Roshni describes herself as one of the first people to move to the “Village” where she and her partner, both in their late 20s, privately rent an apartment. She recounts her first visit to the Olympic Park before her son was born describing how she knew straight away it was somewhere she wanted to bring up her family: “This is where I could picture myself with kids ... I loved the fact that it was green and I thought it would be perfect for my son.” She ticks off a long list of things that make life in East Village different from other areas of Stratford: green space in the city, good quality housing, clean and safe streets, fresh air, connections to other parts of London, feeling part of a community, Olympic sports facilities on the doorstep, a distinct identity. For Roshni, the high-quality living conditions in East Village make a difference to how she feels about everyday life and about her family’s prospects. Her sense of prosperity and living a good life is enhanced by feeling part of “somewhere and something new”, which she argues, gives community spirit a greater significance. Other East Village residents expressed a similar sentiment, describing how the new housing, abundant green space, and being part of a new community are more significant than their financial status in shaping how prosperous they feel:

“I was inspired by the blank canvas ... being pioneers we know everyone in the building and keep meeting people. It’s quite difficult to explain ... the interaction is different somehow here ... something about being in a new place makes people behave differently.”

Phil, early 40s, privately rents an apartment with his partner

Stewart describes affect as the potency of different forces to animate and intensify experience and influence the circulation of public feeling (Stewart 2007). Research participants in East Village appear to be describing a positive feedback loop between people and place, 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. A feedback loop between people and place is also evident in Stratford, however, here the area's dilapidated public realm and poor-quality housing animate a sense of exclusion from wider processes of social and economic change. People used phrases like "we are left behind" or "regeneration is passing us by" to describe how the contrast between newly regenerated areas of the Olympic Park, with high quality housing and green

spaces, and a run-down neighbourhood public realm and housing stock compounds feelings of alienation and exclusion from processes of change.

While East Village residents recognize the neighbourhood's high quality environment contributes to their sense of prosperity, it is also widely acknowledged that they are choosing to pay high living costs in return for a good quality of life. Mark lives with his wife and children in a townhouse. He describes himself as a serial entrepreneur who runs his own businesses and has established several community projects in East Village. Mark's home is classified as affordable housing although he explains the rent and management charges are high compared to other places he has lived. He describes the choice to live in East Village as a "prosperity trade-off":

"I feel like I'm living a prosperous life but it's not sustainable. Personally, it's hard to make it sustainable because I pay such a premium to live here ... If prosperity means saving for holidays and saving for a pension then it is not a prosperous place ... but if prosperity means a first-class education for the kids, healthy food, access to good places for health and wellbeing, somewhere safe ... then you can get on if you can afford to live here."

Mark's perspective is echoed by other people living in East Village who explain they are business owners and entrepreneurs, or in well paid professional jobs, yet find it challenging to afford to live in the neighbourhood. Interviews with Luke and Will, both in their late 20s and living in private rented housing in East Village, reveal the variety of strategies they employ to cope with the costs of living including sub-letting bedrooms, sometimes relocating to a neighbour's sofa in order to let an entire apartment on AirBnB, and in more extreme circumstances, changing apartments as often as every six months to take advantage of discounted rental promotions. They describe these practices as widespread among friends and neighbours who are motivated to trade affordability for the broad sense of prosperity and living well that East Village offers. However, the viability of this mode of dwelling is questionable; apart from the inconvenience of moving frequently people who value the sense of neighbourliness and community in East Village feel it is threatened by a rapidly changing population. Lucy, also in her late 20s and an enthusiast for life in East

Village, says: “We are buying into a prosperous lifestyle that can’t be sustained. It’s great but no-one still expects to be here in two years time.”

4. Theorizing and measuring prosperity: towards an ethics of diversity

There is broad agreement among research participants that prosperity rests on strong material and social foundations, which in east London include a secure livelihood, secure and affordable housing, social support networks and inclusion in the social and economic life of the city. Thereafter the ways in which research participants describe what prosperity means to them multiply to encompass a diversity of meanings, opportunities and practices. These include forms of self-determination and personal development - from formal education to opportunities for lifelong learning, rights and freedoms to participate fully in society; engagements with the environment and natural world from clean neighbourhoods and access to green space, to clean air and growing food; trust in the state and equitable access to public services; choice, agency and influence over decisions affecting our futures; and widespread recognition that time with family and friends, feelings of belonging, identifying with communities of place and interest. It is evident from this diversity of perspectives that prosperity is seen as a multi-dimensional concept. There is not a straightforward relationship between material, social and symbolic domains - rather people describe complex inter-dependencies and relationalities between them. Furthermore, fairness and equity are important dimensions of prosperity shaping both individual experiences and perceptions of wider systemic processes. In this study, a concern with fairness was expressed in terms of a desire for inclusive processes of change and improvement in east London: the hope that low-income working class households and businesses will benefit from economic change and investments in the built environment, and have a voice and a place alongside higher-income professional households in east London’s post-Olympic legacy. Furthermore these accounts indicate how prosperity is seen as fluid and relational; not a fixed or stable condition but negotiated continuously in response to new challenges and through temporal trade-offs, such as those described by East Village residents who choose short-term quality of life over long-term affordability.

The perspectives presented in this paper challenge the orthodox definition of prosperity as material wealth. Furthermore they demonstrate that prosperity is more than an aggregate of individual well-being and the sum of individual wealth (Beinhocker and Hanauer 2014). Wellbeing, as other authors argue (S. C. White 2015; Gasper 2010), has come to be defined predominantly as a subjective and psychological state for which individuals are primarily responsible. While it is evident that prosperity has subjective dimensions, the accounts in this paper demonstrate that prosperity – as imaginary and lived experience - connects the individual to known and unknown others through social, political, economic and ecological frameworks and inter-generational obligations that operate on dramatically different scales and temporalities. Visions of what constitutes prosperity and a good life are bound up with the lives, histories, and futures of others, and in this sense, bear on the question of equality within and between societies in material ways: for example, relationships between individual aspirations and societal needs, prosperity in the present as opposed to that of future generations, and associations between human and ecological systems. In this sense, prosperity is better understood as an ethical project that is multi-dimensional, relational and multi-scalar; an observation that is significant in expanding the conceptual boundaries of prosperity and delineating between wellbeing as individual and subjective and prosperity as a relational and collective concept. These insights illustrate the importance of new empirical work as the basis for theorizing prosperity and raise a number of implications for both research and policymaking. Foremost is the importance of bringing an ethics of diversity to efforts to conceptualise and theorise prosperity, which in turn means that a diversity of pathways to prosperity must also be recognised “because there is no single route to prosperity, there can be no single economic model of development” (Leach, Raworth, and Rockström 2013). Policies, interventions and investments intent on creating prosperity, such as global, regional and local initiatives driven by the SDGs, will change fundamentally if prosperity is recognized as diverse and multiple and approached as a dynamic relation between people and places that takes forms in multiple ways. For this reason, more nuanced approaches to the institutions, public policy frameworks, economic models and investment strategies that are designed to pursue prosperity, and the metrics used to determine how prosperity is measured, are required that pay close attention to situated understandings of prosperity – what it means and the dynamics between systemic and locally-specific factors that shape local outcomes. As other authors have argued in

relation to poverty, wellbeing and quality of life (Giuntoli et al. 2014; Staveren et al. 2014; Quick 2015; Satterthwaite 2003; Satterthwaite and Mitlin 2014) situated, multi-dimensional prosperity models must be developed in partnership with local communities.

Acknowledging local perspectives that are situated in real-world conditions and constraints will enable policymakers to pay attention to the processes and conditions that enable or inhibit prosperity even when they challenge established ways of thinking. As this research from east London demonstrates, interrogating prosperity as a lived experience through a place-based lens reveals the gap between standard prosperity indicators that guide policymaking (e.g. GDP, household income, job growth and employment) and the unintended consequences they create. Indicators are powerful technologies of governance and the wrong measures can lead to misguided policy with high social and economic costs, as Stiglitz et al identify: "In the quest to increase GDP, we may end up with a society in which citizens are worse off." (2010, xviii). Such an outcome is evident in east London where GVA, household incomes and workforce job growth have been modest but consistent since 2015 [London's Economic Outlook Spring 2018] while employment levels are reported to be at a new record high of 75% [London's Economic Outlook Spring 2018]. Hackney and Newham are the London Boroughs with the highest reported proportional increases in median household income [Greater London Authority, Household Income Estimates July 2015]. Yet what appears to be rising prosperity in conventional terms is not translating into rising prosperity in local terms. As the experiences and perspectives presented here indicate, people in Hackney Wick and Stratford describe growing pressures from insecure and low-wage work, and residents in the three neighbourhoods are affected by rising housing costs, factors that together are putting individuals and communities under considerable stress. This research suggests that what it means to prosper and live a good life for people living in Hackney Wick, East Village and Stratford is, in large part, in tension with the development-led Olympic Legacy strategy that is intended to deliver prosperity for all. Local experiences and dynamics suggest the mechanisms intended to generate prosperity – improvements in the built environment, new commercial and retail space to attract institutions and employers to east London, new housing and neighbourhoods - are not yet creating inclusive and sustainable opportunities for existing communities. Instead, rising land values, increasing commercial rents and housing costs are creating instability, even as they improve the quality of the built environment, infrastructure and housing.

Local meanings = sticky measures?

Public confidence and trust in government are casualties of policymaking based on indicators that do not resonate with lived experience (Seaford and Berry 2014).

Deteriorating trust in government is a global trend. In Britain, the proportion of people who say they trust governments "to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party" declined from 38% in 1986 to 18% in 2013 (NatCen 2013) and arguably in the context of Brexit is likely to decline further. Trust in government is similarly low in the US (Pew Research Center 2017) and has diminished in OECD countries since the 2008 financial crisis (OECD 2017). The OECD calls for greater transparency, more open and inclusive policymaking processes, and more attention to be paid to citizens' perceptions of fairness in decision-making as part of efforts to rebuild trust in government (OECD 2017). It is critical thereby that as the SDGs focus government attention on achieving prosperity for people everywhere that local communities have a voice in identifying what prosperity means in different contexts, shaping targeted responses that support local needs and aspirations, and monitoring progress towards these visions. In this context 'sticky measures' – prosperity indicators that capture the things that matter in ways that are meaningful and allow for action – will have a crucial role in enabling communities to hold decision makers to account.

This research has demonstrated that a qualitative, community-based approach to investigating prosperity in context reveals perspectives and experiences that challenge the orthodox definition of prosperity as material wealth and the associated metrics that dominate policymaking. Examining prosperity in context was only one element of the research however, an associated objective was to explore what prosperity indicators would measure if they were created by citizens and based on lived experience, rather than by experts working with universal concepts and frameworks. To this end, the research team and citizen scientists coded, analysed and organized the qualitative data to identify the factors and conditions understood to constitute prosperity. Inevitably, this analysis revealed conflicting opinions and experiences in the data both within and between the three research sites. These tensions were handled by retaining the high-level themes that

incorporated both negative and positive sentiments or conflicting perspectives on how different thematic factors worked together. Thematic data was then clustered to produce a number of general categories of experience and understanding. This analysis identified 15 categories that were described by participants in all research sites - to varying degrees - as essential or important to their prosperity and that of their families, neighbours, friends, and wider communities (see table 1). The 15 categories were organized to reflect the way participants had described interdependencies and overlaps between different aspects of prosperity to produce a 'prosperity model' with five, high-level dimensions (see figure 4). This mode of organizing the data breaks down artificial distinctions between social, economic and environmental domains of life that characterize governance frameworks and public policy measures.

[Table 1: Categorization of factors that are essential / important to prosperity. IGP, 2016]

[Figure 4: IGP Prosperity Model, 2017]

The authors do not claim that what constitutes prosperity in these east London neighbourhoods is either fixed or stable, or, that the same combination of factors in another place would create the same conditions. Instead, it offers a conceptual prosperity model that reflects how situated conditions, practices and meanings interact in everyday life, and provides a framework from which to develop a set of values-based metrics. The east London prosperity model has been translated into a basket of subjective and objective measures that take account of lived experience, future aspirations, local conditions and systemic processes, and can measure prosperity in terms that are meaningful and actionable. This approach advances the recommendations made by Stiglitz et al. (2010) who make the case for multiple new metrics (a dashboard of "replicable subjective assessments" (2010, xxiv)) as the best possible way to supplement GDP and account for societal complexity and the relationships between economic structures and non-economic factors. A face-to-face household survey in five east London neighbourhoods was carried out in 2017 providing quantitative data about levels of prosperity as understood in local terms, which will be published in 2019. It is beyond the scope of this paper to summarise the survey findings, however, the qualitative research and subsequent household survey offer a methodology

for developing locally specific, values-based prosperity metrics that could be adopted in other places and contexts.

5. Conclusion

How prosperity is conceptualised and measured is more than an intellectual exercise. This is not simply because indicators and metrics have powerful knowledge and governance effects. Fields of action, and thereby possibilities for change, are limited or enabled by the concepts and language that citizens, policy makers, governments and academics use to theorize, act on and measure prosperity. Taking east London as a case, this paper demonstrates that locating prosperity – as an imaginary, policy framework and lived experience – in a specific place and time reveals something of the real-world dynamics that create opportunities and constraints to be negotiated as people pursue pathways to prosperity. Furthermore, new empirical data offers conceptual and theoretical insights with significance for research and policymaking. This research has shown that prosperity is diverse, multi-dimensional and multi-scalar – qualities that are significant if prosperity as a global goal is to be coherently and concretely linked to local solutions and operationalized by communities, politicians, policymakers and business leaders. Prosperity understood as the pursuit of a good life – a secure livelihood, good quality work, functioning public services, choice, opportunity, political freedoms, inter-generational justice – is not captured by universal models and frameworks that generate the kind of aggregate data currently available to policymakers (Hepburn et al. 2014; OECD 2014a; The Legatum Institute 2017). As yet, it is far from clear how economic growth can be marshalled in support of this broad and diverse notion of prosperity (Hepburn et al. 2014; Raworth 2017; Jackson 2017). It is evident however that developing visions of prosperity with and for communities, and mapping out pathways for achieving those visions, will bridge the gap between expert-led knowledge and lived experience in ways that are likely to spotlight particular issues and help promote policy change and the accountability of local and national governments – a downward and horizontal shift in power that Katz and Nowak argue is driving innovation in city governance, finance and inclusive change (2017). As an increasingly important public issue, mapping, shaping and monitoring pathways to prosperity should be explored through active deliberation and co-production of knowledge with citizens, as well as renewed

academic theorizing (Drews and van den Bergh 2016). Acknowledging that prosperity is diverse and multiple means that it matters less how prosperity is defined than the deliberative methods that are used to uncover its context-specific meanings.

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Table captions

Table 1: Categorization of factors that are essential / important for a prosperous life in east London. IGP, 2016.

Tables

Table 1

WHAT DOES PROSPERITY MEAN?	EXPLANATIONS FROM PROSPERITY IN EAST LONDON PILOT STUDY DATA
Good quality and secure jobs	A secure livelihood - secure and well-paid work; work satisfaction; equality at work; scope for career progression; work / life balance; feeling part of the economic life of the neighbourhood/city.
Household security and affordability	Secure, affordable and good quality housing; a mix of housing tenures; likelihood of being able to stay in the neighbourhood; living without financial stress.
Inclusion and fairness	Social, financial and digital inclusion; economic fairness; able to access services, work and education; feeling included and safe in the neighbourhood; access to local support networks and care; feeling part of the economic life of the neighbourhood/city.
Local value creation	Strong and inclusive local economies; opportunities for local organizations, businesses and neighbourhoods to share in value generated by wider processes of change; alternative economic models, sharing and circular economies.
Healthy bodies and healthy minds	Mental, physical and social health; access to health and care services; access to informal support and care; local support networks; access to open space; civic participation; life satisfaction; personal safety.
Healthy, safe and secure neighbourhoods	Decent and secure housing; clean air; safe streets and neighbourhoods; road safety; community safety; access to open and green space.

WHAT DOES PROSPERITY MEAN?	EXPLANATIONS FROM PROSPERITY IN EAST LONDON PILOT STUDY DATA
Childhood and adolescence	Early childhood development support; affordable childcare; good quality education; childhood and adolescent wellbeing and health; support for adolescent transitions; pathways to work, education and training for young people.
Good quality basic education	Access to good basic quality education for children and young people; informal and community learning; access to space, sports and culture.
Lifelong learning	Opportunities for formal and informal lifelong learning for children young people, adults and older people; volunteering and community participation.
Autonomy and freedom	Secure personal freedoms and equalities; access to opportunities; time and space to try new things; work / life balance; lifelong learning and personal development.
Social relationships	Feeling included in society and social life of the community; time to spend with family and friends; connections with neighbours; involvement in interest groups; access to local support networks.
Sense of community	Feeling a sense of belonging to local community; neighbours to talk to; access to support networks in the neighbourhood; feeling pride in the neighbourhood; community safety; feeling people will support each other in times of need.
Identities and culture	Feeling secure with cultural, ethnic, religious, personal identities in the neighbourhood; opportunities to participate in cultural life of the area and to pursue participation in cultural / religious activities; feeling part of the cultural life of the community.
Political inclusion	Right to political participation and political representation; feelings of inclusion in political decision-making.

WHAT DOES PROSPERITY MEAN?	EXPLANATIONS FROM PROSPERITY IN EAST LONDON PILOT STUDY DATA
Voice and influence	Opportunities to influence local decision-making; feeling like participation makes a difference; opportunities to make a productive contribution to future of local communities.

Figure captions

Figure 1: Data points by research method for *Prosperity in east London*. Source: IGP, 2015

Figure 2: Map of research sites for the *Prosperity in east London* study. Source: IGP, 2015

Figure 3: What does prosperity mean to you? Most common responses from research participants. Source: IGP, 2015

Figure 4: IGP Prosperity Model, 2017

Figures

Figure 1

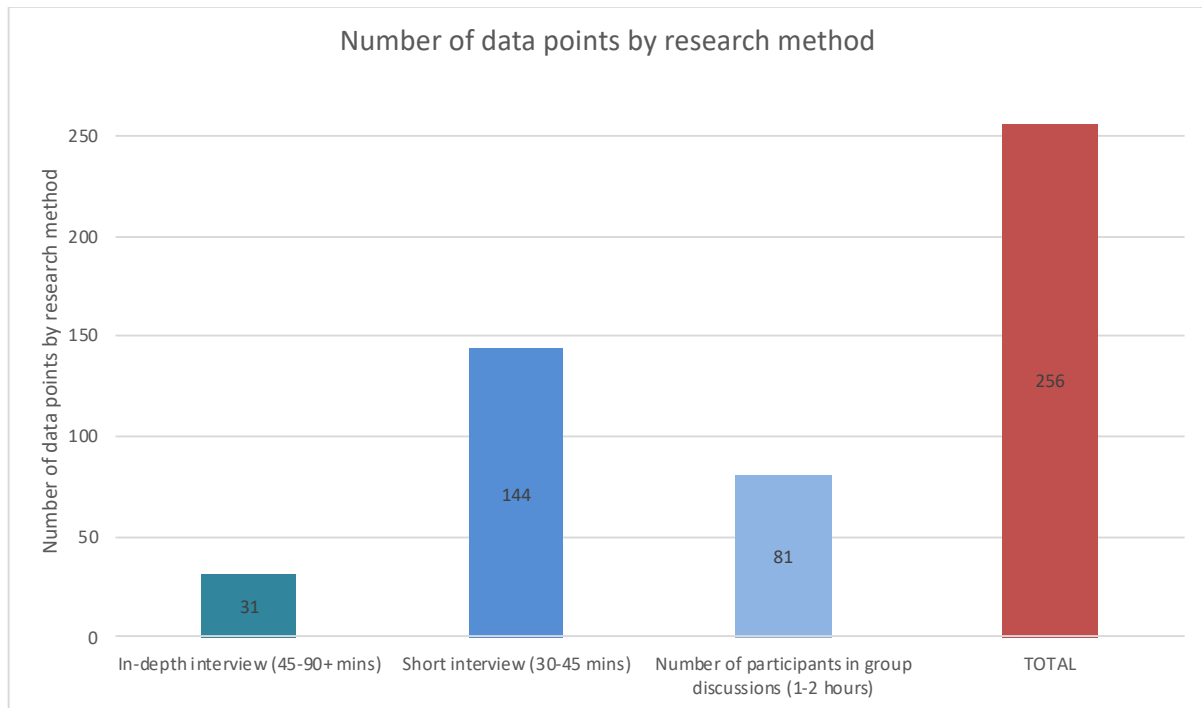


Figure 2

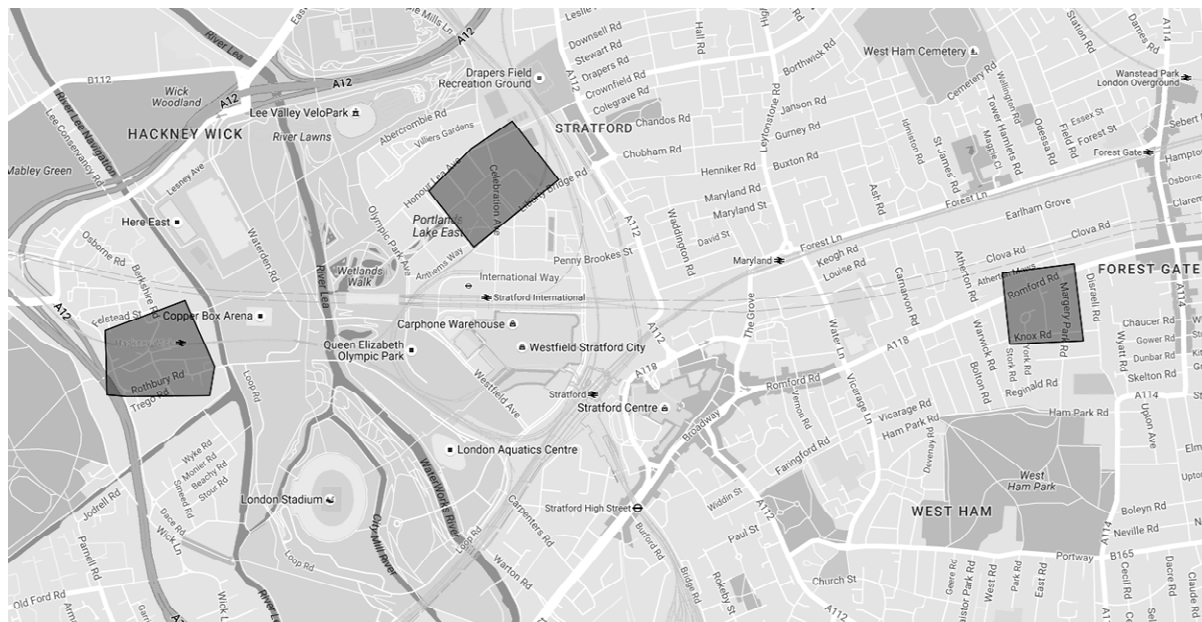


Figure 3

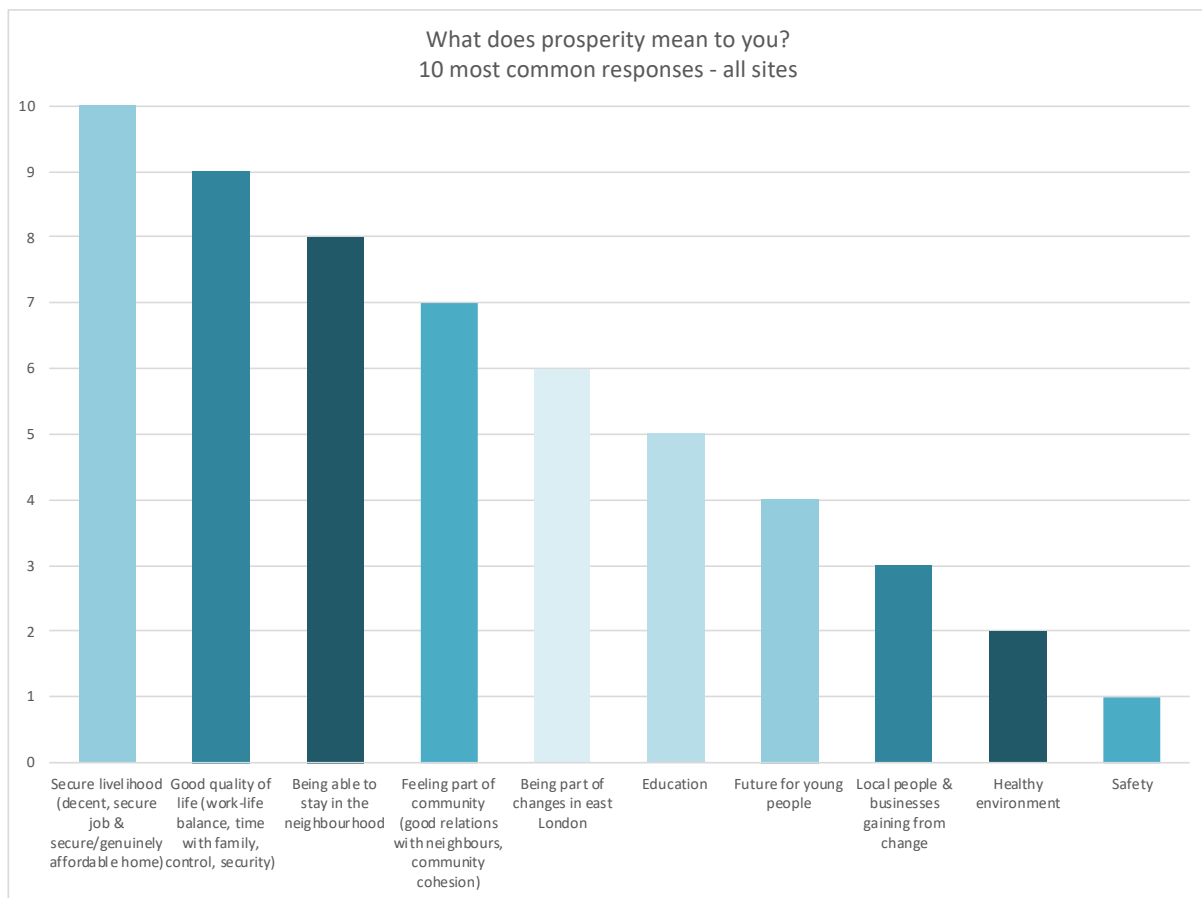


Figure 4

