

Exploring sense of belonging, identity and place within the Derbyshire Peak District

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The Project

Stage One

1. To explore how people 'identify' with where they work & live in rural communities within the DPD
2. To investigate the impact of key events such as Brexit & Covid have had on this sense of belonging
3. To gather views from those with formal responsibility for 'place-making' in the region



The Context

Living in The Peak District

Population – in excess of 800,000 – a 0.6% increase since 2019 but decline in children aged 0-14 years and 15-24 years.

22% of inhabitants in the county 65 years and over – forecast to rise to 27% by 2043. Median age: 46 years (compared to 40 years in England)

Housing costs – vary across the region – mean house cost: £288,000 Derbyshire Dales to £152,500 in Bolsover

Deprivation – 22 out of 491 small areas in the DPD fall within the 10% most deprived in England. Most in the North-East (former coalfield areas)

Migration- 31,900 moving into the area v 25,500 moving out but at 3.2% coming in, half the average growth of other areas in England more broadly

Crime – one of the safest places in England but wide regional variations e.g., 89.2% crime rate per 1,000 of population in Chesterfield v 45.2% in the Derbyshire Dales

Health and wellbeing – varies across regions. Linked to levels of deprivation

Sampling and Participants

- 28 qualitative interviews conducted online between late 2021 & 2022
- Interviewees represented business support organisations, local government, key attractions and community groups across the Derbyshire Peak District region and sectors
- Conducted in DPD with those responsible for the **place agenda, economic regeneration and business support**



Findings: Sense of belonging

- Feelings of security and stability were extremely important with participants nostalgically talking about a sense of 'coming home' and returning back to the area after living/working away
- However, this had some negative consequences & 'disidentification' such as not being attractive to younger people

'...in later life, I wanted to come back home because of the scenery, the landscape, the sense of green space and vivid landscape, water and the feeling of being able to breathe, explore and take adventures'.

Research Participant

'And lots of stability and you have the opportunity also to live in a very nice place as well you know and that is not only the Derbyshire Dales, but very, very much around Buxton'.

Research Participant

'When they are younger they go and pursue....they go to a bigger city or place that that has a lot more. As they get older, they want to return back, maybe for family reasons. They've now got families or looking to have a family, but they don't want the hustle and bustle. So far away, so they tend to come back.'

Research Participant

'not good enough for young people to be able to comfortably move'

Research Participant



Findings: Sense of Place

- A strong sense of appreciation of the natural environment and the communities therein, particularly during Covid

'And a local allotment just exploded in COVID because it was a haven for them, but they had no mains water or anything like that. So we actually we bought them a 20,000 litre tank. And filled it up on demand via our borehole at the water for the local, the allotment and it's just that sort of symbiotic relationship.'

Research Participant

*'You know, it's still a panoramic change in landscape because you have got **diversity** again at every corner. You've got something different'.*

Research Participant

*'Beginning and end, that's it. That's just the icing on the cake, it's the **landscape** that does it'.*

Research Participant



Findings: Sustainability

- It was recognised that maintaining & supporting progress in a 'sustainable' way was important but without compromising a sense of place
- Environmental sustainability emerged in terms of maintaining the natural capital whilst improving infrastructure
- Social sustainability was an issue in terms of providing an equitable, inclusive and resilient society for residents and workers in the region but sense of belonging is not necessarily absent
- Economic sustainability emerged as an issue in terms of work and employment

'In terms of our market towns to revitalize them because actually as a critical mass we've clearly got ageing populations, we know we've got ageing populations. We know we've got people in terms of second homes but actually to make our market town viable we need younger people'.

Research Participant

*And when we're talking I think **climate change sustainability** will actually probably drive more changes to place and a **sense of place**. It's gonna be an absolute nightmare for people like the Peak Park who, who tend to be so insular in that we've got this and we want to keep this. But if you want electric buses...'*

Research Participant

*'We're looking at the opportunities from leveling up. We see the **industry as being quite fundamental**. We're actually doing that and actually also **dictating policy** on that....where we need to **strengthen networks**, cause one of the one of the biggest problems for economic generation in the Buxton area, is the electrical grid is just overloaded. And so actually the **management of place, I think will become far more important**'.*

Research Participant

'Certainly a lot of workers in the farming sector have been impacted by Brexit and that's been happening for probably two or three years as Brexit came nearer, quite a lot of particularly Polish people went home'.

Research Participant



Findings:

Resourcefulness & Resilience

- Participants explained how communities embraced novel and creative ways of doing things, particularly during Covid & this reinforced a sense of belonging

*'Also, the **proactive nature**, as a business and all quarries are involved with local councils, local schools. You know the impact of all of our lorries and things like that, you know, we're very visible about that. It's one of the things we found with COVID, it's really....I think it's gone back again. It's reverted, but people were. I just. I just don't know. We're generally more sort of receptive to good behavior because while we were operating because when COVID started we supply and water treatment works supply and industry animal feeds - we just carried on. **We're a 24/7 operation.**'*

Research Participant

*'So, I think they were **passionate** and they were engaged, irrespective of COVID and the pandemic, and in 12 months' time, will they be even more **passionate and engaged**, as we've come through? I don't know'.*

Research Participant

*'But it was all **working together**, but one of the things we got was just, you know, boxes of biscuits that were sent to our transport office from cyclists. Thank you for the courtesy of our drivers and things like that. And sort of, usually we would have animosity that you blocked our road and then we really did see a change in people appreciating people who were carrying on working. It's **providing essential supplies**. And people actually **taking time out**. Most of it has stopped now. But it was something that we were really quite taken aback'.*

Research Participant



Summary

- A diverse region but sense of belonging to where people live/work is nevertheless strong but perhaps more variable for younger residents/workers
- The role of 'natural' capital is central to a sense of belonging
- The challenge of balancing aesthetic attraction and the practical, infrastructure demands of place
- 'Triple Bottom Line' - socio-cultural, economic and environmental sustainability
- The impact of 'disruptions' like Covid on sense of belonging are not necessarily negative
- Brexit implications were clear in terms of work and employment
- The importance of resilience & resourcefulness is an underlying theme which impacted sense of belonging
- Issues associated with 'young' residents and workers needs to be unpacked
- The need for a holistic, place-based approach to support worker attraction and retention rather than industry/sector specific – DPD as a place to work

- Limitations of data

Stage Two

- Funding secured from the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise
- Extends the current project to focus on attracting and retaining staff in the region
- Focus on employer and employee experiences
- Direct input from Stage 1 participants into the Stage 2 data collection
- Event in Autumn 2023
- Wider interest from Rural England, the Countryside and Community Research Institute (University of Gloucester), the British Beer & Pub Association and Building Digital UK



Thank you – any questions?

