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| Institution: Northumbria University at Newcastle | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 17 (Business and Management Studies) | | |
| Title of case study: 'It's our shout!': Enabling rural communities to save their local pubs and foster community cohesion, wellbeing, employment, and business opportunities | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2019 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: |
| Ignazio Cabras | Professor | 2013 - present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2019 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| 1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) | | |
| <p>Whilst pubs are a characteristic of British culture, there has been a significant fall in their number. Research led by Professor Ignazio Cabras at Northumbria, through development of the COMCOH Index: a novel index measuring social and economic activities, uncovered the vital role of pubs in rural communities. A range of impacts has arisen because of this work. The research informed, and consequently bolstered, notable national support campaigns for pubs from the industry-specific organisations, CAMRA and SIBA. Cabras' research also contributed to a toolkit used by communities across England seeking to save their local pub through the Assets of Community Value process, saving at least 7 pubs by the end of 2019. Further to this, the research was integral to the 2017 House of Lords debate that changed planning laws relating to the demolition of drinking establishments, meaning communities can now object to the repurposing of their local pubs and save them from closure.</p> | | |
| 2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) | | |
| <p>While pub culture is widely recognised as an integral part of British life, the number of pubs in the UK has fallen significantly since the millennium, from approximately 50,000 in 2001 to approximately 39,000 in 2018 (Office of National Statistics, 2018). This fall has been attributed to a variety of factors, including changes to the pub industry ownership structure, shifting pub marketing strategies, and a significant decrease in off-licence and supermarket alcohol pricing [R1, R2]. Cabras' research explores the impact of this decline on rural communities - defined as located at least 5 miles from a larger town and with a population under 3000 inhabitants - in England and Ireland.</p> <p>Alongside traditional research methods such as interviews and surveys, Cabras (with research support from Dr Matthew Mount, a PhD student at Leeds University Business School working for Cabras as a Research Assistant) used an original approach, by creating the <i>COMCOH Index</i> (COMmunity COHesion Index) to measure the social and economic activities occurring at the local level, and their impact on community cohesion and economic viability [R1-R6]. This novel method assesses variables related to leisure, communication, food, and volunteering facilities within the community, and provided much-needed quantitative data to bolster anecdotal evidence and qualitative accounts illustrating the social and economic value of pubs in rural communities. The research revealed that pubs are key to sustaining social cohesion and community wellbeing as they provide physical space for activities that boost social capital, e.g., charity initiatives, sporting events, and opportunities for the elderly [R1-R4].</p> <p>Cabras' research demonstrated that the social importance of pubs has become more pertinent as other services/amenities that traditionally support social engagement (e.g., post offices, community halls, local shops) rapidly disappear from rural settings [R1]. In addition to social</p> | | |

factors, Cabras' research considered the economic impact of rural pubs. Findings from his research conducted in Ireland indicated that pubs are vital to rural employment as they provide local people (particularly first-time employees) with important opportunities for skills development and training [R3, R5]. The research findings indicated that the loss of pubs is likely to have serious detrimental consequences for rural communities, leading to fewer employment and business opportunities, isolation, depression, and excessive alcohol consumption at home [R3, R5, R6].

To prevent this, Cabras' research advocated for the limitation of unnecessary pub closures, by recommending that the Government reduce taxation and duties, and improve understanding of, and access to, the Assets of Community Value process. This process enables communities to flag land/buildings of communal significance for protected status, giving them time to raise funds to bid for/buy the asset should it come to market [R4-R6]. Cabras' research, and his novel COMCOH Index, attracted significant attention among academic peers and beyond, as demonstrated by invitations to present his findings at events held by the Royal Society of Medicine (attended by 80 peers) and Royal Statistical Society (attended by 40 peers).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1. Mount, M. and **Ignazio Cabras (2015)** 'Community Cohesion and Village Pubs in Northern England: An Econometric Study' *Regional Studies* **50** (7): 1203-1216 DOI:

[10.1080/00343404.2014.989150](https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2014.989150)

R2. **Ignazio Cabras** and Bosworth, G. (2014) 'Embedded models of rural entrepreneurship: the case of pubs in Cumbria, North West of England' *Local Economy* **29** (6-7): 598–616 DOI:

[10.1177/0269094214544276](https://doi.org/10.1177/0269094214544276)

R3. **Ignazio Cabras** and Mount, M. (2017) 'How third places foster and shape community cohesion, economic development and social capital: the case of pubs in rural Ireland' *Journal of Rural Studies* **55** (5): 71-82 DOI: [10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.07.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.07.013)

R4. **Ignazio Cabras** and Mount, M. (2017) 'Assessing the impact of pubs on community cohesion and wellbeing in the English countryside: a longitudinal study' *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* **29** (1): 55-79 DOI: [10.1108/IJCHM-12-2015-0717](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-12-2015-0717)

R5. **Ignazio Cabras** and Mount, M. (2016) 'Economic Development, Entrepreneurial Embeddedness and Resilience: The Case of Pubs in Rural Ireland' *European Planning Studies* **24** (2): 254-276 DOI: [10.1080/09654313.2015.1074163](https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2015.1074163)

R6. **Ignazio Cabras** and Lau, C. K. (2019) 'The availability of local services and its impact on community cohesion in rural areas: evidence from the English countryside' *Local Economy* **34** (3): 249-270 DOI: [10.1177/0269094219831951](https://doi.org/10.1177/0269094219831951)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Professor Cabras' research generated impact in three key areas: 1) improving awareness and supporting national pub campaigns, 2) informing national policy change, and 3) supporting communities to save their local pubs.

4.1 Improving awareness and supporting national campaigns

Cabras' research directly increased public understanding and appreciation of how important pubs are in rural communities, and their contribution to local social cohesion and economic development. Several influential groups have engaged with, and shared, Cabras' research, including national media (UK, Ireland, Europe) [E1.1]; charities (e.g., Institute for Alcohol Studies and Power to Change) [E1.2-E1.3]; and organisations operating in the beer and pub sector (e.g., Campaign for Real Ale – CAMRA, and Society for Independent Brewers - SIBA) [E2-E3]. This strengthened the campaign narrative of those seeking national support for pubs, such as

CAMRA (a consumer organisation with nearly 200,000 members across Europe) and SIBA (an association representing 750 craft breweries in the UK). Nick Love (Pub Protection Officer, CAMRA) noted that Cabras' research *'provided us with robust and factual evidence to promote many of our initiatives [and] is fundamental for us in view of achieving our goals'* [E2]. Similarly, Mike Benner (Chief Executive, SIBA) stated Cabras' work *'alerted us to the significance of these places [and] influenced our campaign focus on pubs... We addressed and emphasised the importance with UK government [and] Cabras' research provided us with robust evidence to do this'* [E3]. CAMRA and SIBA have frequently used Cabras' research in their budget submissions to the UK Government's Budget process, advocating for lower taxation and duties to provide relief for, and increase the profitability of, these establishments [E4]. These campaigns spurred debate in the House of Commons [E5] that led to tax freezes and a 13% decrease in beer duty from 2013/14 to 2019/20 [E6, Fig 2, p3].

4.2 Informing national policy change

Cabras' research informed further policy change enacted in the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017, which altered the planning permission stipulations regarding the demolition of a drinking establishment in England [E7.2]. Now planning permission is required for demolition or change of use of a pub, not only those in listed buildings, a conservation area, or those nominated/registered as an Asset of Community Value. Communities now have power to raise objections to proposals to repurpose pubs, increasing the likelihood that they can save their local pub from closure [E7]. Cabras' research was directly cited as evidence in a House of Lords debate on this Act by Lord Shipley, who stated:

'The research, undertaken by Professor Ignazio Cabras and Dr Matthew Mount, showed that there was stronger community cohesion in parishes with pubs... Their conclusion was that we needed legislation to prevent unnecessary closures. That has convinced me that we need to do something to address this problem. Removing permitted development rights seems the most effective way.' [E7.1]

4.3 Supporting communities to save their local pubs

Initiatives aimed at preserving the role of pubs in rural communities have used empirical evidence from Cabras' research – the most notable being CAMRA's *'Saving Your Local Pub: A comprehensive toolkit for campaigners'*, designed to provide solutions and advice about how to protect pubs from unnecessary closure and maintain them as viable businesses [E8]. Nick Love (Pub Protection Officer, CAMRA) said that Cabras' research *'forms an integral part of [the] toolkit'*, which *'has been downloaded over one thousand times, helping many communities to keep their locals open'* including: The Punch Bowl (York, population: 198,051), Lord Nelson (Nether Poppleton, North Yorkshire, population: 2,077) and The Plough (Fadmoor, North Yorkshire, population: 100) [E2], located in Yorkshire where typically few transport connections and services are found in rural settings limiting access to alternative community hubs or job opportunities.

Cabras' research was also directly cited in several successful Asset of Community Value applications submitted to local authorities across the UK by small and isolated rural communities, including: The Crown and Mitre (Bampton, Cumbria, population: 373), The Red Lion (Wingham, Kent, population: 1,775), and The Baker's Arms (Somerford Keynes, Gloucestershire, population: 479) [E9]. John Whitwell, Parish Councillor for Somerford Keynes, acknowledged Cabras' research as vital to the success of their application as it enabled them to *'demonstrate that losing the Baker's Arms was not just a whim on the part of our village, but a serious threat on the life of our local community'*. By rescuing their local pubs from closure, rural communities such as Somerford Keynes have been able to preserve a much-needed *'hub'* for community activities, including charitable initiatives, supper clubs, quiz nights, christenings, weddings, and funerals [E10].

| 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references) | | |
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| Ref. | Source of corroboration | Link to claimed impact |
| E1 | Examples of media articles plus two charity reports citing Cabras' research: 1. Le Monde (Feb 2018), The Times (Feb 2017), The Daily Telegraph (Oct 2014), The Sun [Ireland] (July 2014) 2. Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS), p.10, Pubs Quizzed: What publicans think about policy, public health, and the changing trade (2017) 3. Power to Change - Research Institute Report No. 5, p.15-17, What works: Successful community pubs (2017) | Corroborates claim that Cabras research received media interest in the UK and beyond Research cited on p.10 to emphasise the importance of pubs to rural communities Research referenced pp.15-17 to emphasise the importance of rural communities |
| E2 | Testimonial - Nick Love, Pub Protection Officer for CAMRA (June 2019) | Confirms the value of the research to the work of the association and Cabras' role in helping list pubs as ACVs |
| E3 | Testimonial - Mike Benner, Chief Executive of SIBA (June 2019) | Confirms the importance of Cabras' research in aiding their work and campaigning for lower taxation for independent breweries and in favour of Small Breweries' Relief (SBR) |
| E4 | 1. Supporting a Great British Industry: The case for financial measures to support beer and pubs in the 2017 Spring Budget (2017). CAMRA. Cites SIBA Annual Report (2016), authored by Cabras, p.6, 14, 20 2. SIBA Budget Submission September 2017. Research referenced section 7, p.17 | Illustrates the use of Cabras' research in CAMRA's and SIBA's campaigns to influence the Government's budgets |
| E5 | Beer Taxation and Pubs. House of Commons debate - 28th May 2019 | Evidences the House of Commons debate influenced by CAMRA campaign |
| E6 | Budget 2018 Analysis. Institute of Alcohol Studies Graph (p.5) | Evidences the decrease in beer duty |
| E7 | 1. Neighbourhood Planning Bill (28/02/17) 2. Amendment passed in 2017 | Research cited by Lord Shipley to highlight the importance of pubs to community cohesion and propose/support the removal of permitted development rights |
| E8 | Saving Your Local Pub: A comprehensive toolkit for campaigners (2018). CAMRA | Cited, and informed by, Cabras' research |
| E9 | Asset of Community Value applications: The Crown and Mitre (Bampton), The Red Lion (Wingham), and The Baker's Arms (Somerford Keynes) | Research cited to highlight community value and importance of rural pubs |

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| E10 | Testimonial - John Whitwell, Parish Councillor, Somerford Keynes (August 2019) | Confirms the importance of Cabras' research to the success of The Baker's Arms' ACV application and the value of the pub remaining open to the local community |
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