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Emerald

International Journal  
of Contemporary  
Hospitality Management

**Assessing the impact of pubs on community cohesion and  
wellbeing  
in the English countryside: a longitudinal study**

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>
Manuscript ID	IJCHM-12-2015-0717.R2
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Keywords:	Public houses, Community Cohesion, Third Places, Structural equation models, Rural England

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Manuscripts

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3 **Assessing the impact of pubs on community cohesion and wellbeing**  
4 **in the English countryside: a longitudinal study**  
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7

8 **STRUCTURED ABSTRACT**  
9

10 **Purpose**

11 The study presented in this paper explores and examines how public houses or pubs function as facilitators and  
12 developers of community cohesion and social interactions in rural areas of England.  
13

14 **Design/methodology/approach**

15 The authors use data and information about facilities and services available for 284 rural parishes in two  
16 different points in time (2000 and 2010) to elaborate an index measurement of community cohesion. The index,  
17 created upon a range of discrete variables capturing multiple aspects of community living, is then investigated  
18 by using structural equation models to assess the impact of pubs in shaping the levels of community cohesion in  
19 the English countryside.  
20

21 **Findings**

22 Findings gathered from the analysis identify a strong positive relationship between the presence of pubs and  
23 higher levels of community cohesion index occurring within the examined parishes, indicating that this  
24 relationship is maintained in time regardless of size of the parish, although different impacts are found in the  
25 two time-points considered.  
26

27 **Research limitations/implications**

28 Since the study is based on a longitudinal examination, it can stimulate research on themes and issues regarding  
29 the impact of third places on community cohesion and social capital in rural and remote communities, increasing  
30 the amount of information and data available. For instance, due to the nature of information considered, the  
31 study could not explore the effects on rural communities' wellbeing associated with different types of pubs'  
32 ownership and management.  
33

34 **Practical implications**

35 These results provide a valuable and original contribution to the literature related to the measurement of  
36 community cohesion and wellbeing with regard to third places such as small businesses and local retailers,  
37 whose significant functions of fostering social aggregation and communal initiatives at a local level are  
38 frequently neglected.  
39

40 **Social implications**

41 Findings from this study provide a valuable opportunity for policymakers and local administrators to evaluate  
42 policies and actions in support of their communities. In particular, findings provide an original piece of  
43 information about the social value of community pubs particularly in small and peripheral areas of England  
44

45 **Originality/value**

46 The paper provides new and original information about the importance of pubs and third places in general in  
47 fostering and developing community cohesion and wellbeing at a local level. Given the significant paucity of  
48 empirical studies in the field, the paper represents a valuable contribution to knowledge with particular regard to  
49 the methodology applied as well as the potential implications of its findings.  
50

51 **Keywords:** Pubs, Third Places, Community Cohesion, Structural Equation Models, Spatially  
52 Remote Areas, Rural England  
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3 **Assessing the impact of pubs on community cohesion and wellbeing**  
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5 **in the English countryside: a longitudinal study**  
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10 **1. Introduction**

11 In recent years, many studies have explored and examined the societal role and  
12 significance of *third places*, defined as places and locations other than private homes and  
13 working environments where people tend to spend significant amounts of their time  
14 (Oldenburg, 1989, 2001; Ramsay, 1996; Woolcock, 1998; Tiepoh and Reimer, 2004; Besser,  
15 2009). Several studies have demonstrated a strong positive relationship between the presence  
16 of third places and levels of community cohesion and engagement at a local level (Woolcock,  
17 1997; Besser, 2009; Watson and Watson, 2012).  
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27 In England, public houses or *pubs* represent important third places for social aggregation  
28 and provide the physical settings for many types of communal activities (Maye *et al*, 2000;  
29 Mount and Cabras, 2015). Particularly in the English countryside, pubs are essential in  
30 fostering and developing social relationships among residents, strengthening the level of  
31 community cohesion in villages and parishes and positively contributing to communal  
32 wellbeing and provision of social capital. While a positive impact of pubs for local  
33 communities seems confirmed by several studies (Maye *et al*, 2000; Mayo and Ross, 2009;  
34 Cabras and Bosworth, 2014), none of these studies have been able to investigate the scale of  
35 their impact over time, failing somehow to provide evidence of a cause-effect relationship.  
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47 The study presented in this paper intends to fill this gap by investigating the longitudinal  
48 impact of third places, and specifically of pubs, in facilitating community cohesion and social  
49 interactions within communities living in the English countryside. By using an original  
50 longitudinal dataset comprising information on facilities and services available for 284  
51 English rural parishes, the authors develop a number of structural equation models (SEMs  
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hereafter) to investigate the impact of pubs on an established index measure of community cohesion that uses a range of variables to capture multiple aspects of community living.

The paper comprises of six sections, including this brief introduction. Section two discusses and illustrates the theoretical background of the study, providing an overview of the progressive decline in pubs that has occurred in England and across the UK, focusing on pubs operating in spatially remote areas and rural parishes, identifying third places and analysing their importance with regard to concepts such as community cohesion and social capital, and explaining the significance of these places for rural communities. Section three describes data used and methodology applied. Section four documents the results gathered from the data analysis. Section five explores and discusses findings in detail. Section six concludes.

## 2. Literature review

### 3.1 The Decline of Pubs in England and the UK

Pubs represent an important part of English and British culture, economy and society. Their social and economic significance within the UK has been addressed and analysed in a number of studies (Hunt and Satterlee, 1986; Bowler and Everitt, 1999; Jones et al., 2000; Pratten and Lovatt, 2002; Pratten 2003, 2004; Cabras and Reggiani, 2010; Cabras, 2011; Mount and Cabras, 2015). Despite this importance, the number of pubs in the UK registered a steady decline since the 1980s. According to the British Beer and Pubs Association (2015), the total number of pubs passed from about 67,000 to less than 51,200 in the period 1982-2014.

A variety of causes and factors that affected, and still affect, British pubs today can explain such decline. One of the causes lies in the changes that occurred in the sector since the 1960s, which saw the separation of pubs from breweries that traditionally owned them. Preece et al. (1999, p. 12) state that 80 per cent of British pubs were owned by brewers in the

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3 1980s, with six major companies dominating the market. After a number of conglomerate  
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5 mergers, which brought the market on the brink of entering a monopoly phase, Parliament  
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7 issued the Beer Order, forcing large brewers to vend pubs (posing a threshold of 2,000 above  
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9 which half of the remaining pubs they owned had to be sold) or cease brewing. Breweries,  
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11 consequently, had to sell pubs at very attractive prices that led to the rise and enlargement of  
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13 corporate pub-chains or *pubcos* dedicated to retail.  
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17 From the early 1990s, these companies dominated the sector. Figures related to lease and  
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19 tenancy holders exploded, bringing the vast majority of pubs under direct control of large  
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21 national brewers and corporate pub chains (Preece, 2016). Conversely, the number of free  
22  
23 houses, privately owned or family managed pubs, decreased. 'Tied pubs', pubs that are tied to  
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25 buy their beverages and other supplies from specific retailers, most frequently the pubco  
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27 owning or leasing their premises, soon became the majority in the market, controlling  
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29 approximately 55% of all pubs in 2011. More recently, some of the largest pubcos have  
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31 incurred financial losses, which catalysed significant disinvestment, ownership changes and  
32  
33 several pub closures (Andrews and Turner, 2012). As a result, at the end of 2014, two fifths  
34  
35 of British pubs were owned by pubcos, two fifths were free-houses and the rest owned by  
36  
37 breweries. Albeit this rebalances in the market and the introduction of self-regulative bodies  
38  
39 to monitor the industry, many tenants are still struggling financially with many generating a  
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41 profit below minimum wage (All Party Parliamentary Save the Pub Group 2014).  
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46 Changes in the ownership structure also brought about changes in the marketing  
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48 strategies pursued by pubs with regard to customers. Many pubs ceased their traditional beer-  
49  
50 oriented vocation and started to develop into different types of businesses e.g. gastro-pubs or  
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52 European style cafes (Lincoln 2006). Pratten (2003) mentions the so called 'theme-pubs',  
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54 which combine drink-retailing with a specific environmental setting (i.e. sophisticated  
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premises, 1980s designed style etc.). Other examples include sports bars, which target customers by showing a wide range of different sporting events.

A significant decrease in alcohol prices from off-licenses and supermarkets has also had an impact on customers' choice and on the attractiveness of pub nights. Smith and Foxcroft (2009) indicate an increase from 10% to about 42% in total alcohol sales made through off-trade premises and a corresponding decrease from 90% to 58% in on-trade sales (pubs, clubs, restaurants, etc.) between 1971 and 2006. This situation provides more incentives for people to drink at home rather than in public places (Pratten 2004). In parallel, the growth of home entertainment has also contributed to making pub nights less attractive. Devices such as high-definition TVs and home-theatre sound systems have become progressively more affordable and the commercialization of video-game consoles that enable players to play in groups of two or more has provided significant opportunities for in-house gatherings. As a consequence, the average number of night outs among households has been progressively reduced and mainly pushed to the weekend (Cabras et al., 2012).

### **3.2 The Significance of Pubs Serving Rural Communities in England and the UK**

The factors causing the decline of pubs are exacerbated for those businesses operating in spatially remote and rural areas, most commonly known as village or rural pubs, which appear to have suffered significantly in the past decade. The Institute for Public Policy Research (2012) indicates that 12 pubs shut down each week in rural areas of the UK in 2009. More recent figures provided by Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA, 2012) confirm the negative trend, but indicate a reduction in pub closures in rural areas to four per week. The dispersed nature of rural population and reduced catchment areas in terms of custom make these pubs more vulnerable to changes. Fewer opportunities with regard to public and/or alternative transport magnify the effect of drink-driving laws, and a reduced availability of

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3 amenities and infrastructure discourage individuals working, shopping and maintaining social  
4 networks beyond the rural areas in which they reside (Champion and Brown, 2012; Cabras  
5 and Bosworth, 2014).  
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10 Furthermore, rural pubs may differ considerably from those in urban and suburban areas  
11 regarding the type of custom these businesses target and rely on. In urban areas, pubs  
12 represent an important component of the so called 'night-time economy' (NTE), based on  
13 clubs, bars and other licensed premises that attract residents as well as tourists to urban  
14 centres and have a significant impact for the local economy in terms of employment and  
15 revenues (Hough and Hunter, 2008; Tierney, 2006). During the 1990s and early 2000s, the  
16 NTE was recognized and encouraged by Governments with licensing and planning policies,  
17 and supported in conjunction with a national strategy that sought the re-vitalization of city-  
18 centre locations with the development and expansion of tourist, retail and leisure attractions  
19 (Hough and Hunter, 2008). Such support was not enjoyed by pubs located in rural areas, and  
20 many needed to reconfigure themselves into different types of businesses (e.g. gastro-pubs,  
21 bed and breakfasts) in order to survive.  
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36 This situation is likely to have generated effects on the rural communities and villages  
37 served by these pubs, hindering the social ecosystem supported by these places. According to  
38 Maye et al. (2005), each village pub has its own unique cultural terrain, where the word  
39 'terrain' identifies a layering of relationships which includes the whole networking system  
40 that links villagers, traditions and modern facilities. For the villagers, 'the pub may operate as  
41 the centre of their social life, especially if there are no other alternative social facilities' (Hunt  
42 and Satterlee, 1986 p.523). For these reasons, village and rural pubs are perceived by local  
43 residents as vital and essential networking places, especially in communities located in  
44 disadvantaged areas with regard to major railway routes and road connections.  
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Moreover, such situation has hampered the role of pubs as third places, defined by Oldenburg (1989, 2001) as social contexts and surroundings in which individuals and groups of people tend to spend significant portions of spare time in alternative to homes and workplaces, identified as "first places" and "second places" respectively. Third places provide physical spaces for people to congregate and join together, shaping and delineating frameworks and boundaries for individuals and groups (Oldenburg, 2001; Watson and Watson, 2012); and facilitating the accumulation of social capital within the communities they serve, with social capital defined as the whole of relationships and ties among individuals which provide a degree of social interaction, cohesiveness and networking in a given community (Putman, 2000; Besser, 2009).

Social capital is often assumed to be a positive indicator of local wellbeing, as it favours the flow of knowledge and information among different components of the society. An accumulation of social capital tends to generate positive impacts on community cohesion (Granovetter, 1989; Tiepoh and Reimer, 2004), with community cohesion defined as 'what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together (...) People all want to fulfil their potential and feel that they belong and contribute to their local area' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008 p.10).

Empirical evidence seems to suggest that third places play an important functional role in providing platforms for these concepts to develop and expand (Botterman *et al*, 2012). Even if the social components defining rural communities tend to be more homogeneous and less diversified (e.g. in terms of age, employment, ethnic and cultural background) compared with those in urban areas, this does not necessarily mean that individuals living in rural areas face fewer challenges with regard to integration, participation in and engagement with community life (Stillwell, 2008). The number of second homes, with more than 165,000 households owning more than one dwelling in England, also has an impact on the social fabric of rural

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3 communities (Campaign to Protect Rural England, 2013). Second homes are frequently  
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5 concentrated in areas not located in proximity to major road or railway networks, with  
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7 seasonal residents coming from very diverse backgrounds and generally not possessing a  
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9 sense of local identity (Gallent, 2014). While second homes and seasonal residents may  
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11 generate some positive outcomes for rural communities (e.g. increased accumulation of social  
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13 capital due to networks expanding outside the community; Gallent, 2014), they frequently  
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15 result in an increase of service rates and housing market prices, with social costs in terms of  
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17 gentrification (Shucksmith, 1990; Lyons, 1996) and empty houses (with the risk for  
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19 communities to be transformed in 'ghost towns'; Simms et al, 2002).  
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23 In light of these considerations, places such as village shops, local libraries, or pubs  
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25 become essential hubs for social exchanges and interactions within rural areas, mostly  
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27 characterized by spatial remoteness and a lower provision of services and facilities. The  
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29 disappearance of these places, in terms of business closures, is often associated with the  
30  
31 decline of several other initiatives and activities taking place at a local level. Their vanishing,  
32  
33 therefore, generates 'black holes' within local communities whose effects go far beyond the  
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35 mere closure of commercial businesses and services (Mount and Cabras, 2015).  
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37

38 Pubs in particular seem to be an ideal platform for the development of social and human  
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40 relationships and communal activities and initiatives, other than providing opportunities for  
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42 new business ventures and economic development (Cabras et al., 2012). Pubs function as  
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44 physical hubs that foster engagement and involvement among individuals, and work as  
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46 incubators for the development of social capital and networking, fostering and enhancing  
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48 community cohesion. Moreover, pubs provide the settings where individuals or groups of  
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50 people start initiatives that generate positive outcomes for the community or whole society,  
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52 such as volunteering and charity activities, or at channelling passions and interests into a  
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54 more structured effort, such as a social club or a sports team. In addition, while pubs are often  
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3 associated with issues such as alcohol intoxication and binge-drinking, these problems tend to  
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5 occur almost exclusively in urban areas and only occasionally in the countryside (Institute for  
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7 Public Policy Research, 2012), possibly due to past governments' policies favouring the NTE  
8  
9 in urban centres, which at that time attracted criticism and raised concerns in the wider public  
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11 (Hough and Hunter, 2008).  
12

### 13 14 15 16 **3. Data and Methodology** 17

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19 Most of the studies investigating community cohesion, wellbeing and social capital tend  
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21 to use a qualitative approach, often based on case-studies. Econometric and statistical  
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23 investigations are reduced in number, and even fewer studies address the role of pubs and  
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25 other third places within rural and remote communities. This may be partially explained with  
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27 the relative paucity of data available for rural and remote areas compared to more urbanised  
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29 areas. Empirical work in the field has been conducted by Callois and Aubert (2009), who  
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31 examined pubs and bars as indicators for social ties in a wider conceptualisation of  
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33 community cohesion in four rural areas of France; by Cabras and Reggiani (2010), who  
34  
35 explored the relationship between pubs and local wellbeing in Cumbria, a predominantly  
36  
37 rural county located in the North West of England; and by Botterman et al (2012), who  
38  
39 investigated the level of social and community cohesions in rural and urban areas of Belgium  
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41 by using a wide range of indicators including presence or absence of charities and churches.  
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43 While these studies represent significant contributions with regard to understanding the  
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45 impact of third places on community cohesion and wellbeing, none of them investigated the  
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47 scale of their impact over time, failing somehow to provide evidence of a cause-effect  
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49 relationship.  
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54 For the purpose of this study, information about services and amenities in rural areas of  
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56 England were extracted by the last Survey of Rural Services (SRS) conducted by Countryside  
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3 Agency in 2000. With the Countryside Agency disbanded in 2009, the collection of data  
4 regarding facilities and services in rural England ceased to be conducted at a national level.  
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7 However, data collection continued sparsely at a local level, mainly administered by local  
8 branches of national charities and associations operating across the country, such as Rural  
9 Service Networks (RSN) and the Actions with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), and  
10 by a restricted number of local authorities.  
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16 In this context, the authors identified seven local authorities and organizations  
17 (Cambridgeshire County Council, Wiltshire County Council, Community Impact  
18 Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire ACRE, Suffolk ACRE, the Rural Community Council  
19 of Essex and the Rural Community Council of Leicestershire and Rutland), which continue  
20 collecting data across rural parishes by using the SRS questionnaire as a platform. Figure 1  
21 illustrates the location of parishes within their respective local authorities. Based upon these  
22 data, the authors compiled the dataset used in this study, with the aim to conduct a  
23 longitudinal analysis of the impact of pubs on level of community cohesion and wellbeing in  
24 rural communities.  
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40 [INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]  
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42 **Figure 1: Map of rural parishes identified for this study**  
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49 In this investigation, the level of observed community cohesion for a given area is argued  
50 to be function of a variety of inputs such as common values and culture, social networks and  
51 place attachment (Kearns and Forrest, 2000). Building on these factors, the authors develop  
52 an index measure of community cohesion (*COMCOH*), which comprised 21 binary  
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3 categorical variables (e.g. assuming the value of 1 or 0 only) across four main components:  
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5 *leisure activities (LEI)*–variables relating to a community’s access to social clubs and  
6  
7 recreational activities; *communication (COM)*–variables relating to the spread of information  
8  
9 within the community; *food facilities (FF)*–variables relating to a community’s access to  
10  
11 local food facilities; *volunteering (VOL)*–variables relating to community-based voluntary  
12  
13 activities. Using this measure, the authors seek to examine the longitudinal impact of pubs on  
14  
15 levels of community cohesion in rural parishes of England. Table 1 provides the variable  
16  
17 breakdown of these components, which were used to categorize variables in the dataset.  
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23 [INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]  
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25  
26 **TABLE 1. Index components and variables**  
27

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29  
30 An ordinal structural equation modelling (SEM) approach is adopted using a number of  
31  
32 fixed and mixed effect models<sup>1</sup> to estimate the impact of pubs on *COMCOH* and potential  
33  
34 random variations in impact owing to time. By comparing data collected from two discrete  
35  
36 time points (2000 and 2010), the authors were able to match a total of 12 variables from the  
37  
38 established index measure of *COMCOH* to construct a proxy measure such that:  
39  
40  
41

$$42 \quad COMCOH_i = \sum_{j=1}^4 LEI_{ij} + \sum_{j=1}^4 COM_{ij} + \sum_{j=1}^3 FF_{ij} + VOL_{ij} + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

43  
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47 The resultant index is used as a dependent variable in the analyses that follow. During  
48  
49 the SEM modelling procedure, the authors first examine the fixed effect impact of pubs on  
50  
51 levels of community cohesion across all parishes and time points. Second, to account for  
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54  
55 <sup>1</sup> With fixed and mixed effect models, we indicate a set of statistical regression models in which the independent  
56  
57 variables have both fixed effects and random effects. Fixed effects have an influence on the population mean  
58  
59 (e.g. a medical treatment), while random effects are associated with a sampling procedure (e.g. subject effect).  
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These models are useful in investigating repeated measurements made on the on clusters of related statistical  
units or on same statistical units (longitudinal study).

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3 potential random variations in impact owing to time, a latent repeated measures variable was  
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5 created to index observations to their specific year (i.e. 2000 = 0 and 2010 = 1), which is then  
6  
7 estimated as a mixed effects model. Population size is then introduced as a control to identify  
8  
9 differences in small and large parishes. Finally, to examine the change in impact of pubs on  
10  
11 community cohesion over time, a number of fixed effect SEM models are conducted to  
12  
13 isolate and compare observations from 2000 and 2010 independently, and examine pubs'  
14  
15 impact on individual index components<sup>2</sup>.  
16  
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19 Data for the two time points were collected from a number of sources. For the year 2000  
20  
21 data relating to the index domains were collected from the Office for National Statistics  
22  
23 (ONS), the National Archives, and the SRS for 2,769 rural parishes across England. Rural  
24  
25 parishes were identified following the definition proposed by Cabras and Reggiani (2010, 6),  
26  
27 “as areas with no more than 3,000 inhabitants, situated at least 5 miles (or 10 minutes' drive)  
28  
29 from towns or larger parishes counting 5,000 inhabitants or more”. This definition naturally  
30  
31 excludes London and other major conurbations such as Manchester, Birmingham, and  
32  
33 Liverpool, and was deployed as a standard to distinguish rural areas from larger town and city  
34  
35 areas with higher levels of infrastructure. Data relating to the number of pubs present in each  
36  
37 parish were collected from the National Archives and CAMRA.  
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40  
41 For the 2010 discrete time point, data collected from local parish authorities and local  
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43 RSNs provided information relating to 1,232 rural parishes. Comparing the two datasets  
44  
45 (2000 and 2010), the authors matched observations for 284 rural parishes, comprising  
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47 longitudinal information into a unique dataset. Table 2 provides basic summary statistics of  
48  
49 the resultant parish sample, classified with regard to administrative regions. In addition,  
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51 Figure 2 show the decline of services in the parishes examined between 2000 and 2010.  
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57 <sup>2</sup> All of the statistical models are estimated using the 'GSEM' command and ordinal probit link function in  
58 STATA statistical software version 13 (STACORP, 2013).  
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As expected, the descriptive statistics show a sharp decline in the average number of pubs over the 10-year period, which results more significant in comparison to other local facilities. However, despite such decline, there is a slight increase in community cohesion observed. This represents an interesting paradox given our proposition that pubs are essential drivers of community cohesion, which will be investigated further in the following econometric analysis. Figure 3 provides a visual presentation of how parishes are distributed over the community cohesion index. Parishes tend to be normally distributed, with the bulk of observations falling between levels 3 and 6 on the COMCOH index – 81% of observations for 2001 and 69.3% for 2010.

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 [INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

**TABLE 2. Summary statistics**

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[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

**FIGURE 3. Decline of services within parishes examined (counts)**

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[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

**FIGURE 3: Distribution of parishes across community cohesion index**

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#### 4. Empirical Results

Results of the ordinal probit SEM for fixed effect and mixed effect models are presented in Table 3. The purpose of running two separate analyses is to evaluate the degree of

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3 significance attributed to potential random variations between discrete time points using a  
4 log-likelihood ratio test. The fixed effect coefficient of pubs in Model 1 (0.244,  $p < 0.01$ )  
5  
6 shows a positive and statistically significant relationship, indicating a sustained cause-effect  
7 link between pubs and levels of community cohesion over a 10-year period. This model,  
8 however, does not account for potential random variations over time, which may inflate or  
9 deflate effect sizes. To rectify this, the authors introduce a latent index variable to estimate a  
10 variance parameter for time. Considering these effects, estimates in Model 2 show an  
11 increase in the magnitude of impact observed between pubs and community cohesion (0.396,  
12  $p < 0.01$ ) with a high degree of variance between time points accounting for this disparity ( $\sigma^2$   
13 = 0.286). The path diagrams depicted in Figure 3 provide a visual representation of these  
14 results and report the direct effects between structural paths.  
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28 The index threshold estimates report the average marginal effect for a unit increase in  
29 pubs at each level of the community cohesion index. Results show that for parishes with low  
30 levels of reported community cohesion ( $0 \leq COMCOH \leq 4$ ), a unit increase in pubs would  
31 cause a negative change in impact, with  $COMCOH = 3$  causing the largest decline. In  
32 contrast, for parishes reporting moderate to high levels of community cohesion ( $5 \leq$   
33  $COMCOH \leq 11$ ), a unit increase in pubs would cause a positive change in impact, with  
34  $COMCOH = 7$  causing the largest increase. This general pattern is observed across both  
35 Model 1 and Model 2. However, not all estimates reported in Model 2 are statistically  
36 significant. Analysis of the log-likelihood ratio test conducted between these two models  
37 indicates that Model 2 provides a superior fit ( $p < 0.01$ ), which emphasizes the statistical  
38 significance of the randomized time variance parameter. Results show that when neglecting  
39 random variation owing to time, Model 1 actually underestimates pubs' impact on  
40 community cohesion.  
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 [INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

**TABLE 3. SEM results for fixed and mixed effects**

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 [INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

**FIGURE 4: SEM Path diagrams for fixed and mixed effects**

Next, having established Model 2 as superior, population size is introduced to Model 2 as a categorical control variable, which separates parishes into four equal quartiles of population size 'n', such that: Group 1 =  $n < 241$ ; Group 2 =  $241 \leq n < 420$ ; Group 3 =  $420 \leq n < 925$ ; Group 4 =  $n \geq 925$ . Results gathered from these population groupings are presented in Table 4. The estimates show a strong, statistically significant relationship between pubs and community cohesion across all groupings except Group 2. Interestingly, the magnitude of impact decreases moving from the smallest towards the largest rural parishes. Analysis of variance parameters for time indicates a similar degree of variability between time points for each population grouping, which suggests a relatively stable degree of change between groupings over the 10-year period.

The marginal effects provided in Table 4 show the differences in population groupings for a unit increase in pubs on each observed level of the index. Interestingly, the dynamics of change for each population grouping are quite distinct, with the largest reported negative and positive changes increasing with population size. For example, the largest positive change level for Group 1 is  $COMCOH = 5$ , whereas for Group 4 it is  $COMCOH = 8$ .

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[INSERT TABLE 4 HERE]

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**TABLE 4. SEM results for population groupings**  
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Finally, to explore the differences in impact between discrete time points, as indicated from previous variance parameters, two independent SEM models (Model 3 and 4) are run in order to isolate observations to each year. Table 5 presents the results of this ordinal modelling procedure. Results show a strong, statistically significant relationship between pubs and community cohesion in each time point. However, the magnitude of impact has more than doubled moving from 2000 to 2010. This result is important when considering the significant decline of pubs in rural areas. Analysis of marginal effects shows the differences in discrete time points for a unit increase in pubs on each observed level of the index. There is also a significant difference in the dynamics of change between each time point, with the largest positive index level shifting from  $COMCOH = 6$  in 2000 to  $COMCOH = 8$  in 2010. Furthermore, the magnitude of this change trebles (from 0.042 to 0.133) over the 10-year period.

The path diagrams depicted in Figure 4 provide a visual representation of these results and report the direct effects of the independent models between structural paths on the overall index and individual index components. Analysis of individual components reveals some interesting results. In particular, leisure (*LEI*), communication (*COM*), and food facilities (*FF*) are all strong positive and statistically significant across both time points. However, the magnitude of impact in each component increases significantly over time, suggesting an increasing criticality of pubs in rural areas. Moreover, the rank order of index components

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3 indicates a potential change in the fabric of pubs, shifting from a focus on leisure activities  
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5 towards food facilities, such as the gastro pub and bistro bars.  
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11 [INSERT TABLE 5 HERE]  
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13 **TABLE 5. SEM results for independent models**  
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20 [INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]  
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22 **FIGURE 5: Path diagrams of independent structural model results.**  
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## 26 27 28 **5. Discussion** 29

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31 The analysis conducted in the previous section and its related findings provide more  
32  
33 clarity with regard to the functional relationship between pubs and levels of community  
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35 cohesion in rural areas of England. Overall, results identify the positive impact of pubs in  
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37 promoting social engagement and involvement among residents living in the English  
38  
39 countryside.  
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42 The SEM analysis applied to data collected between 2000 and 2010 show a strong,  
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44 statistically significant impact of pubs on the level of community cohesion, measured by the  
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46 *COMCOH* index, and sustained over time. Considering random variations in time, results  
47  
48 indicate that the magnitude of impact of pubs has increased over the last decade. This  
49  
50 demonstrates an increasing criticality of pubs for sustaining rural life and wellbeing in the  
51  
52 area in terms of *COMCOH*. However, the marginal effects, which enable us to identify at  
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54 which point a unit increase in pubs either increases or decreases the observed impact on  
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56 *COMCOH*, indicate that more pubs do not necessarily increase the levels of community  
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3 cohesion observed in the parish. Perhaps, a higher concentration of pubs in such small  
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5 villages and remote areas may generate and amplify the magnitude of possible negative  
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7 externalities, e.g. noise. Given the difference in margins within the population groups  
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9 considered, this appears to be the case in larger parishes, e.g. an increase in pubs in parishes  
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11 with  $COMCOH = 5$  induces a positive change for population Group 1 but a negative change  
12  
13 for population Group 4.  
14

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16 However, the individual analysis of each time point conducted by using an aggregate  
17  
18 mixed effect model confirms the increase in impact of pubs on  $COMCOH$ , showing a  
19  
20 dramatic increase in criticality of pubs over time. Moreover, the individual analysis of index  
21  
22 components suggests a change in business focus of pubs over the last decade, with a shift in  
23  
24 rank order from leisure to food facilities between 2000 and 2010. This finding corroborates  
25  
26 evidence in literature (Lincoln, 2006; Pratten, 2007) and confirms the significance of the  
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28 gastro-pub phenomenon in rural and remote areas of England, with possible positive  
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30 externalities on local economies emerging from this shift e.g. pubs purchasing from local  
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32 supply chains.  
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36 By considering the population size of parishes analysed, the authors demonstrate the  
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38 importance of pubs regardless of the infrastructural endowments available at a local level.  
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40 This aspect is important given the number of people relocating from urban areas to the  
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42 countryside, which has constantly increased in recent years. The Commission for Rural  
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44 Communities (2010) indicates that the net migration from urban to rural areas in England  
45  
46 during 2009 was 92,000 people. This figure reveals a renewed interest for living in rural  
47  
48 areas. However, “only if people in rural communities have ready access to local schools,  
49  
50 local jobs, local shops and pubs, and homes which are affordable, will they and their children  
51  
52 thrive, and will the nation meet its environmental and economic needs” (Commission for  
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54 Rural Communities 2010, p. 28). Yet, the declining number of services available in these  
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3 areas to accommodate increases in population also has a direct impact on the local supply  
4 chain, hindering firms and enterprises that were dependent on those services for their  
5 business. Thus, to ensure that the quality of life of rural residents is maintained, there is a  
6 distinct need to promote factors associated with community cohesion and social integration  
7 (Atterton 2007).  
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14 The last statement appears to be particularly relevant in relation to smaller parishes,  
15 frequently characterized by an ageing population and lower availability of facilities and  
16 services. As confirmed by the analysis conducted in this study, the presence of one or more  
17 pubs operating in these communities has a more significant impact on the index of  
18 community cohesion used by the authors compared to larger parishes. Therefore, the  
19 disappearance of pubs would represent a far higher loss in terms of social wellbeing,  
20 suggesting the need of defining 'community pubs' in a more specific way within business  
21 classifications (All Party Parliamentary Beer Group, 2008). This would help to legislate in  
22 favour of these and other rural businesses and to design ad-hoc measures (e.g. business rate  
23 relief schemes) for supporting pubs and preserving their benefits to residents as well as other  
24 businesses in rural areas.  
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38 Government and policymakers can then play an important role with regards to halting the  
39 decline of pubs in rural England and more generally in the UK. The Localism Act introduced  
40 by Parliament in 2011 increases the level of control for local authorities and parish councils  
41 on matters that arise within local communities, including decisions related to community  
42 assets and services. In particular, community groups are given priority with regards to  
43 services and assets of community value, such as pubs, village shops, libraries, and post  
44 offices: these places can be identified by community groups to local authorities, which are  
45 then required to insert them on a protected list. When listed assets come up for sale or change  
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3 of ownership, community groups are given enough time to raise funds to bid and buy the  
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5 asset when it comes on the open market (Parliament, 2011).  
6

7 Intervening on taxation and alcohol duties would also help to reduce pubs' decline.  
8  
9 Between 2008 and 2012, their rise generated a progressive increase in the price of an average  
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11 pint and a steady decline in beer sales in the on-trade market, determining a surge of pub  
12  
13 closures across the country (British Beer and Pubs Association, 2015). The three consecutive  
14  
15 cuts by 1p per pints introduced in Governments' Budgets between 2013 and 2015 have been  
16  
17 cheered by numerous trade and industry associations, although the debate regarding an  
18  
19 appropriate level of duty for beer and other alcoholic beverages is still ongoing. However,  
20  
21 while changes in the level of taxation may benefit the pub industry, a significant difference in  
22  
23 prices between the on-license and off-license still remains (All Party Parliamentary Save the  
24  
25 Pub Group 2014).  
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30 Particularly for pubs operating in smaller and remote communities, the combination of  
31  
32 higher on-trade prices and reduced transport alternatives has a tremendous impact on their  
33  
34 survival rates, with many pubs failing to attract enough custom to be financially sustainable.  
35  
36 More pub closures would further reduce the number of opportunities in terms of socialisation  
37  
38 and engagement for local residents, with the consequence of increasing home drinking habits,  
39  
40 posing considerable threats in terms of health and wellbeing in rural areas (Pratten, 2004;  
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42 Mount and Cabras, 2015).  
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46 In light of these considerations, the findings gathered from this study may provide an  
47  
48 opportunity for policymakers and local administrators to evaluate the positive impacts rural  
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50 pubs and other third places have in the villages they serve, and to better assess current  
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52 policies and actions supporting the development and maintenance of spatially remote  
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54 communities.  
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## 6. Conclusions

The econometric analysis proposed in this paper corroborates evidence from recent studies highlighting a strong positive relationship between the presence of pubs, identified as third places of reference in this study, and higher levels of community cohesion occurring in the English countryside. Moreover, results confirm that this relationship is maintained over time regardless parish size, although different impacts are found in the two time-points considered.

These results add to the literature related to the measurement of community wellbeing and the development of community cohesion with regard to third places fostering social aggregation and communal initiatives. Since the study is based on a longitudinal examination, it may stimulate research on themes and issues regarding the impact of third places on community cohesion and social capital in rural and remote communities, increasing the amount of information and data available. In addition, findings from this study provide a valuable instrument for policymakers and local administrators to evaluate policies and actions in support of their communities.

While the analysis proposed offers an original contribution to the field, it also presents some limitations. For instance, due to the nature of the data, this study could not explore the impact of pubs with regard to bridging and bonding social capital within local communities. These forms of social capital may be affected in different ways and at different stages by activities fostered and facilitated by pubs and other third places, which could also have had an impact on community cohesion and wellbeing in the English countryside. However, the number of other potential third places in the parish considered for this study was significantly smaller compared to the number of pubs, and did not provide the authors with a sufficient range of observations to conduct their analysis. In addition, due to the paucity of longitudinal data, the impact of pubs on community cohesion and wellbeing has been examined in two

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3 defined periods only. Undoubtedly, a higher availability of data collected in several points of  
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5 time would have further increased the quality of this study in terms of generalisation and  
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7 contribution to knowledge.  
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10 Another potential limitation relates to the variables used to create the COMCOH index,  
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12 since its composition has a direct impact on the models and therefore on the findings. To  
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14 minimise the risk of misspecification (e.g. inadequacy of independent variables in explaining  
15  
16 the dependant) and as reported in the analysis, the authors verified and tested for issues  
17  
18 related to sample variation and outliers (e.g. observations departing from the distribution  
19  
20 mean) with regard to each variable. This exercise increased both robustness and reliability of  
21  
22 the COMCOH, which is rigorous in capturing the association between pubs and social and  
23  
24 community cohesion from an econometric perspective, although the availability of other  
25  
26 information in the models might even increase its accuracy. For instance, the COMCOH uses  
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28 the parish newsletter as a proxy for addressing the level of communication within the  
29  
30 community, in absence of any information available about the type and amount of social  
31  
32 media exchanges among local residents, e.g. profiles in social networks, virtual communities,  
33  
34 and parish websites. While the COMCOH represent a valuable tool, the authors are fully  
35  
36 aware that individual relationships and networks developing in and around third places such  
37  
38 as pubs are complex and in constant evolution, and that capturing these relationships is a  
39  
40 challenging task.  
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46 More specifically to pubs, the analysis developed in this study was not able to verify if  
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48 and how the changes in the pub sector (i.e. ownership structures) had any effect on this  
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50 relationship. Again, this was mainly due to the types of data available, which did not provide  
51  
52 information about pub-ownership. This paucity in the data may be even magnified by the  
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54 high level of turnover occurring in the market, which is often unreported. Future research  
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56 may focus on examining different ownership structures of pubs and their relationship on  
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3 community dynamics e.g. the role of independent free houses compared with those  
4 administered by large pubcos, which may identify and measure the effects on rural  
5 communities' wellbeing associated with different types of pubs' ownership and management.  
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9  
10 Finally, the authors based their analysis on rural areas focusing on the most spatially  
11 remote, which usually tend to have a less diversified population in terms of age, employment,  
12 ethnic and cultural background. A similar analysis conducted in urban and metropolitan areas  
13 will need to consider more aspects and higher levels of variation among social components  
14 compared to the one presented in this study. However, the use of SEM and the type of  
15 methodology illustrated could be applied to different areas and contexts, providing an  
16 incentive for more empirical investigations in the fields of community cohesion, third places  
17 and social capital.  
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## Tables and Figures

**Table 1. Index components and variables**

Domain	Variables	Description	Matched variables*
Leisure activities (LEI)	Beavers	<i>Presence of beavers/cubs/venture scouts operating within the parish</i>	X
	Bowling green	<i>Parish contains a bowling green available for use by local residents</i>	
	Brownies	<i>Presence of brownies/rainbows/guides operating within the parish</i>	
	Cricket matches	<i>Whether cricket matches are held within the parish</i>	
	Football/ rugby matches	<i>Whether football/ rugby matches are held within the parish</i>	
	News	<i>Parish has a community newsletter</i>	X
	Playing field	<i>Parish contains a playing field available for use by local residents</i>	X
	Retired club	<i>Presence of retired club operating within the parish</i>	X
	Sports hall	<i>Parish contains a sports hall available for use by local residents</i>	X
	Tennis court	<i>Parish contains a tennis court available for use by local residents</i>	
Communication (COM)	Worship	<i>Presence of worship centres/churches in parish</i>	X
	Festival/galas	<i>Whether festival/galas are held within the parish</i>	
	Markets	<i>At least one market operating within the parish</i>	X
	Music/art events	<i>Whether music/art events are held within the parish</i>	
Food facilities (FF)	Noticeboard	<i>Parish has a public noticeboard</i>	X
	Social club	<i>Presence of social club in parish</i>	X
	Cafés	<i>At least one café operating within the parish</i>	X
Volunteering (VOL)	Restaurants	<i>At least one restaurant operating within the parish</i>	X
	Takeaways	<i>At least one takeaway operating within the parish</i>	
	Voluntary clothes recycling	<i>Presence of voluntary organisation(s) providing clothes recycling</i>	X
	Voluntary paper recycling	<i>Presence of voluntary organisation(s) providing paper recycling</i>	

\* Variables for which data are available in the two time-points considered (2000 and 2010)

*Notes:* All variables are coded as binary and provided in alphabetical order; sport matches classified as taking place on regular basis if frequency is above or equal to two matches per month, music/art events at least once a month.

*Sources:* The National Archives; Cambridgeshire County Council, Wiltshire County Council, Community Impact Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire ACRE, Suffolk ACRE, the Rural Community Council of Essex and the Rural Community Council of Leicestershire and Rutland

**Table 2. Summary statistics**

Region	Frequency	Pubs			COMCOH		
		Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD	Range
EM (Total)	21 (7.4)	1.98	1.91	0 – 6	4.67	1.83	2 – 9
2001		2.76	2.19	0 – 6	4.67	1.83	2 – 9
2010		1.19	1.17	0 – 5	4.97	1.96	2 – 9
EE (Total)	183 (64.4)	1.21	1.36	0 – 12	4.99	1.74	0 – 11
2001		1.70	1.65	0 – 12	4.73	1.69	0 – 11
2010		0.71	0.69	0 – 5	5.39	1.74	0 – 11
SE (Total)	13 (4.6)	0.94	1.21	0 – 4	5.19	1.94	0 – 8
2001		2.08	1.38	0 – 4	4.54	1.20	3 – 6
2010		0.77	0.44	0 – 1	5.85	2.34	0 – 8
SW (Total)	67 (23.6)	1.4	1.233	0 – 6	4.40	1.46	1 – 8
2001		1.85	1.41	0 – 6	4.40	1.46	1 – 8
2010		0.94	0.814	0 – 5	4.79	1.72	1 – 8

*Notes:* This table presents basic summary statistics by region for the parishes used in SEM analysis: EM = East Midlands; EE = East of England; SE = South East; SW = South West. SD = standard deviation. Percentages reported in parentheses.

Table 3. SEM results for fixed and mixed effects

	Model 1	Model 2
Total pubs <sup>a</sup>	0.244*** (0.034)	0.396*** (0.039)
Index threshold	Marginal effects	Marginal effects
COMCOH=0	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.005 (0.005)
COMCOH=1	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.004 (0.004)
COMCOH=2	-0.011** (0.004)	-0.010 (0.007)
COMCOH=3	-0.042*** (0.007)	-0.060*** (0.016)
COMCOH=4	-0.026*** (0.004)	-0.050** (0.018)
COMCOH=5	0.009** (0.003)	0.004 (0.028)
COMCOH=6	0.024*** (0.004)	0.034** (0.012)
COMCOH=7	0.029*** (0.005)	0.046*** (0.008)
COMCOH=8	0.021*** (0.004)	0.035* (0.014)
COMCOH=9	0.004~ (0.002)	0.006 (0.005)
COMCOH=10	NA	NA
COMCOH=11	0.005* (0.002)	0.010 (0.008)
Time <sup>b</sup>	NA	0.286 (0.294)
Log-likelihood <sup>c</sup>	-763.310	-730.324

Notes: \*\*\*Significant at <0.001; \*\*<0.01; \*<0.05; ~<0.1. <sup>a</sup>Fixed effect variable;

<sup>b</sup>Random effect variable.; <sup>c</sup>Model fit measures. Marginal effects are only calculated for fixed portions of each model.

**Table 4. SEM results for population groupings**

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Total pubs <sup>a</sup>	0.322** (0.125)	0.134 (0.120)	0.231* (0.098)	0.145* (0.068)
	Marginal effects			
COMCOH=0	-0.015 (0.013)	-	-	-0.002 (0.003)
COMCOH=1	-0.011 (0.009)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.004)	-
COMCOH=2	-0.020~ (0.092)	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.007 (0.007)	-
COMCOH=3	-0.074* (0.030)	-0.026 (0.022)	-0.007 (0.006)	-0.009 (0.007)
COMCOH=4	0.022 (0.032)	-0.020 (0.020)	-0.048* (0.022)	-0.010 (0.006)
COMCOH=5	0.050* (0.021)	0.021 (0.018)	-0.024 (0.021)	-0.022* (0.010)
COMCOH=6	0.021 (0.014)	0.020 (0.017)	0.021 (0.017)	-0.013 (0.011)
COMCOH=7	-	0.009 (0.009)	0.034* (0.015)	0.011 (0.011)
COMCOH=8	-	0.003 (0.005)	0.028 (0.018)	0.026* (0.012)
COMCOH=9	-	-	-	0.009 (0.007)
COMCOH=10	-	-	-	-
COMCOH=11	-	-	-	0.009 (0.009)
Time <sup>b</sup>	0.202 (0.234)	0.157 (0.189)	0.212 (0.244)	0.148 (0.192)

Notes: \*\*\*Significant at <0.001; \*\*<0.01; \*<0.05; ~<0.1. <sup>a</sup>Fixed effect variable; <sup>b</sup>Mixed effect variable. Group 1= $n < 241$ ; Group 2= $241 \leq n < 420$ ; Group 3= $420 \leq n < 925$ ; Group 4= $n \geq 925$ . Marginal effects are only calculated for fixed portions of each grouping model.

Table 5. SEM results for independent models

	Model 3	Model 4
Total pubs	0.392*** (0.041)	1.061*** (0.186)
Index Threshold	Marginal effects	
COMCOH=0	-0.007 (0.004)	-0.037 (0.023)
COMCOH=1	-0.013* (0.006)	-
COMCOH=2	-0.021** (0.006)	-0.015 (0.015)
COMCOH=3	-0.069*** (0.009)	-0.084** (0.030)
COMCOH=4	-0.024*** (0.005)	-0.200*** (0.034)
COMCOH=5	0.024*** (0.005)	-0.021 (0.018)
COMCOH=6	0.044*** (0.007)	0.048** (0.015)
COMCOH=7	0.042*** (0.007)	0.108*** (0.025)
COMCOH=8	0.019** (0.006)	0.133*** (0.034)
COMCOH=9	0.002 (0.002)	0.029 (0.020)
COMCOH=10	-	-
COMCOH=11	0.003 (0.002)	0.039 <sup>~</sup> (0.024)

Notes: \*\*\*Significant at <0.001; \*\*<0.01; \*<0.05; <sup>~</sup><0.1.

Figures.

FIGURE 1: Map of rural parishes identified for this study

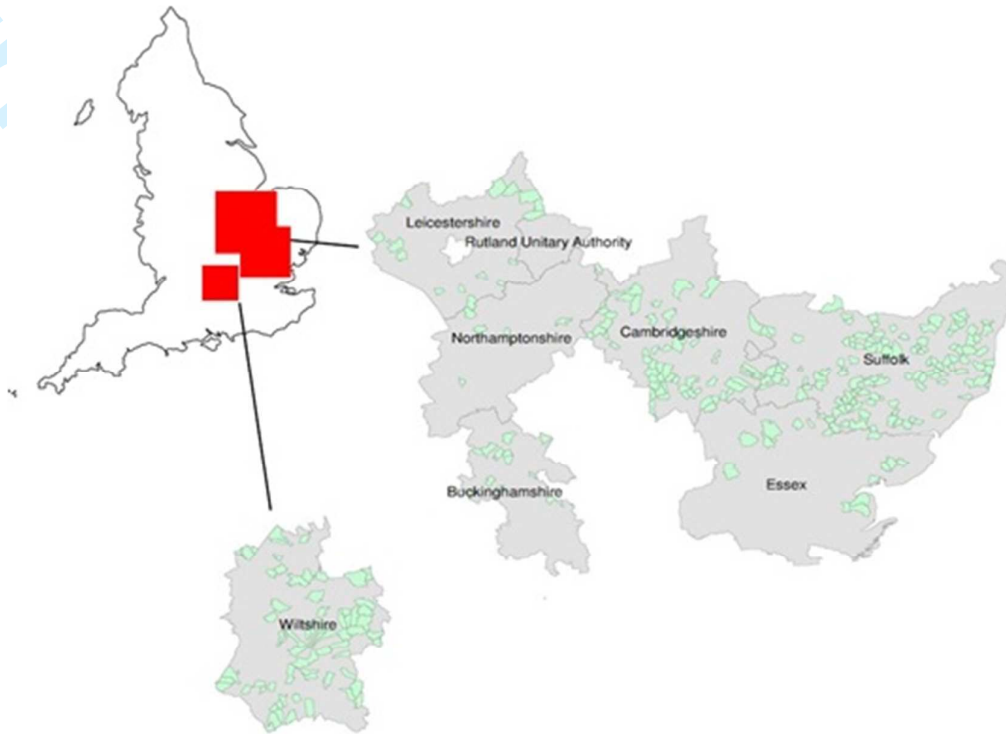


FIGURE 2: Decline of services within parishes examined (counts)

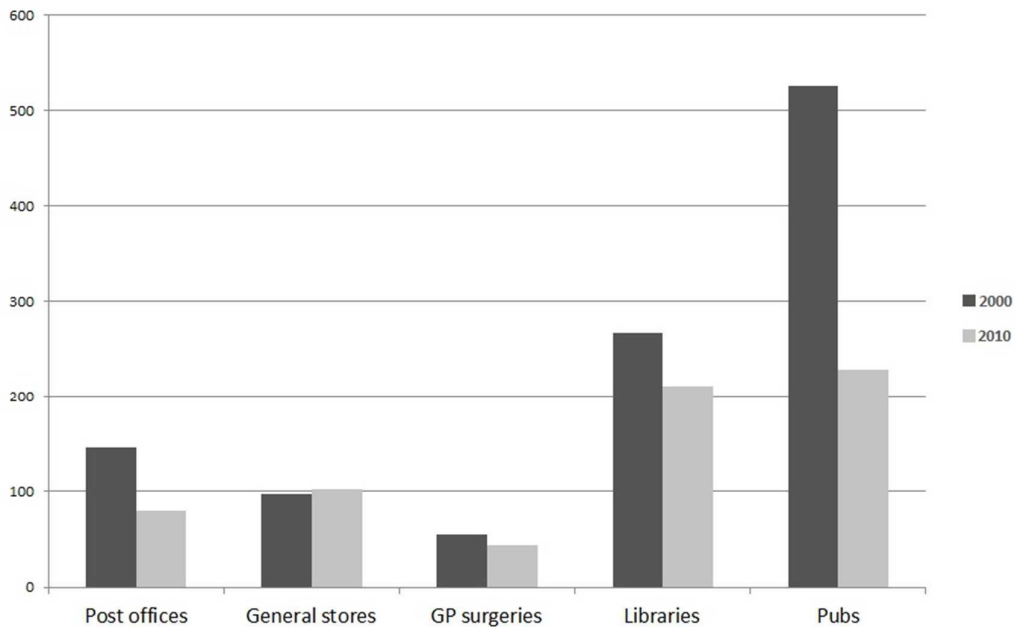


FIGURE 3: Distribution of parishes across community cohesion index

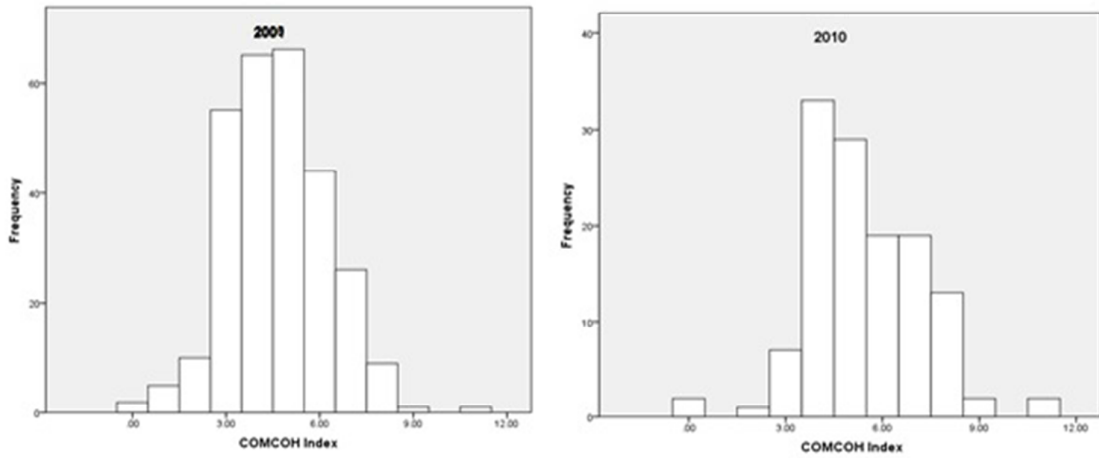


FIGURE 4: SEM Path diagrams for fixed and mixed effects

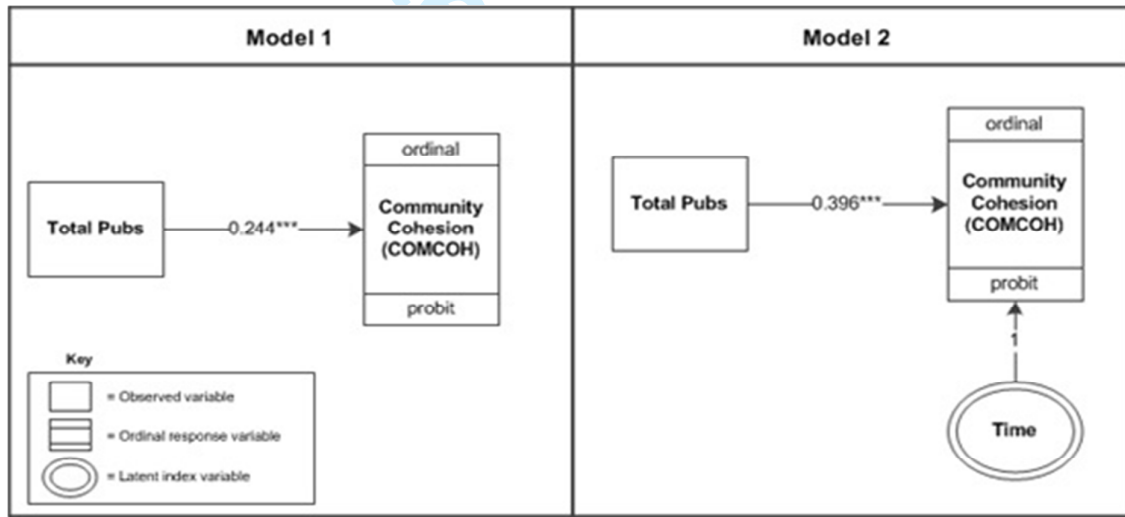
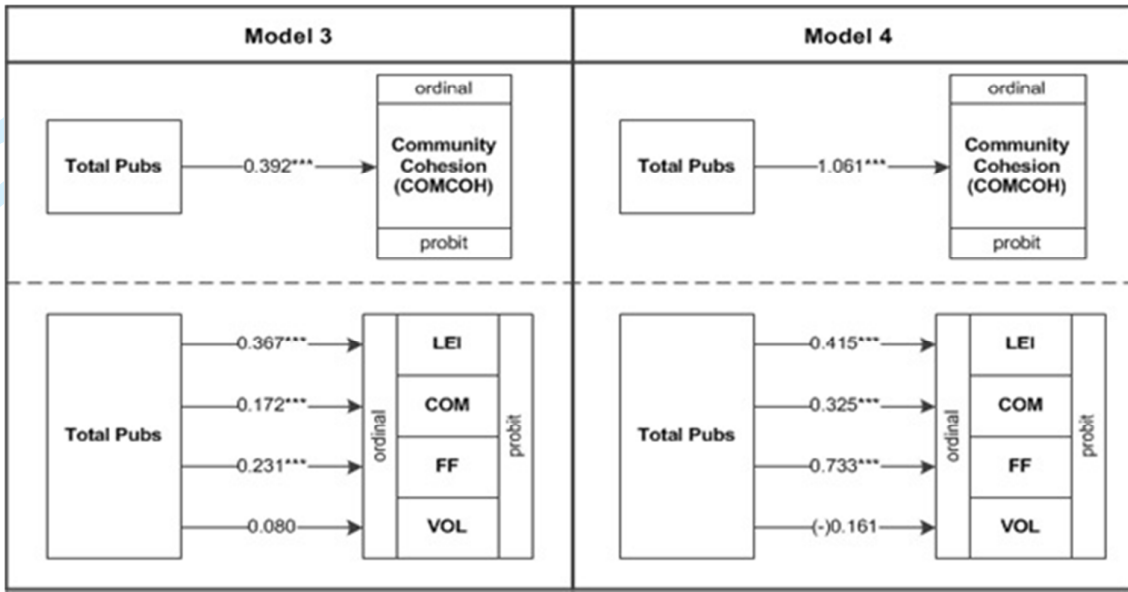


FIGURE 5: Path diagrams of independent structural model results.



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Author Response Form

When revising your paper, please prepare this report explaining how you have responded to each reviewer's comments and suggestions specifically.

**REVIEWER A**

Suggestions/comments from the Reviewer	Response from the Author(s)
1. <i>I feel that the only actual improvement that needs to be implemented in this version of the manuscript is the recommendations provided for government and policymakers (pp.19-20 - in red fonts). This part needs better discussion / justification.</i>	We have developed this part further by expanding on the implications related to increased taxation and alcohol duties for rural pubs. In particular, we discussed how recent changes might have had a positive impact on the pub industry, indicating a number of benefits for spatially remote communities associated with preserving pubs from unnecessary closures.
2. <i>Although this version of the manuscript reads better than the original submission, there are still a few points that need your attention i.e. in conclusion (p20 - lines 54-56) there is repetition of the word 'present' - the sentence needs to be rephrased</i>	The sentence has been re-phrased to avoid repetition. In addition, the entire manuscript has been proofread twice, and referencing have been double-checked for consistency.
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**REVIEWER B**

Suggestions/comments from the Reviewer	Response from the Author(s)
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**REVIEWER C (if applicable)**

Suggestions/comments from the Reviewer	Response from the Author(s)
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