

A "UNITED" KINGDOM?

In January 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May set out her twelve objectives for the 'Brexit' negotiations following the vote to leave the European Union (EU). She called for a UK that was 'more united' and aspired to 'build a stronger economy and a fairer society by embracing genuine economic and social reform'. How can we build a more 'United' Kingdom?

How is the UK divided?

Economic divisions

The UK has the highest level of regional economic inequality among all EU member states (see Figure 1).

In the vote to leave the EU, there was a correlation between people living in a poorer area and voting leave.

The theory of people being 'left behind' by social and economic progress has gained traction. One exception is in Liverpool, where people voted to remain, despite several areas ranking highly in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Speculative reasons for this include: people not reading *The Sun* newspaper and seeing more visible positive impacts of being in the EU.

Social divisions

Voters were also divided in their social values. People voting remain thought that multiculturalism, social liberalism, and immigration were forces for good, whilst people voting leave thought they were forces for ill.

Since the EU vote, there has been a 41% increase in the number of reported hate crimes (Home Office Statistics).

Social segregation is shown to have negative impacts on health, particularly mental and cardio-vascular health. A review by the Riots Communities and Victims Panel following the 2011 UK Riots found that 71% of riots happened in the 10% least socially cohesive locations.

Demographic divisions

80% of wards in England and Wales are on average 90% White British. Half of all ethnic minorities live in 502 of the 8810 wards, where White British is the minority. This is maintaining ethnic separateness, which influences cultural and political divisions, leading to "Two Britains". Ethnic minorities are moving out of areas of concentration into superdiverse areas. Meanwhile, segregation between White British and ethnic minorities has not declined since 1991. Professor Eric Kaufmann says: "the choices that White British people make have the biggest impact of the macro-segregation picture". There is an issue of 'white avoidance' of ethnically diverse areas, as White British people are attracted to live in areas that are heavily White British.

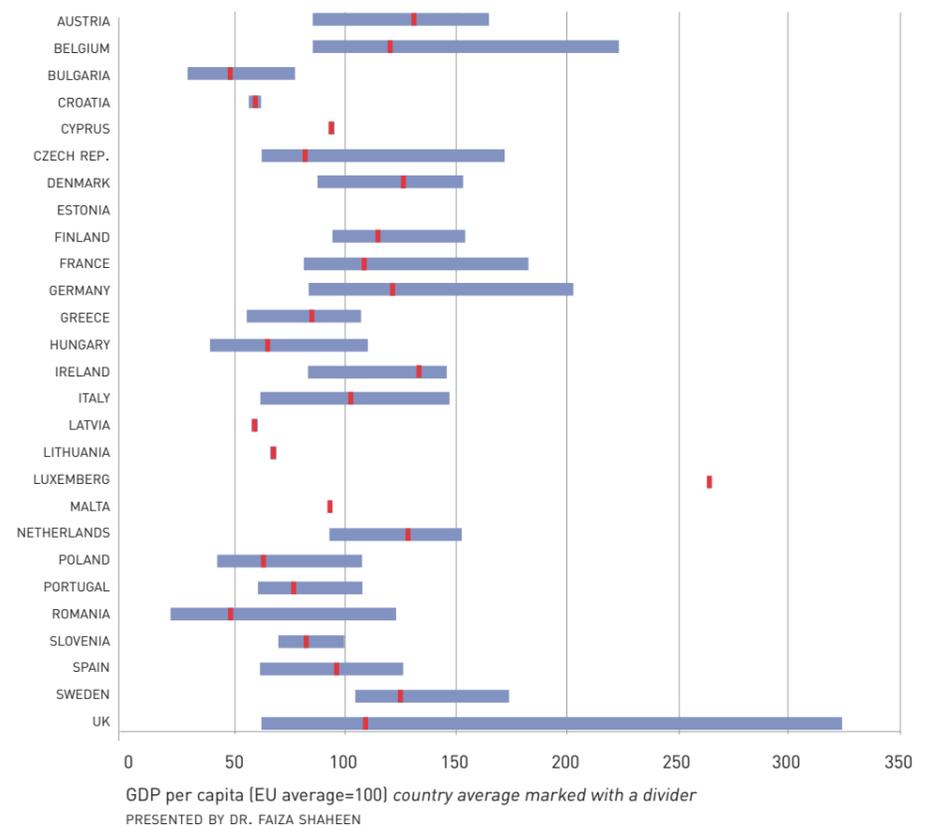
Divisions in representation

Existing institutional practices do not always recognise local voices, leading to underrepresentation and mistrust between decision makers and local communities.

People are sometimes prevented from making positive change in their communities due to a lack of resources.

People feel disadvantaged because of negative connotations associated with the place they live.

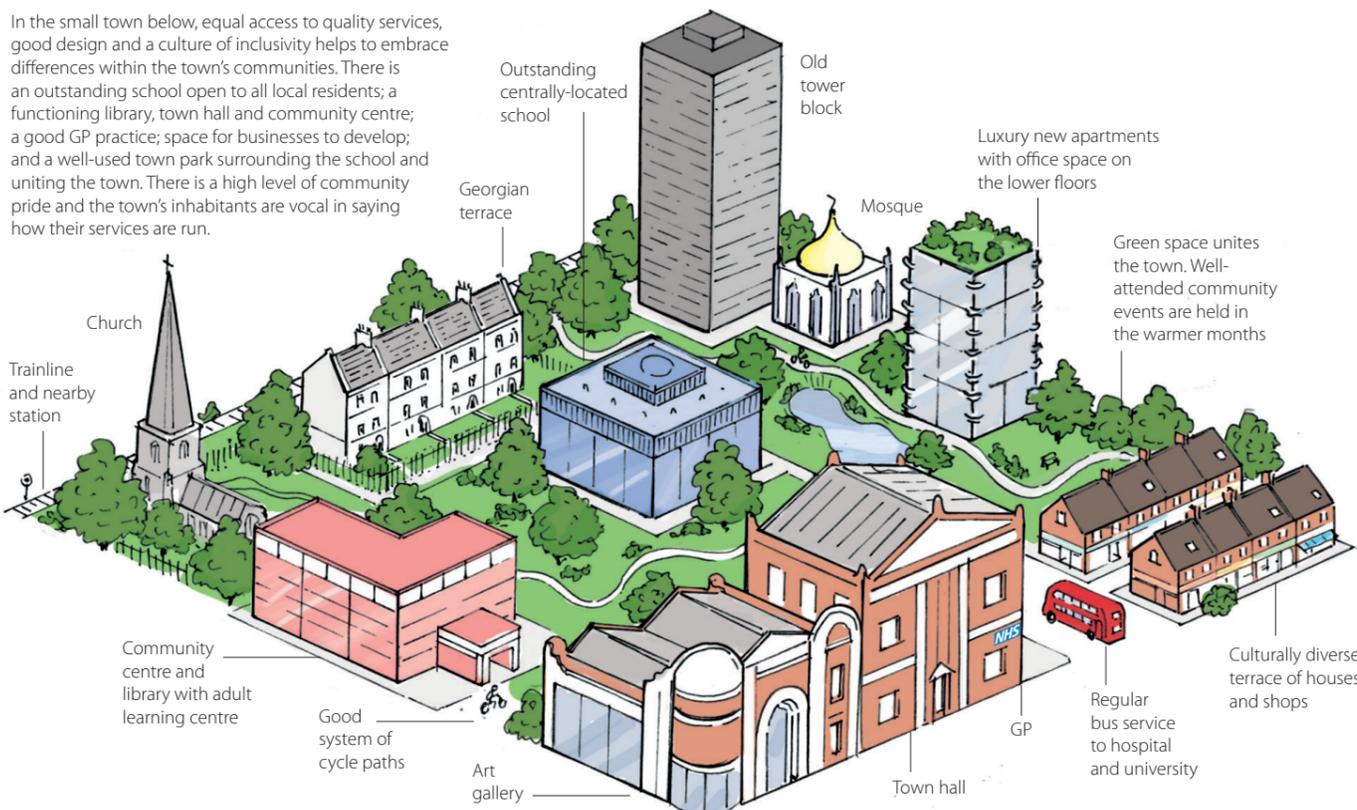
Figure 1: GDP per capita across all EU member states



How can the UK become more 'united'?

A town that works for everyone

In the small town below, equal access to quality services, good design and a culture of inclusivity helps to embrace differences within the town's communities. There is an outstanding school open to all local residents; a functioning library, town hall and community centre; a good GP practice; space for businesses to develop; and a well-used town park surrounding the school and uniting the town. There is a high level of community pride and the town's inhabitants are vocal in saying how their services are run.



CASE STUDY: London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Barking and Dagenham has experienced significant economic, social and demographic changes in recent decades. The borough has experienced a significant loss in jobs and associated culture, following closures at the car manufacturing factory, Ford. Meanwhile, 50% of the population is now White British and 50% are of an ethnic minority. By engaging in a participatory city model, the borough aims to embrace these changes by: ensuring the voices of white working class people are listened to in order to tackle low social and economic performance indicators; responding to the varying needs for places of worship; investing in regeneration projects as part of the 'No-one left behind' strategy, including new affordable housing, a new secondary school and a new rail link; providing interventions at primary school to encourage people to embrace opportunities such as higher education or access to London later in life; and investing in the Arts through a 'Creative Barking and Dagenham' project, supported by 100 people known as 'Cultural Connectors'.

Regional economic rebalancing

Implementing a programme of regional rebalancing could address economic inequalities. Examples include a British investment bank; investing in green infrastructure and moving parliament outside of London.

Greater social integration

Positive contact between different groups of people can temper prejudices and reduce hostilities. Greater social integration has positive economic benefits, as a more diverse social network can improve people's access to employment. The geographical size of someone's network and their level of mobility is influential in this respect. 'Nudges' such as new home designs and publishing the ethnic composition of schools could discourage 'white avoidance' in very diverse areas.

Place-based approaches

People identify with their communities through geography and place. Many people are ready to act positively for their community, once they are provided with economic and social infrastructure. This could include administrative and financial support or listening to and supporting people's potential to lead projects, in order for their voices to be heard. Institutions can enable and build collaborative and trusting relationships with community members. Changing the public narrative from a place's decline and decay, to a more positive message is vital for a community's psyche.

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Content for this infographic was derived from the 21st Century Challenges Policy Forum A 'United' Kingdom? held on the 16 March 2017. The views reflected are those of the speakers and audience, and not of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG). Panellists at this event were: Dr Faiza Shaheen, Centre for Labour and Social Studies; Professor Eric Kaufmann, Birkbeck, University of London; Ralph Scott, The Challenge; Nat Defriend, The Young Foundation and Councillor Cameron Geddes, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.