

PROPAGATING SUCCESS

AN EVALUATION OF THE SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC
IMPACTS OF THE INCREDIBLE EDIBLE TODMORDEN INITIATIVE

SUMMARY REPORT



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FOREWORDS

Incredible Edible was a crazy dream that became a reality. An experiment born out of frustration and concern about our children's tomorrows that has created a platform where people of all ages cultures incomes and abilities can offer their gifts to build something kinder through food and the power of small actions.

Todmorden was the first community to come together to use the Incredible Edible model, to spin the three plates, over nine years ago and what an impact they have had.

This report captures some of that magic and generosity, but it also captures the very tangible economic and social impacts that grassroots movements like ours can deliver.

We now know the impact of Incredible Edible Todmorden. Now others outside our movement can share knowledge of this impact, and help play their part in shaping a kinder world.

Pam Warhurst CBE, Chair of Incredible Edible Ltd.

Small is beautiful.

It's a hard road to travel keeping your eyes both on the ground and on the journey ahead, and not be distracted by 'shiny big things'.

Incredible Edible Todmorden has undertaken to focus on voluntary actions, to stay free of outputs and outcomes, to manage our own dreams and goals using whoever and whatever comes our way.

We are working with the gifts people bring to us and the ever-increasing network of members who believe in the power of small actions. We are travelling down an unmade road free of interference of state and bureaucracy.

As Pam said in her Ted Talk:

"There are so many things you can do, but ultimately this is about something really simple.

Through an organic process, through an increasing recognition of the power of small actions we are starting at last to believe in ourselves again, and to believe in our capacity each and every one of us to build a different and kinder future."

If this research helps good people to galvanise their skills and energy into being the change they want to see, bravo!

Mary Clear, Chair of Incredible Edible Todmorden Ltd.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research project aimed to evaluate the social, economic and environmental impacts of the Incredible Edible (IE) model as applied in Todmorden and to assess its wider potential as a community-led framework for improving wellbeing. There is a strong perception that Incredible Edible Todmorden (IET) has achieved positive impacts, as reflected in a range of publications.^{1 2 3 4 5 6 7} However, key stakeholders were keen to build a more robust evidence base and this study therefore sought to build on previous research to increase understanding of IET's wide-ranging impacts in a comprehensive and joined-up way. The authors are indebted to the funders of this research, the Ashden Trust and NISA Making a Difference Locally Fund, as well as the invaluable guidance given by Incredible Edible in Todmorden and all those who participated in the study.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Since 2007, Todmorden in West Yorkshire has been the focal point of IE, the pioneering social movement which uses local food to enrich communities. Founded by Pam Warhurst and Mary Clear, IET emerged as a response to both the global challenges of climate change and food sustainability and local economic and social challenges associated with post-industrial decline.^{8 9} The approach has highlighted grassroots action, collective responsibility and community mobilisation. Food is viewed not only as a focus in its own right, but also as a 'universal language' for promoting inclusive community development, resilience-building and economic regeneration – through bringing people together to work for the future wellbeing of their communities and the wider world.

2.2 THE INCREDIBLE EDIBLE MODEL

The IE model, as developed and applied in Todmorden, is based around a conceptual metaphor of three spinning plates:¹⁰

- **Community:** Concerned with growing food in public spaces for people to pick, the community plate's focus on 'propaganda gardening' creates 'open source' food growing areas and seeks to change people's relationship with their environment and catalyse engagement and discussion.
- **Business:** Focused on supporting local food-related enterprises, the business plate has aspired to strengthen the local economy – creating a 'brand' for adoption by local food producers and retailers, and facilitating 'vegetable tourism' for people wanting to visit IET.
- **Learning:** The learning plate has prioritised engagement with schools as well as adult and community-based education and training, with a particular emphasis on the development of cooking skills and strong links to the Incredible AquaGarden and its food inspirers programme.

2.3 INCREDIBLE EDIBLE STRUCTURE AND EVOLUTION

IET is a community benefit society called **Incredible Edible Todmorden Ltd.** In addition, two spin-off social enterprises exist within town – **Incredible Farm** and **Incredible AquaGarden**, which support entrepreneurial business development and innovative approaches to education and training.

In 2012, IET was instrumental in establishing the **Incredible Edible Network** to support the expanding number of IE groups across the UK and internationally. This operates under the auspices of **Incredible Edible Ltd.** and facilitates the exchange of information and promotes the IE approach in local and national policy, practice and decision-making. **Incredible North** is an Incredible Edible Network project that seeks to build capacity across the north of England.

3. THE EVALUATIVE RESEARCH: AIMS, STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1 AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of evaluative research to enable learning and guide and enhance future practice through building a better understanding not only of whether a project/programme is working effectively to achieve what it's trying to achieve, but also of why and how. The overarching aims of this study were:

- To evaluate the social, economic and environmental impacts of the IE model as it has been applied in Todmorden, in relation to community, learning and business 'plates'.
- To assess the wider potential of the IE model as a community-led framework for improving social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

A decision was taken to limit the scope of the research to the core elements of IET and therefore to reference but not focus on the spin-off social enterprises or wider IE developments.

3.2 CONTEXT



Todmorden is a market town in the Upper Calder Valley, within Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council in West Yorkshire. Formerly a thriving textile centre, Todmorden is now increasingly a commuter town for people working in Manchester, Leeds and other urban centres. The 2011 UK census reported the population of Todmorden Parish as 15,481, of which 48% were male and 52% were female.¹¹ Demographic data for Todmorden Ward suggests that the population is less ethnically diverse, poorer, more deprived and has higher long-term unemployment and greater rates of ill health than national averages.^{12 13 14 15 16 17}

3.3 METHODS

Ethical approval was granted by ethics committees at Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Central Lancashire. The study took a mixed-methods approach, employing qualitatively- and quantitatively-focused data collection and analysis techniques. These included:

- **Literature Review:** In order to contextualise the research, an initial literature review was undertaken, focusing on previous IE studies, both published and unpublished.

- **Theory of Change Stakeholder Workshop and Refinement:** A workshop was held with 30 IET stakeholders to inform the co-production of a ‘theory of change’ (ToC), which both informed and was further refined by consultation and parallel data collection processes. Presented as a flow chart showing the steps involved in achieving change and the perceived links between them, a ToC describes how a project achieves its intended short-, medium- and long-term impacts.¹⁸
- **Community Survey:** An accessible questionnaire was designed using open and closed questions. In order to introduce a comparative longitudinal perspective, questions from a 2009 research study were incorporated. The questionnaire was administered online and face-to-face, ensuring that the sample of 320 residents reflected both Todmorden census demographics and the 2009 study sample. Data were analysed using statistical and thematic analysis.
- **Volunteer Survey:** A short survey was conducted with a sample of 28 IET volunteers, exploring nature and impact of involvement.
- **Semi-Structured One-to-One Interviews and Focus Groups:** 24 semi-structured narrative-pointed one-to-one interviews and two focus groups were conducted with a total of 32 stakeholders, selected using purposive and snowball sampling. Participants included people centrally involved in IET and related organisations, and stakeholders representing community, business and learning plates. Interview and focus group schedules explored stakeholders’ awareness, experiences and perspectives on IET and its influence and impacts. Data were subjected to thematic analysis and grouped under headings of: origins and development; community, business and learning outcomes; and enablers, challenges and wider development.
- **Social Return on Investment Analysis:** A small-scale Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis of IET’s activities in 2016 was undertaken to help understand the impact of IE in Todmorden. SROI provides an estimate of financial impact in a way that incorporates the value of social, environmental and other non-economic impacts – by identifying financial ‘proxies’.¹⁹ The ToC was used as the basis for selecting indicators linked to community, learning and business outcomes. These were used to frame the SROI, which also used data from the volunteer survey.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 INCREDIBLE EDIBLE TODMORDEN: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

The interviews and focus groups, supplemented by comments received via the community survey, provided a qualitative account of the story of IET and highlighted a number of themes:

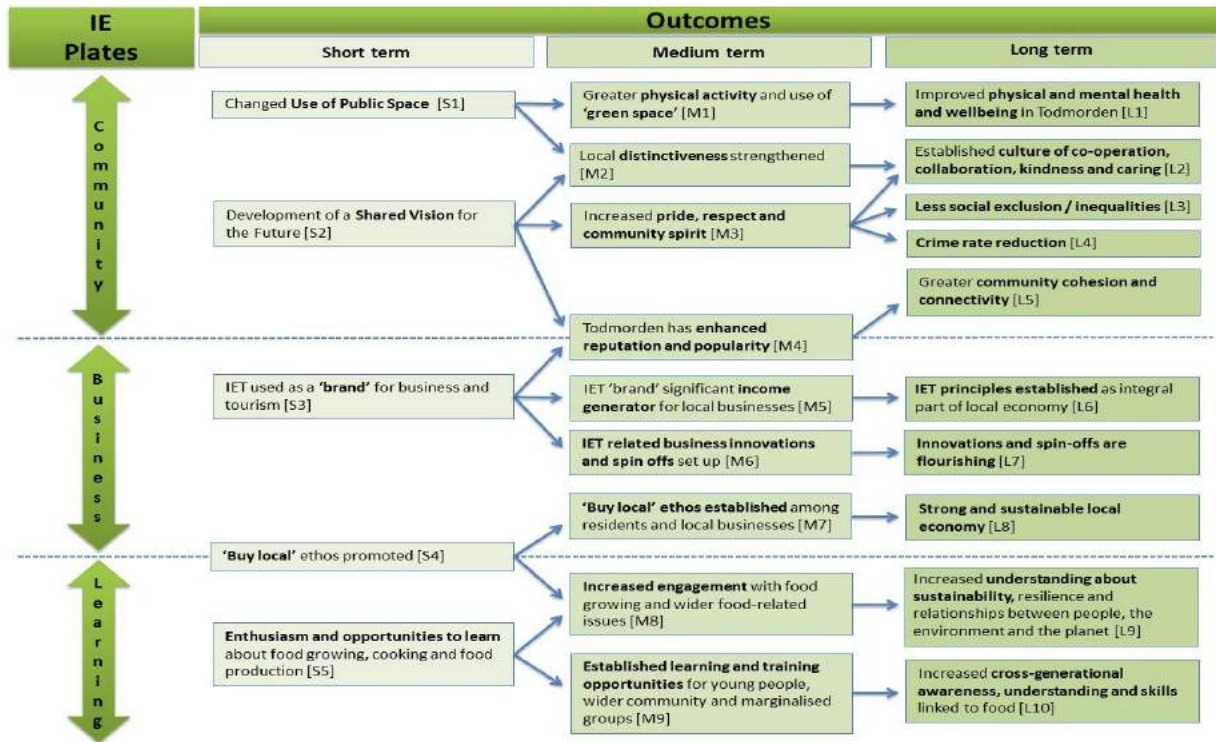
- **Distinctiveness of Todmorden:** The distinctiveness of the town, rooted in history, geography and social and economic circumstances, was seen to be reflected in a cohesive and proactive culture.
- **Incredible Edible Model and Recruitment:** The IET ‘three spinning plates’ model offered a foundation for good local media relations, ensuring a high profile and attracting interest – leading to an IET community volunteer group, the creation of key roles and links with local organisations.
- **Visibility of Activities – Propaganda Gardening and Media:** Developed alongside guerrilla gardening, IET established growing areas in public places and a walking route known as the ‘Incredible Todmorden Way’. These areas have helped transform the town through ‘propaganda gardening’, deliberately visible and concerned to provoke a response and ‘start a conversation’. Proactive branding and use of wide-ranging traditional and social media have enhanced visibility.
- **Impact and Expansion of Incredible Edible Todmorden:** IET has increased in popularity and influence, engaging more community members and gaining traction with local organisations and

businesses. IET and its spin-offs are seen by many as part of the town's identity and to have achieved wider influence, with IE initiatives being established across the UK and the globe.



4.2 THEORY OF CHANGE

As outlined above, a stakeholder workshop was held to facilitate the co-production of the ToC. Given the complexity of the interactions and impacts associated with IET, the approach to developing the ToC grouped identified outcomes in a matrix based on the three 'plates' combined with three temporal scales – short-(1-3 years), medium- (4-10 years) and long-term (10+ years). The final version was informed by insights from the interviews and focus groups and wider consultation.



4.3 INCREDIBLE EDIBLE TODMORDEN: OUTCOMES

The IET short- and medium-term outcomes identified in the ToC for the three spinning plates (community, business, learning) were evidenced in the interviews, focus groups and community survey:

4.3.1 Community

- **Changed Use of Space/Public Realm:** Through establishing and maintaining 'propaganda gardening' areas – in schools, care homes and reclaimed derelict sites, and attached to locations such as the police station, health centre and train station – IET has visibly impacted use of space. It has also begun to change people's perception of their locality and relationship to their environment and public realm, creating a greater sense of ownership and positivity. Alongside widespread support for IET's use of public space, there was some negativity about its impact on the town's appearance.
- **Greater Physical Activity and Use of 'Green Space':** Increased physical activity was viewed as a key benefit, through IET's walking route and volunteer involvement in horticultural work.
- **Development of a Shared Vision for the Future:** IET has brought people together for the shared purpose of improving the local community, enhancing confidence, creativity, vision and innovation. Food has been used not only as a focus in its own right and a means to connect people, but also as a vehicle to convey wider messages about sustainability, to engage people in discussions about challenges facing the planet, and to encourage 'think global, act local'.
- **Local Distinctiveness Strengthened:** IET's activities, ethos of kindness and community-focused culture were understood to have strengthened local distinctiveness and to have contributed to change in the town, in turn is altering attitudes of other members of the community.
- **Increased Pride, Respect and Community Spirit:** IET was perceived to have generated an enhanced pride of place and community connectedness that has helped to counter decline. As well as being understood to have improved the town's appearance and contributed to a reduction in vandalism, IET has reached out, for example providing assistance at times of flood.



4.3.2 Business

- **Incredible Edible Todmorden Used as a 'Brand' for Business and Tourism:** IET was understood to have supported local producers and to have extended its influence through signs displayed at market and other retail outlets. Its wider impact was evidenced by the increased amount of locally-sourced food on menus and invitations for IET personnel to speak across the UK and internationally.
- **Todmorden has Enhanced Reputation and Popularity:** IET was regarded as a positive influence and understood to have put Todmorden 'on the map'. As well as achieving global media coverage and attracting international 'vegetable tourism', IET was seen to have contributed to the town's desirability, with knock-on effects for the economy through business start-up and property prices.
- **Incredible Edible Todmorden 'Brand' as a Significant Income Generator for Local Businesses:** Despite historical tensions between the market and IET, local producers generally perceive advantages to being associated with the IET brand.
- **Incredible Edible Todmorden Related Business Innovations and Spin-Offs Set Up:** IET has been a catalyst for the spin-offs Incredible AquaGarden and Incredible Farm. As social enterprises, both have focused on business development while trying to stay focused on the local community.
- **'Buy local' Ethos Promoted and Established:** With motivations related to carbon reduction, animal welfare and broader sustainability and resilience concerns, IET is widely understood to have enhanced awareness of the value of buying locally-sourced produce. Beyond this, IET is also seen to have contributed to the upward trend in purchase of locally-sourced food. Whilst largely welcomed, there were concerns about constraints imposed by cost and/or availability and a suggestion that 'buy local' does not take full account of the complexity of sustainability and carbon foot-printing.



4.3.3 Learning

- **Enthusiasm and Opportunities to Learn about Food Growing, Cooking and Food Production:** IET members have placed information signs around growing areas and along the Incredible Todmorden Way. Whilst to some extent successful in engaging the community and enabling informal learning, there was concern that the approach is not reaching everyone or always achieving clarity.
- **Increased Engagement with Food Growing and Wider Food-Related Issues:** Understanding that fresh food is healthy and can be inexpensive was seen as key to shifting mind-sets and getting people to think differently about food and their relationship to their environment differently. IET has clearly made progress and empowered people to take small steps forward, although there is some reticence to pick IET's 'free' food – due to fear of contamination and a sense of not being needy or entitled. IET appears to have impacted most strongly on young children, although adult learning was also highlighted. Although IET's most visible focus is local, it also addresses macro-level issues of sustainability and resilience. This awareness-raising of local-global connections is widely welcomed, although there is a vein of scepticism about the rhetoric of self-sufficiency.
- **Established Learning and Training Opportunities for Young People, Wider Community and Marginalised Groups:** Increased enthusiasm for learning about food combined with the informal educational opportunities created through propaganda planting have facilitated activities that connect growing with cooking. IET has worked with other organisations to hold cooking classes and events in community settings and has supported schools to develop intergenerational learning. The Incredible AquaGarden and Incredible Farm have both been valuable educational assets: the former has hired food inspirers to increase awareness of the connections between wellbeing and growing and cooking local food; the latter facilitates informal learning opportunities through children's visits.



4.4 COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

The community survey explored community perspectives and considered how IET has penetrated and influenced the wider population of Todmorden. Where possible, data was compared with the 2009 survey results. Findings focused on awareness and engagement with both IET and local food:

- **Awareness of Incredible Edible and the Model:** Awareness of IET was almost universal, with only 2.5% of stating no knowledge of the initiative. Respondents identified IET's primary aim as 'to increase the amount of food grown locally', but also acknowledged a wider range of multiple aims than in the 2009 study – indicating a deepening of understanding about the breadth of the initiative.
- **Community Engagement with Incredible Edible Todmorden:** The survey indicated that consuming food from IET growing areas is widespread among Todmorden residents and has increased over time, with 44% of respondents stating that they pick the plants compared with 16% in 2009. Reflecting the fact that herbs are the primary food type available, the most common reason for picking produce was to 'use as a flavouring or garnish' (79%); this was followed by picking produce 'to use as a main ingredient' (51%). Among non-pickers, the longitudinal comparison showed a large decline in people not knowing that produce was available; 'I feel uncomfortable about picking them' was the primary stated reason (41%) with a sizable minority (31%) expressing concern about the risk of pollution/contamination as a factor. Beyond picking produce, 32% of respondents had taken part in another activity involving IET over the previous 12 months, a similar proportion to the 2009 survey. Of these, 80% had visited an IET stand at a local food event and 27% had participated in planting activities. Lack of time was given as the most frequent reason (42%) for those not interacting with IET, broadly similar to the prior study. 18% and 27% of respondents respectively had visited Incredible Aquagarden and Incredible Farm.
- **Community Engagement with Local Food:** A key finding was that over half of Todmorden respondents (54%) stated that they purchase local food at least once a week (compared with 41% of UK consumers) with only 20% indicating that they never buy food specifically because it is locally produced (compared with 37% of UK consumers). The most common reasons for purchasing local food were 'supporting the local economy' (87%), 'quality/freshness' (63%) and 'traceability' (62%).

4.5 VOLUNTEER PERSPECTIVES

The Volunteer Survey explored demographics and nature and impact of involvement in IET:

- **Volunteer Demographic:** The volunteer profile is similar to that of Todmorden in terms of gender, age and socioeconomic status (using tenancy status). 32% of volunteer respondents have lived in Todmorden for more than 10 years compared to 67% of those responding to the community survey.
- **Nature of Involvement:** The average length of time over which respondents had volunteered for IET was 4.5 years. Excluding those with a co-ordination role who commit a large amount of time to IET, the mean annual number of volunteering hours was 59 – and nearly two thirds of respondents have increased their involvement over time. Fortnightly planting days and IET events were the most frequent forms of engagement by IET volunteers. Outside of IET, 64% of respondents reported gardening at home and volunteering with other groups.
- **Impact of Involvement:** The respondents overwhelmingly reported a positive relationship between their IET involvement and a range of health, wellbeing and knowledge accumulation factors. Positive impacts on 'sense of well-being', 'sense of belonging to a community' and 'friendship circle' were near universal – while over 70% of respondents reported increases in 'food growing knowledge', 'understanding of community issues', 'understanding of environmental issues', 'understanding of local economic issues', 'activeness' and 'physical health'.

4.6 INCREDIBLE EDIBLE TODMORDEN: ENABLERS, CHALLENGES AND WIDER DEVELOPMENT

A number of themes developed from the analysis offered insights into factors that served as enablers and/or challenges for IET, and for the wider development of the IE movement:

4.6.1 Local Enablers

The research identified three interconnected enablers:

- **Individual Personalities:** The inspirational and charismatic personalities of the individuals who founded IET were understood to be pivotal in catalysing the initiative and motivating engagement.
- **Culture of Proactivity:** The proactive culture that characterised early developments was seen to have infused IET and to have been instrumental in facilitating its successful evolution and expansion.
- **'Three Spinning Plates' Model:** The IET model was understood to underpin its distinctiveness and success and to have been highly influential in guiding its evolution (although some raised concerns that a model is a normative concept that fits uncomfortably with IET's counter-cultural identity).



4.6.2 Local Challenges

Likewise, a number of challenges were highlighted, suggesting that Todmorden has not been a straightforward place in which to operationalise IE – and requiring dedication, persistence and diplomacy from those involved:

- **Countering Resistance to Change:** Although the town has demonstrated a spirit of togetherness and resilience, the perceived division between 'incomers' and longer-term residents was seen to have resulted in some resistance to new ideas and the type of change instigated by IET.
- **Securing Inclusivity and Reach:** Against a backdrop of overwhelming positivity, there were some concerns about elitism and perceptions that IET has only a limited 'reach' into the community.
- **Overcoming Scepticism:** Alongside the optimism and celebration of IET's achievements, a few sceptical voices questioned the motivations of high-profile individuals.
- **Living up to Expectations:** The extensive positive media coverage has led in some instances to pressure for IET to live up to its reputation.
- **Retaining Community Cohesion:** There was concern that the success and distinctiveness of IET was contributing to gentrification and in turn threatening community cohesion as middle class commuters moved into the town.

- **Assuaging Fears and Misconceptions:** There were early fears about IET’s provision of free food threatening local market traders and retailers, but relationships have improved markedly over time.

4.6.3 Differences, Tensions and Creative Innovations

The research also highlighted issues relating to conflict, tensions and innovation:

- **Creativity and Difference:** The innovation characterising IET has, to an extent, been borne out of and thrived on difference – and creative tensions were seen as going hand-in-hand with inspirational and charismatic leadership.
- **Coherence of Incredible Edible:** Whilst there was some appreciation of the reasons for IE separating into separate entities (e.g. IE Todmorden Ltd., IE AquaGarden, IE Farm, IE Ltd./IE Network), this had created some confusion and was seen to reflect ‘silo working’ and to undermine coherence.
- **Effective Partnership Working:** Whilst IET was seen to be well-connected with key public services, there were differing perspectives on how strongly or harmoniously it has worked with other community organisations.
- **Different Agendas:** There were also issues with sub-groups wanting to use IET for specific purposes and concern that this could jeopardise its wider role in relation to the local economy.

4.6.4 Engaging Different Demographics and Connecting Outwards

Whilst some felt that IET had helped to break down barriers and bring people together, the research also suggested that a continuing question concerns community-wide awareness and engagement:

- **Engaging the Whole Community:** IET has been most popular with women, young children and older members of the community, with positive examples of intergenerational activities. However, there has been less involvement of teenagers and young adults, and engaging longer-term residents and marginalised sections of the community was seen to be a key challenge (although there has been enthusiastic participation by people with learning difficulties, and partnerships have been forged with the Recovery Centre, the Staying Well mental health project and the Job Centre).
- **Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers:** More widely, the ongoing recruitment and retention of new volunteers was identified as important to the long-term sustainability of IET.
- **Forging Outward-Facing Links:** The importance of securing links to individuals and organisations in a position to have influence locally was also highlighted.



4.6.5 Reproducibility of the Incredible Edible Model as applied in Todmorden

A key issue concerning the spread of IE nationally and globally is the extent to which the IE model, as developed and applied within Todmorden, is reproducible. A number of themes related to this:

- **Coherence and Self-Determination:** Whilst linking success to the enabling factors identified above – including the ‘three spinning plates’ model – it was argued that IE initiatives need to embrace core principles but be able to take control of their own identity and development and have the flexibility to evolve as they wish within their particular contexts and using their specific assets (although some questioned whether this threatens the coherence of IE as a movement).
- **Understanding the Challenges:** An appreciation of the challenges that an IE initiative is likely to face was seen to be invaluable in guiding its development and navigating pitfalls.
- **Thinking Big, Starting Small:** There was a suggestion that it can be helpful for IE groups to ‘start small’, linking incremental change to a bigger vision of what’s possible longer-term
- **Learning from Others:** The IE Network was viewed as a key resource for learning and peer support.



4.7 SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The evaluative SROI of IET used the ToC as a reference point to identify six outcomes that were considered to be ‘material’ – identifiable and attributable to the work of IET – two from each ‘plate’ and three representing both short and medium outcomes:

- Changed Use of Public Space
- Greater physical activity and use of ‘green space’
- IET used as a brand for business & tourism
- Buy local ethos promoted
- Increased engagement with food growing and wider food-related issues
- Established learning and training opportunities for young people, wider community and marginalised groups.

In accordance with conventional SROI analysis, a series of indicators and financial proxies were identified for each outcome and the resulting impacts were moderated by factoring in deadweight, displacement and attribution coefficients. Inputs were estimated on the basis of financial data and volunteer time (derived from the Volunteer Survey).

The resulting analysis showed a Net Social Return for IET activities in 2016 of £878,609, set against inputs totalling £159,512. This results in an SROI ratio of 1 to 5.1: in other words, for every £1 invested, largely through volunteer time and small financial contributions, £5.51 was returned to the Todmorden community as a whole during 2016.

Of this return, 75% was attributable to the uplift in demand for local food, as evidenced by the community survey and 9.4% was attributable to the increase in visitors to Todmorden.

The analysis adopted a cautious approach, excluding ToC outcomes that could not clearly be attributed to IET or for which proxies could not be robustly identified, in order to minimise the risk of over-claiming beneficial impact. It is, therefore, very likely that the actual impact and return on investment is significantly higher.



5. DISCUSSION

This study was designed to elicit a wide range of data on IET and provides a convincing and largely coherent account of its achievements. This section reflects on the findings, profiling key themes.

5.1 SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Whilst giving voice to ‘dissenting’ voices, the views elicited across all data collection strands was overwhelmingly positive. In terms of material impact, IET has had a significant effect on the town, and awareness and active engagement have increased markedly over time. The ToC framework mapped perceived short-, medium- and long-term impacts. These ambitious impacts suggest a confidence in the IET model and were further evidenced by interview, focus group and survey data. Whilst framed in terms of the three ‘spinning plates’ of community, business and learning, the outcomes clearly addressed social (e.g. increased physical activity and use of green space; strengthened local distinctiveness; increased community cohesion and connectivity), economic (e.g. IET brand as income generator for local businesses and tourism; IET-related business spin-offs; ‘buy-local’ ethos) and environmental (e.g. increased engagement with food; changed use of public space; increased understanding about sustainability) dimensions. Key points to highlight include:

- IET volunteers – estimated to number around 300 individuals – are an important beneficiary group and the volunteer survey was overwhelmingly positive about the range of wellbeing benefits, many particular to IET.
- Although IET is focused on local community action, the findings pointed to successes in developing a ‘think global, act local’ ethos – an early aspiration of key actors.

- The SROI study identified the impact of IET on local food purchasing as particularly important but also profiled outcomes across all three ‘spinning plates’. The resulting return on investment ratio of 1 to 5.1 is impressive, particularly as the study adopted a cautious approach and the actual ratio is likely to be significantly higher.

5.2 ORGANISATIONAL EVOLUTION

Ten years after its inception, IE in Todmorden is complex and, for some, confusing – comprising a group of interrelated organisations, each with their own focus and challenges. Two core axes can be identified to characterise the difference in ethos between the organisations in the IET institutional family: focus (internal / external) and resourcing (reliance on external funding / self-reliance). IET Ltd. focuses on local community-led action within Todmorden, working without grant assistance and relying on volunteer resources and limited income from tours and speaking engagements. IE Ltd., Incredible North and the IE Network are primarily concerned with spreading the IE model outward beyond Todmorden and, whilst still relying heavily on volunteer time, also draw on funding for professional support services. The Incredible AquaGarden and Incredible Farm both utilise volunteer time, with the former relying also on external funding and the latter generating income through selling produce.

The research suggests that the organisational evolution and resulting contrasting ‘missions’ reflect individual motivations and philosophies of the original core members of IET, influenced by contextual factors, opportunities and challenges over time. However, the divergence between internal and external focus and between self-reliance and external resource reliance also reflect deeper and wider distinctions in social and environmental movements.

5.3 INCREDIBLE EDIBLE TODMORDEN: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INITIATIVE AND PLACE

The findings suggest that IET’s impacts reflect its relationship with Todmorden as a place – its geography and history, and its distinctive and, to a degree, counter-cultural, human and social capital. Despite some resistance and dissent, Todmorden has largely welcomed IET’s establishment and been receptive to its ideas and community-led action – as demonstrated by the adoption of branded blackboards by market traders; and by the permission granted to plant outside the police station, health centre and railway station. Moreover, IET has achieved extensive community engagement, resulting in upward trends in both IET produce-picking and wider local sourcing.

Whilst the success of IET is in part a product of Todmorden as a particular place with a distinctive community, the research also shows that it has its roots in the vision, leadership and actions of dynamic, resourceful and persuasive individuals at a specific point in time. It is noteworthy that the majority of those actively involved in IET are ‘incomers’, albeit having lived in the town for a significant period of time and become well integrated.

More broadly, analysis of the data revealed the rich ways in which IET as an initiative has interacted with and changed Todmorden as a place. Its proactive ‘can do’ culture has broken down barriers, engendered a hopeful sense of optimism and revitalised community – further enhancing the distinctiveness and attractiveness of the town. Likewise, the creation of food growing areas has not only enhanced the town’s physical appearance, but – through highly visible ‘propaganda planting’ – has positioned food as a vehicle to catalyse conversations and empower people to explore their relationship with their local environment. IET has challenged prevailing policy discourses, for example, through promoting growing spaces in the forthcoming Todmorden Neighbourhood Plan, which looks to influence the strategic-level Local Plan Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council. Beyond this, there

were signs of people considering how local actions interact with national policy and with global sustainability and wellbeing challenges.

5.4 REPRODUCIBILITY

A key question is ‘how can the IE model, as developed in Todmorden, be meaningfully translated to other areas’? Many other IE groups are implementing similar kinds of actions, supported by the Incredible Edible Network, but as this research focused only on IET, we do not know whether the ToC developed with IET stakeholders reflects a common understanding across the IE movement or how successful other IE initiatives have been.

Whilst other IE initiatives may be able to put in place some of the same enabling factors that IET has benefited from, it is important to recognise that IET’s success has been due in part to its trailblazing nature and its creation and, therefore, ‘ownership’ of the IE concept. It is intuitive that some of the impacts identified in the ToC – for example, local distinctiveness, enhanced reputation and the IET ‘brand’ related to tourism and business – result directly from these particular characteristics.

A question emerging from the research is how the IE model is understood and used by other groups – specifically whether it constitutes a prescriptive tool whereby groups are expected to frame their project using the ‘three spinning plates’; or an overarching brand under which diverse community-led food-related projects can be developed; or a philosophy and set of values that can guide such projects, drawing on their unique set of community assets, relationships and aspirations? Whilst the former might offer more coherence to an emerging movement, the majority view emphasised ‘bottom-up’ approaches and highlighted the importance of IE projects finding their own way, being locally determined and responding to and enhancing local distinctiveness.

The huge momentum, profile and impact of the wider IE movement is due in part to those individuals and places that have been inspired by and adopted the IE vision and model – and there are now multiple examples of excellent practice from which to draw learning. However, its success also owes much to the inspirational example of the ‘original’ IE in Todmorden driven by IET Ltd. and the work of IE Ltd. through Incredible North and the IE Network, offering a supportive and enabling environment for other initiatives across the UK and worldwide.

5. CONCLUSION



Established in 2007, IET remains highly active and influential ten years on. This study utilised a combination of research methods informed by a community-generated ToC, including surveys, interviews, focus groups and a SROI analysis. Together, these have generated a wealth of insightful quantitative and qualitative data and point to IET's remarkable resilience and growing reach within and beyond Todmorden.

It is evident that IE has resonated with Todmorden's residents and galvanising deep and sustained community action. Whilst it is notoriously challenging to attribute particular community-based effects to specific causes, the data convincingly shows that IET has achieved a range of social, economic and environmental impacts on the town and its population.

For those looking to learn from the Todmorden experience, it is important to note that despite its overwhelmingly positive 'story', IET has faced a number of challenges: firstly, it has faced some resistance to change, seemingly linked to divisions between incomers and longer-term residents; secondly, it has faced a degree of scepticism and hostility stemming from negative perceptions, fears and prejudices; and thirdly, the divergence and conflict that has nurtured creative innovation has also threatened the cohesiveness and coherence of the IE 'message'.

Alongside these challenges, it is, however, important to identify and celebrate IET's success factors, some of which can be readily reproduced, others of which are more unique to Todmorden as a place, by virtue of its particular characteristics and IET's pioneering status:

- the 'three spinning plates model' of community, learning and business as a simple and engaging framework to involve multiple stakeholders, empower local residents, organisations and businesses', and ensure joined-up action with demonstrable value

- the leadership of charismatic, inspirational and entrepreneurial champions who have persuasively articulated the IET vision and engaged people to ensure the effective translation of idea to action
- the facilitating nature of Todmorden’s historical and (counter-) cultural context and distinctiveness, which in turn have been strengthened and enhanced by the actions of IET
- a commitment to bottom-up and inclusive ‘people power’, whereby IET has not waited for the leadership, permission and resources of government and other bodies, but instead has made things happen by harnessing supporters and volunteers and building a proactive ‘can-do’ culture
- the use of food not only as the focus for growing, education and business development, but also as a unifying and inclusive vehicle for societal change that can break down barriers and serve as a common language to engage people and tackle both local and global issues
- an appreciation of the value of ‘visibility’ to engender community-led action, demonstrated through creating an attractive and innovative brand, fostering good media relationships, effectively using of social media, and developing ‘commercially’ viable activities
- the creation of an effective and ‘infectious’ concept at a particular point in time, allowing IE to go ‘viral’ and catalyse national and worldwide movements that further spotlighted IET and the town
- the use of ‘propaganda gardening’ to grow food in public spaces, thereby helping to improve the town’s appearance, raise awareness, catalyse conversations, encourage people to re-evaluate their relationship to their local environment, and stimulate broader reflection and re-appraisal in public policy discourse about what is ‘normal’ and what is ‘possible’ and ultimately about the relationship between people and the public realm.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

Public policy related bodies (including local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS trusts) should:

- create enabling environments that facilitate the development of self-starting community groups and promote peer-to-peer interaction both within communities and between communities
- enable community initiatives to harness assets within the public realm, as potential growing areas and as spaces for community expression that promote distinctiveness and collective belonging
- maximise potential for medium- and longer-term community impacts, acknowledging the complexity and unpredictability of holistic community action arising from initiatives such as IE
- value and support community-led initiatives such as IE within the context of social prescribing and the growing evidence base concerning the horticulture, nature connectedness and wellbeing.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

IE and related initiatives should:

- be responsive to their own particular context, valuing and utilising the IE ‘three spinning plates model’ as it relates to their own distinctive culture and assets
- reaffirm commitment to bottom-up community-led action, whilst appreciating the value and influence of forging connections outwards to local democratic structures and policy-making bodies
- consider developing their own ToC as a means of clarifying and achieving a consensus concerning their vision, aims, expectations and assumptions

- consider engaging in evaluative research, appreciating the potential value for reflecting on progress, guiding future development and changing the perceptions of key stakeholders
- whilst being mindful of potential negative impacts, recognise that divergence, conflict and resistance can be positive assets for community action, through kindling innovation and creativity
- appreciate the value of consciously developing ‘media literacy’, recognising that external communication and engagement can impact significantly on success and reach
- reflect on how local food-based activity can change people’s relationship to their environment, shift conceptions of the public realm, and connect to 21st century global challenges.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Researchers should:

- consider undertaking a large-scale multi-site study to explore how the IE model has been understood and implemented in different contexts, and examine the stories and impacts of different IE initiatives
- utilise innovative mixed-method designs that can effectively capture the range of interconnected social, economic and environmental outcomes of complex community-led initiatives such as IET
- seek to understand the links between contexts, mechanisms and outcomes, examining not only what works, but also exploring for whom, in what contexts, and how and why
- engage as diverse and hard-to-reach stakeholder groups and also seek to distil insight and learning not only from ‘success stories’, but also from conflicts, shortcomings and failures
- consider developing a consensus-based ToC as an evaluation framework and tool when focusing on IE and related initiatives
- advocate and seek funding for longitudinal studies that span multiple disciplines, appreciating that this type of research is necessary to understand the impact of complex community-led initiatives.

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