

Could saving the traditional pub be the answer to Britain's binge drinking problem?

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A research study finds evidence for the traditional pub as a site for restrained and responsible social interaction for young adults. The UK government wants further controls to restrict high street bars but on the other hand is concerned about the decline in the number of traditional public houses or pubs. A recent article published in *Planning Theory & Practice*, "Young adults and the decline of the urban English pub: issues for planning," by Marion Roberts (University of Westminster) & Tim Townshend (Newcastle University), discusses whether the English Planning System should distinguish between pubs for the "public good" and licensed premises associated with "social ills?"

Roberts and Townshend bring together two issues that have pre-occupied the British government; young people's drinking and the [decline](#) of the British pub. The number of public houses in the UK has fallen by nearly one quarter in the space of three decades. Meanwhile alcohol consumption amongst [young adults](#) remains a key policy concern. The authors discuss [evidence](#) from research into local variations in youth drinking cultures in England, which found that young people reported drinking in a restrained and responsible manner in "traditional" pubs. Young adults in their study reported having one or two drinks on a weekday evening or sometimes not drinking alcohol at all. Such behaviour could be contrasted with heavy drinking at high street bars or at house parties.

"I've got one group of friends who I would go out clubbing with and they like to get completely wrecked... My other group of friends are more

like me and like to go down the pub and have a glass of wine and stick to soft drinks after that. It depends who I am out with."

While recognising the adverse effects of excessive alcohol consumption, the authors point out that going to pubs reinforces social ties and networks. This evidence lends support to arguments for the contribution of pubs to social sustainability and paradoxically, to health, or at least a healthier mode of alcohol consumption.

The article explores the difficulties the English [planning system](#) faces in seeking to distinguish pubs that might be identified with a "public good" from other types of licensed premises more associated with "social ills." The Use Class Order in the English planning system does not provide an adequate distinction between different types of drinking establishment. The authors suggest a new use class established for traditional pubs where the majority of patrons are seated. The UK government is already providing special support to "community pubs," through the Localism Act 2011 and the Community Services Grants. The study found that its sample of young adults were prepared to travel to meet friends and that their pub going routines were rarely confined to their "local." This suggests that while the Localism Act may be effective in supporting well-organised community groups, it does not meet the needs of a younger, mobile demographic.

"It may seem paradoxical to support going to pubs as part of a healthier lifestyle," says Marion Roberts, "and it is important not to romanticise pubs as there are issues about the extent to which young women feel welcome or comfortable in them and that applies to other groups. Nevertheless, the planning system has been called on by politicians to help local [pubs](#) to survive and it does seem that this issue should be taken seriously."

More information: Roberts, M, Townshend, T, Pappalepore, I,

Eldridge, A, & Mulyawan, B. (2012). "Local Variations in Youth Drinking Cultures. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation."
www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14649357.2013.845683

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