Do BIDs Make Better Places?

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Background and Motivation

Business Improvement Districts are a global and historic initiative which have grown in popularity as a way of ameliorating local communities through the stewardship of local businesses. From this study, it became more evident that BIDs have a wide-reaching scope that disproportionately benefits retail. It also was clear that BIDs face challenges of data measurement and quantification, lending the need to set out standards for determining if BIDs make better places?

Data and Methods

For a mixed-methods approach, the following datasets were utilized: geographic data of BID boundaries provided by the London Datastore and created by the Greater London Authority (GLA) which also hosts data on BID boundaries.

I also leveraged OpenLocal data, which provides updated information on the status of commercial entities within a borough. It contains columns classified by several attributes including vacancies, rental valuations, rates ratepayers. This allows for a comparison of geography.
between the BID boundary taken from the London Datastore and the points provided by OpenLocal.

As BIDs are multifaceted, several confounding factors were similarly utilized for a deep dive into understanding how BIDs operate and where such as their special category (Scat) code, identified by the UK Government, the businesses rental valuation, and their time of activity to provide a better understanding of longevity amongst rapidly expanding BID initiatives. The data from OpenLocal is crucial to being able to create a time series analysis, which takes components of a time frame and spatial elements, to then understand how an area has developed over time. In this scenario, it was used to study the rise in BID areas for London from 2018 to 2020 and to understand the increase of the BID phenomena.

Key Findings

BIDs often take on the efforts that go ignored by local authorities which is a grand task to be taken on by business owners who must rely on the attractiveness of their borough for client well-being.

What BIDs fail to do is account for the businesses who rely on much more pointed initiatives to improve their climate. As stated, offices are one of the largest type of businesses that fails to have direct policy measures to improve its situation. One of the ways in which these lapses in full policy implementation could be mitigated is through an increased use of data-sharing and availability, especially from boroughs. This study illuminates the multi-faceted nature of BIDs as a tool for place management and their impact on urban spaces, businesses, and people.

Do BIDs make better places? Efforts of BIDs certainly work towards making communities greener, safer, and more walk-able, but these factors are too abstract to concretely determine if BIDs have made the places in which they operate better. These findings underscore the need for BID governance that goes beyond retail-oriented thinking to account for the diverse economic needs within the designated BID areas. This analysis suggests that BIDs must embrace a calibrated strategy that addresses the unique requirements of all business categories and community members, beyond typical retail measures of footfall and sales.

Value of the research

There is a lack of quantification of BIDs thus far, and an even higher deficiency of a data-driven evaluation of their impact of local boroughs in London. By quantifying the multifaceted impacts of BIDs and embracing transparency, cities can harness the full potential of these initiatives to invigorate urban landscapes and empower diverse economic stakeholders. quantifying the success of BID initiatives through standardized metrics and transparent reporting could enhance accountability, bolster public engagement, and contribute to sustainable urban development.