

The development of the Cardiff City-region

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Introduction

There is a resurgent interest in how the city of Cardiff links to neighbouring areas in the Valleys as well as to urban areas such as Bridgend and Newport. Policymakers are currently exploring how this greater city-region area – an area that includes Cardiff and nine proximate or neighbouring local authority areas (map above) - can be more effectively governed and how resources can be managed to support investment in infrastructure (which provides the back bone for how cities and regions function). It is argued here, and in other city-regions across the UK, such as Greater Manchester, that by improving linkages across the city-region, prospects for employment and wage growth can be improved.

Findings

The links between Cardiff itself and neighbouring areas have played historically important roles in shaping the local economy. In the nineteenth century, Cardiff was a major port that exported coal and steel from mines located in parts of Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda CynonTaf, for example. The link from mine to port, that enabled materials to be transported, was initially supported by a canal before the advent of the railways proved vital. However, following World War I, mining activities reduced sharply. As a result, the economy of south-east Wales is now firmly focused on services rather than manufacturing (although in Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent, manufacturing represents around 20% of jobs in each area; the UK average is close to 9%) (Waite, 2015).

Given the dominance of service jobs, the link between city and hinterland is now principally focused on the movement of labour, with over 70,000 people commuting into Cardiff itself from neighbouring areas each working day (City of Cardiff Council, 2014). People commute into Cardiff, especially the central business district, as this is where a concentration

of service jobs is located. However, for those using public transport, commuting can be a frustrating and time consuming experience, with old train carriages and limited integration between services for rail and bus. This contributes to a heavy reliance on the private car. Indeed, at present, 80% of those who commute in to Cardiff from outside the local authority area use personal transport (City of Cardiff Council, 2014).

To address this problem, a Metro is being developed. Metro aims to create an integrated public transport system where bus and train services are linked together at key transport hubs and where passengers use a single ticket across the network. Metro aims to reduce the time it takes to get from towns and communities in the “Heads of the Valleys” (Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent and the northern parts of Rhondda Cynon Taf, Caerphilly and Torfaen) to Cardiff city centre. The proposed map for the Metro is as follows:



Funding for Metro has initially been provided by the Welsh Government. However, to support the wider construction programme - reflecting the fact that Metro will be developed in phases - funding will also be sought from funds provided by the EU and possibly from a City Deal which is an agreement being negotiated with the UK Government in Westminster.

Economic vs Ecological

To date, economic development objectives have been the core focus for policymakers. That is to say, Metro is seen to improve the links between places where job opportunities are located and where workers live across the city-region. However, important social and environmental systems, that are not directly linked to economic growth per se, also function within the city-region and should be part of how we plan for and prioritise city-region policies (Morgan, 2014).

For example, with rural and agricultural activities prominent in many parts of the city-region, food systems are important to consider. Local food movements and farmers markets

are existing initiatives that emphasise the importance of consuming locally grown produce. Such initiatives link to efforts to promote healthy eating across Wales more generally.

Additionally, the Valleys Regional Park is an initiative that seeks to promote outdoor, heritage and conservation activities



at multiple sites across the Valleys. A stylised map of the regional park area, which extends into the Swansea city-region and encompasses some of the most deprived communities in Wales, is given below:

Regarded as core green infrastructure, the Valleys Regional Park is an initiative that balances environmental, social and economic issues. In this respect, as well as seeking to improve the quality of life and the health of local residents through the promotion of active lifestyles, efforts to provide job opportunities in the regional park, through tourism, have been made. Metro, in this context, will play a role in making such tourist activities accessible.

In many environmental and social programmes in city-regions, initiatives originate from the “bottom-up” rather than the “top-down”. In other words, instead of being designed and controlled by elites, such as elected politicians, environmental projects are in many cases run by local groups and communities collectively known as civil society groups. It is important that civil society groups are similarly empowered to play such roles in the Cardiff city-region.

Research Focus

Working closely with the policymakers in the city-region, our research currently explores:

- How environmental and social issues can gain greater attention and focus alongside economic concerns in the city-region.
- How City Deal negotiations – which involve the Welsh Government, the UK Government and local authorities – are shaping city-region policymaking.
- As city-region policies are rapidly evolving, our research typically involves the analysis of documentary material, including reports produced by government bodies.

Conclusions

- Efforts are underway to develop a city-region in south-east Wales which encompasses 10 existing local authority areas.
- Transport infrastructure, delivered through Metro, is a major priority for the city-region.
- Transport projects are typically seen to support economic objectives by linking workers with places of employment.
- Local food systems and the Valleys Regional Park initiative are examples of key environmental systems and projects within the city-region.

References

- City of Cardiff Council (2014). Cardiff Local Transport Plan 2015-2020. Cabinet Proposal, 27 November. Available at: https://formerly.cardiff.gov.uk/objview.asp?object_id=29497 [accessed 4/1/16]
- Morgan KJ (2014). The rise of metropolitics: Urban governance in the age of the city-region. In N Bradford & A Bramwell (Eds.), *Governing urban economies: Innovation and inclusion in Canadian city-regions* (297–318). Toronto: University of Toronto Press
- Waite D (2015) City Profile: Cardiff and the shift to city-regionalism. *Cities*, 48: 21-30

Further information

- <http://gov.wales/topics/transport/public/metro/?lang=en>
- <http://www.thevalleys.org.uk/>