School of Social Sciences

"Registered charity number: 1141565"

THE MENAI PAPERS

Working Papers Series 2011/01

ISSN 1465-2027
EAST, WEST AND THE BIT IN THE MIDDLE: LOCALITIES IN NORTH WALES

Robin Mann and Alex Plows

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines ways of understanding and knowing North Wales. We outline some of the key ways in which different parts, or localities, within North Wales are seen to connect or relate to each other. We examine different ways of constructing North Wales, for example, as divided by a rural North West and industrial North East, as linked by transport connections, and as cross-bordered. We consider how these situated understandings of locality shape, and are shaped by, specific factors including demographic changes and mobilities, economic and community regeneration as well as questions concerned with national identity and the Welsh Language.

This endeavour is based on a number of data collection exercises including a baseline audit of available secondary data; interviews and focus groups with local governmental organisations as part of the WISERD stakeholder interview series; as well as small-scale qualitative fieldwork.

LINKING NORTH WALES: THE A55 CORRIDOR

There are two challenges in North Wales, one is sort of bridging East and West and I think also the other one is bridging from the A55 to the rural areas in the south (Economic Regeneration)

The above stakeholder sets an economic challenge for North Wales and the A55 appears central to this. In this context, the A55 is related to concerns about a lack of economic mutuality across North Wales, such that developments in the industrialised areas of the North East do not ‘grasp’ rural areas of the North West (for a background to the economic rationales behind the A55 see Bryan et al 1997 and Welsh Economy Research Unit 1996). Running ‘East-to-West’ from Chester to Holyhead docks, the A55 epitomises the significance that is often placed on the cross-border relationship between North Wales and the North West of England. The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) National Transport Plan (2010) states that:

…the efficiency of the East-West corridor is of crucial importance to the future development of North Wales. Internal connectivity within North Wales is complex, but crucial to ensuring the distribution of growth and access to services and leisure. (Welsh Assembly Government 2010:31)

This account is corroborated by the following tourism stakeholder, who highlights the impact of increased connectivity for North West Wales:
The A55 was a great investment... Post A55, what we have picked up is that there’s kind of a shift by the customer who was saving 30 minutes in travel time; in actual fact [this] didn’t make his journey time shorter, he spent the 30 minutes travelling further West… And I think that may have accelerated, you know, the Western periphery to be more popular. (Tourism)

As a site the A55 Corridor cuts across administrative boundaries, covering six Unitary Authorities (if one includes Wrexham). It comprises a mixture of different contexts including: environmental (urban and rural); economic (e.g. deindustrialization, farming, tourism, declining coastal resorts, numerous business parks and industrial estates); deprivation (areas having some of the least and most deprived districts in Wales) and language/cultural identity (areas of both high and low proportions of Welsh speakers, areas of significant in- and out-migration and cross-border relationships, as well as a notable migrant worker population in Wrexham).

Given this heterogeneity and diversity, proximity/distance to the A55 thus becomes a way of understanding ‘micro-locality’ differences within the North Wales ‘site’. For example, access to the A55 means that you can reach the border and Chester within one hour when driving from locations East of Bangor. So in understanding the multiple micro-localities of which North Wales is comprised, one key issue was to think about the differences between the coastal strip running parallel to the A55 as well as inland to the south. We can think about roads here as tributaries off the A55 so we have Holyhead-Llangefni- and Northtlo WYLFA nuclear power station and Amlwch; Bangor-Caernarfon-Llanberis; Llandudno-Llanrwst; Rhyl-Denbigh etc.

A related aspect to this understanding of micro localities is the distinction between rurality and peripherality (Wales Rural Observatory 2007). Towns such as Caernarfon and Bangor are not rural but are characterised by a feeling of being peripheral, while nevertheless playing important roles for the populations they serve. A Welsh Rural Observatory report (Wales Rural Observatory 2007) focuses on the unique makeup and role of such smaller size towns in Wales which serve large rural areas. A related issue is the importance of scale and relativity when considering how concepts such as rural are understood, and by whom; for example, those living in Caernarfon may not see themselves as rural but may see other places within 10 miles (such as villages on the Llyn Peninsula) as being rural. However from the perspective of someone living in Wrexham, Caernarfon may seem extremely rural indeed.

A further important consideration was the need to account for localities in both North West and North East Wales. The Wales Spatial Plan (described in detail below), for example distinguishes between North West and North East and the distinction has historical, cultural and political resonance. Towards the North East are coastal towns such as Colwyn Bay, Rhyl, Prestatyn, Flint, Shotton. But away from the coast there are parts of North East Wales which are largely rural characterised by village communities, with the area West of Wrexham becoming ‘deep rural’ (Wales Rural Observatory 2009). Wrexham itself is the largest town in North Wales and the fourth largest in Wales after Cardiff, Swansea and Newport.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH ENGLAND: ECONOMY, MOBILITY AND IDENTITY
The A55 corridor also affords consideration of the extent to which localities across North Wales are embedded in different kinds of relationships with England. A distinctive aspect of North Wales, and of North East Wales in particular, is its cross-border relationship with England. Of all the Welsh regions, North Wales attracts the highest net number of migrants from England, with most migrants to Wales from England coming from North West England (Office for National Statistics 2006). Compared to the rest of Wales, North Wales also has the highest net inflow of migrants aged 65+ as well as the highest net outflow of migrants to England aged 16-24. This would include students and graduates who move around the UK to university and to pursue careers.

These relationships, however, can be considered not only in terms of migration to and from England, but also more broadly in terms of mobilities, or peoples’ daily movements. Certain places are embedded in cross-border relationships for instance, particularly between Flintshire and the neighbouring English local authorities. The table below shows the percentage of 16-74 year olds in employment who work in England. Over 1 in 10 of those living in North Wales (11.4%) travel to work in England. This is more than double the national Wales percentage (5.4%). Furthermore, as many as 24% of those living in Flintshire have their workplace across the English border.

**Table 1: Living in Wales, working in England**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Residence</th>
<th>16-74 yr olds in employment who work in England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrexham</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Wales</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conwy</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwynedd</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglesey</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 2001 Census.*

This economic embeddedness between North East Wales and North West England is also reflected in the Spatial Plan for North East Wales in which economic regeneration is centred on the fostering of cross-border economic and business partnerships. Furthermore the 2001 census data on travel to work indicates that the numbers of people living in North West Wales and working in North East Wales vastly outweighs the opposing movements of people living in the North East and working in the North West. Conversely, one can think of opposing movements from East to West Wales when one considers recreational and leisure flows created by
Snowdonia National Park and other opportunities. The ‘tourism flow’, as picked up by our previous tourism stakeholder, from East to West, and indeed from parts of England to the North West, is further emphasised when we consider that the dominant visitor sourcing areas to North Wales are the North West of England (37%) and West Midlands (27%) (North Wales Tourism Partnership Business Plan, 2011). Patterns of East-West migration flow can also be examined by looking at Census 2001 data on country of birth.

Map 1: % of People born in the UK, outside of Wales

The map above shows the percentage of people born in the UK outside of Wales for local areas across North Wales. There are numerous districts where the non-Welsh born population are over 45%. The non-Welsh born percentage in these areas is almost double the national Wales picture where around a quarter of the Welsh resident population was born outside of Wales in the UK. In Flintshire, as in other unitary authorities close to the border, these figures are accentuated due to births in hospitals across the English border (these figures are also noted by the Aberystwyth team for Montgomeryshire). Yet there are also notable pockets of non-Welsh born people in remote parts of Anglesey and in the south West of Gwynedd. A number of trends might be underlying these patterns such as the settlement of in-migrant families and retirees; allocation of social housing to deprived groups; Flintshire as a
commuting area for those working in England. The accentuation of these percentages due to births in hospitals in England is unlikely to influence percentages of non-Welsh born in Anglesey and Gwynedd.

Of course, these relationships can be contrasted to other places, where it is evident that networks and relationships remain largely locality-specific and often extend only to the nearest large town. This appears to be the case in the slate mining villages on the Western face of Snowdonia which have historically looked, and continue to look, towards Caernarfon. Our qualitative research in these areas report perceptions of being on ‘the other side of the mountains’ to the A55. Topographical landscapes are experienced as an important geographical boundary which has cultural and social implications. Both Caernarfon and Bangor represent major public sector employers (for example, Gwynedd County Council and the Countryside Council for Wales), as well as being sites of Welsh language cultural and media industries. Smaller villages in the North West may be viewed simply as travel to work areas to these centres.

Interesting and policy relevant questions would then be to understand the sense of participation and attachment of those people have moved to live in Wales and their sense of identification with Wales compared with their place of origin (see for example Day et al 2006). Table 2 below shows the varying senses of national identity and Welsh language ability across North Wales.

Table 2: National Identities and Welsh Language Ability in North Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% national identity Welsh</th>
<th>% national identity British</th>
<th>% national identity English</th>
<th>% Welsh born Welsh</th>
<th>% Welsh born Speak Welsh</th>
<th>% Welsh born Speak Welsh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gwynedd</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>91.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrexham</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglesey</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conwy</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Annual Population Survey 2010*

The table shows national identity options in terms of whether people report themselves as Welsh, British and/or English. These are not forced choices but may

---

1 It is noted that the percentage of Welsh speakers is higher in the APS compared to the 2001 Census. Difference in estimates of Welsh speakers between the Census and the forerunner of the APS (the Labour Force Survey) are discussed in Haseldon (2003). See also Higgs et al (2004).
also represent dual or multiple national identities\(^2\). Comparing these figures with the Welsh national average, a number of patterns can be discerned. Firstly, that the percentage reporting a Welsh national identity is higher in majority Welsh speaking authorities of Gwynedd and Anglesey. But it is also high in Wrexham, close to the border, and where the percentage of Welsh speakers is similar to the Wales average. There is no simple East-West picture here. Substantial sections of the population do report themselves as British, and very likely as Welsh and British. Both British and English national identities run in the opposite direction. Reporting an English national identity is particularly high in Flintshire. Being born in Wales appears to make a significant difference to whether one reports themselves as Welsh. Of course, whether country of birth is an accurate indicator of anything can be debated. Yet looking only at those born in Wales, there is much less variance in Welsh national identity across North Wales, and in relation to Wales as a whole. In addition, being born in Wales appears to make a bigger difference to whether one speaks Welsh (over 20% more so in Gwynedd and Anglesey). This suggests that Welsh language ability is strongly correlated to country of birth. Interestingly, the impact of being born in Wales on Welsh language ability is much less in Wrexham and Flintshire and indeed for Wales as a whole, in other words, where the proportions speaking Welsh are lower.

Finally, there appears to be a strong correlation between Welsh identity and the ability to speak Welsh. The suggestion from the data is that the majority of people reporting a Welsh national identity across North Wales are those who can speak Welsh. This trend is even evident in Flintshire, where Welsh identification is particularly low. The exception is Wrexham, a case of divergence between speaking Welsh and Welsh identity, and where the pattern is similar to the national picture. It is also interesting that in Gwynedd, and to a lesser extent in Anglesey, the proportion of people who say they can speak Welsh is higher than those considering themselves as Welsh. This can be contrasted to some authorities in south Wales (such as Blaenau Gwent or Merthyr Tydfil) where Welsh identity is around 80% and Welsh language ability is very low. Thus the relationship between national identity and Welsh language ability presents itself in complex ways. In North Wales at least, it would appear ‘British’ does not necessarily mean ‘not Welsh’.

**NORTH WALES AND SPATIAL PLANNING**

Notions of North Wales, North East Wales, North West Wales can be invoked to express both social and economic coherences as well as incoherence. Such notions they are also institutionalised through their correspondence to administrative boundaries and visions of regional working across these ‘hard’ local authority boundaries. Within the Welsh policy context, a key document has been the Wales Spatial Plan (Welsh Assembly Government 2008) which states the Welsh Assembly Government’s vision for regional working across local authorities, private and third sectors. The Wales Spatial Plan distinguishes between North West Wales and North East Wales\(^3\). The North West Wales plan describes a natural and physical

---

\(^{2}\) The national identity question in Wales asks ‘What do you consider your national identity to be? Please choose as many or as few as apply’: 1. Welsh, 2. English, 3. Scottish, 4. Irish, 5. British, 6. Other answer.

\(^{3}\) The 6 ‘area visions’ of the Wales spatial plan are: Central Wales; North East Wales (Border and Coast); North West Wales (Eryri a Môn); Pembrokeshire (The Haven); South East Wales (Capital Network) and; Swansea Bay (Waterfront and Western Valleys).
environment as well as a cultural and knowledge based economy which supports a strong Welsh language culture. Lack of opportunities for young people and the sustainability of Welsh speaking communities receive specific attention. Equally, the area is seen to attract people for tourism and recreation, as well as offering quality of life that can lead to permanent settlement. Gwynedd and Anglesey play a key role in the North West Wales’ spatial plan as indicated in the map below. This interface between longstanding Welsh speaking and in-migrant communities reflects the rural yet hybrid nature of the region.

Map 2: The North West Wales Eryri a Môn Spatial Plan Area


Of key importance in the plan, and to the Arfon research site, is the ‘Menai Hub’ incorporating Bangor, Caernarfon, and Llangefni. This includes significant cultural and knowledge based economies such as those centred on Countryside Council for Wales, Bangor University, Welsh Language Media Industries. In Anglesey, there are two focuses of attention; southern Anglesey, which is included in the Llangefni, Bangor and Caernarfon Hub, and North West Anglesey which is focussed on the Holyhead Hub. The Holyhead Hub is defined as an area of national connectivity reflecting its importance as one of the main UK links to Dublin and Eire. Holyhead is also a key primary settlement and a key regeneration and key business sector area, as is Llangefni.

Interestingly, no Anglesey town is classed as being of key national importance, with Bangor being the only settlement in North West Wales identified as such. This is despite the fact that Llangefni on Anglesey, and Caernarfon in Gwynedd, are core administrative centres, home not only to council offices but also magistrates courts. Caernarfon is also a World Heritage site. It is also worth noting that links from
Anglesey to other areas in Wales are not identified. Anglesey is presented as being an important link to Dublin and Eire, as being part of the Caernarfon and Bangor Hub, but not as having important links to other areas of Wales. Anglesey airport has only been in operation since 2007 so its impact on links to south Wales and Cardiff in particular remain to be assessed. However the WAG National Transport Plan (2010) notes that:

…the existing intra-Wales air-service provides fast, efficient and reliable transport between North and south Wales. The service has proved extremely popular with passengers (Welsh Assembly Government 2010:25).

The National Transport Plan aims to ‘increase the capacity of the intra-Wales air service’, although there have been significant teething problems\(^4\). Tourism on the Island is confined to the coast, with only coastal areas being identified as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and of having tourism potential. It is significant that the area covered by the Central Wales spatial plan is depicted as ‘extending’ into the North West Wales spatial plan; particularly the Southern Gwynedd region of Meirionydd, and extending up the Conwy Valley as far as Llanrwst. This crossover in the North West and Central spatial plans is explicitly framed in terms of ‘fuzzy boundaries’ (Welsh Assembly Government, 2011), this ‘fuzziness’ reflecting interconnectivity between North West and Central Wales, especially regarding shared experience of the ‘deep rural’ (Wales Rural Observatory 2009). The farming heartland town of Bala, located in Southern Gwynedd, exemplifies this ‘fuzziness’, identified in both the North West Wales and Central Wales plans as a ‘cross-boundary settlement’.

In some contrast to North West Wales, the North East Wales Plan is described as a highly industrialised cross-border area. Central to the plan is the Wrexham-Deeside-Chester hub which is distinct from the North coastal belt towns as well as the rural hinterland surrounding Llangollen. It is evident from the plan that cross-border linkages have particular importance to the economic prosperity of this area.

**Map 3: The North East Wales Border and Coast Spatial Plan Area**

---

\(^4\) Highland Airways, the company running the link, went into administration in March 2010 but the Anglesey-Cardiff air service link has continued following a WAG subsidy of £1.2 million, reflecting the strategic importance of the link for WAG (see BBC News 2011).
The plan considers the Wrexham hub to be distinct from the coastal belt towns of Rhyl, Prestatyn and others, as well as from the rural hinterland which includes Llangollen. It is evident from the spatial plan that cross-border linkages are viewed as crucial to the economic prosperity of this area (although it is also evident that this raises issues relating to identity, culture, community and language as a result of significant economic in-migration). There are questions as to whether this relationship amounts to inter-dependency as well as a tension between an ‘all-Wales’ focus and its pulls from outside. The high levels of economic in-migration can also be contrasted to net-out migration of young people aged 16-24. The North East Wales area and Wrexham in particular, is highly dependent on the manufacturing sector which makes it particularly susceptible to global economic changes. It also raises issues about the skills base of the local population for a knowledge economy, which is reflected in the lack of graduate employment opportunities in the area. Although there has been some success in re-developing the area along the lines of high skills manufacturing, Wrexham and Flintshire are still structurally weaker than Chester in this respect.

LOCAL PERSPECTIVES AND CONTESTED SOCIO-SPATIAL IMAGINARIES

‘Place-shaping’ has become a term commonly adopted across UK government policy where there is an agreement on the importance of place in delivering (spatial) policy (Lyons Inquiry, 2007). However, places are constructed by people and hence perceptions and constructions of place (‘spatial imaginaries’) vary. Different institutions, groups and individuals have different ideas of where place is and where boundaries and borders are; and also why and how place is important. Spatial imaginaries are often political constructs (Boudreau 2007). Questions can thus be posed as to how new forms of spatial planning, as described above, are shaping the way stakeholders in North Wales understand the spaces for which they are responsible (in geographical and/or policy terms, or otherwise) and the ways in which they view...
themselves as being enabled or constrained to act within such shaped places. In some cases, there is evidence that the spatial plans are reflective of existing knowledge and identity claims about a region; in other cases, it would seem as if the spatial plans are ‘place shaping’ in new and contested ways. How different stakeholders relate to the spatial plan can thus vary; interviews with stakeholders working in local government and in public bodies across the region suggests there may be important differences in these understandings of place, these ‘spatial imaginaries’ in different parts of North Wales.

a. Isolated and self-orienting West?

Some of the issues and some of the problems of the Western marginal areas haven’t really changed for probably a long, long time. In some ways, it’s worse because of the transportation and the service provision issues. There is a whole tranche of social economic transportation issues really, civil issues perhaps, and that hasn’t changed. And it does tend to rely a lot on tourism, farming, obviously, in decline on behalf of the number of people employed and the rest of the farms being joined up. The loss of young skills if you like from the area, that’s really a huge issue (Economic Regeneration)

Particularly evident amongst stakeholders in Gwynedd was a tendency to define and describe their ‘patch’ in relation to its ‘internal’ nature, to its relative isolation and rurality. Below is an example of this rural, relatively inward-looking ‘framing’ from a Housing stakeholder in Gwynedd when asked to describe their geographical area of responsibility:

Geographically, I would say all of Gwynedd, it varies from rural to urban really I mean there’s a, quite, you know, very differing needs in different areas, you can imagine, Bangor, Caernarfon, I don’t know how well you know the county but little villages and things as well further out, all totally different like Blannau Ffestiniog, Dolgellau and, if you go down Tywyn, Barmouth which are holiday resorts. They’re quite different. Bangor’s a university town, Caernarfon I suppose is a tourist area. I have said, quite often in the past, you know we manage a housing estate down in Aberdyfi, well it would be a lot easier for me to get to Liverpool…than down to Aberdyfi (laughs) (Housing)

In this specific example, Gwynedd is described in terms of the difference within different areas, ranging from urban to rural and which are not easy to access. A related issue raised by one of our Gwynedd Stakeholders was about space and the relatively large geographical size of the Unitary Authority (UA), and how this creates challenges for those responsible for maintaining partnerships and working in teams across the UA as a whole:

we’ve just given a presentation to the new Chief Executive of Public Health Wales…on ‘what is Gwynedd, what is it like as a patch’, and we chose to lead on size…I just wanted to give this guy a sense of the size and the fact that it takes you 2 ½ hours to drive from one end of the patch to the other …the size is big and with a very small team thinly spread…some of the other teams work in one county…in the South in the Valleys for example those counties can
actually be very compact, you know they might have the same population as us...they can get around it...whereas we’ve got team members ... it takes them an hour and a half to get here, to a team meeting so we never see them. So it’s just a very different way of working (Health and Social Care).

The emphasis upon size by the above stakeholder can be seen as a general issue of rurality in two ways: Firstly, because of the difficulty in travelling across the terrain, and secondly, because it has a sparse population.

b. Cross-bordered East
In contrast to the North West, several stakeholders in North East Wales positioned themselves in relation to the border with England, often referring to this as ‘our larger geographical area’ or ‘our hinterland’.

Everybody thinks the A55 as linking North Wales, [but] it doesn’t run through Wrexham, nor does the railway line and the North Wales Coast doesn’t run through Wrexham, it’s too far south...So it’s the A483 and we’re more interested in the links to Shrewsbury as well...And to the West Midlands, we’re that little bit further south (Economic development)

This is one of our Wrexham stakeholders talking about how Wrexham connects to other places with an emphasis upon economic relationships and partnerships, and supports the National Transport Plan comments cited earlier, that internal connectivity in North Wales is ‘complex’. This account of connectivity and ‘flow’ between North East Wales and North West England has implications for the Wales Spatial Plan, and Economic Partnerships such as Mersey Dee Alliance, North Wales Economic Forum. In this and other cases, there is emphasis upon commonality with (North West) England. But this is clearly contested rather than assumed to be a shared way of thinking (e.g. ‘I might be shot down on this by other people’; and below: ‘there is a bit of tension for us’) by whose who may wish to stress or justify the Welshness of the authority. Moreover we see a collapse of the local-national boundary through having adjacent authorities in England. While the border is invoked as a material entity, and ascribed with agency to influence policy delivery, it may be less salient for ‘ordinary’ residents who ‘don’t see the border’ and who may even have a different national orientation:

there are some particular issues perhaps because we are so close to England and because a lot of the impact, you know, the economic impact on us is from England rather than from West Wales really (Housing)

I think one of the issues brought is our proximity to England really...which is the thing that stands out for me because we are on the border of England...And there’s always an issue for us about, although we’re part of Wales but we also have relationships with England. Erm, in terms of some regional planning issues. And also we tend to draw a lot of staff here from English areas. Like Cheshire, Merseyside, Manchester, Shropshire and so on. So I think being a border geographical area, in a border town, does have its own ... (Social Care)
In contrast to the self-referential discourse amongst stakeholders in the North West, the North East Wales stakeholders describe their localities in terms of borders and flows. There are different borders and different sorts of flows across different sorts of borders:

And I think in the North East, there’s a lot of, still some…industries there that are also a throw back to the past in some old fashioned type activities. And even there, there tends to be branch factories and they tend to be most vulnerable. And their staff might be people from across the border. And have issues in their economic way, because I think the, the value and the sort of hits that you get from an expenditure from a salary is where the person lives and not where the person works. So, erm, I think many of the businesses in the North East really benefit Merseyside more than it benefits the local area. (Economic Regeneration, North Wales)

c. Linking West and East

And one of the issues I think is how do we bridge between the North West and the North East. For example, I mean, if there are new jobs in the North East, what can we do to make them more attractive to people from the centre bits and the North West of Wales rather than from Merseyside. And I think the training bodies in Merseyside have been much more alive to, to these opportunities. If they knew there was a car plant coming to the North East of Wales, they would be up there training people and they’d be running buses from the Wirral down to Flintshire…But us we don’t seem to be quite so alive to what’s happening. You know, and, I mean, it’s only an hour and a bit from this part to Flintshire and people really travel a lot from those areas to work. (Economic Regeneration, North Wales)

A number of issues are being raised here. Firstly, that the bridging or link of East and West is an economic problem. In particular, the need for the West to benefit from job creation in the East. Secondly, is the contrast between this lack of bridging and Merseyside or England benefiting from jobs in the North East. A point is also being made about the greater ability of training bodies in Merseyside to identify and respond to employment opportunities. There is undoubtedly a national frame to this discourse which is about generating a West-East link, and contesting a North East Wales/England link. In contrast, the stakeholder below describes a different relationship between West and East to do with access to services:

If you live in Dolgellau and you’d want to take your wife to hospital or your husband to hospital you’d go to, guess where…Where do you go? Wrexham….And that’s an awful long way if you’ve had a stroke…Aberystwyth would be closer…but their general hospital is Wrexham…you know if you want to do a big shop, if you live in Dolgellau or one of those villages around Dolgellau, you know, you have to drive to Chester, um, Aberystwyth to an extent if you’re happy with Morrison’s but, um, you know, and most of them go to Chester or Wrexham. So the travel… the travel areas are vast when you get in to the rural communities. (North Wales, Environment)
In this case there is a relationality here between North West (living in Dolgellau) and North East (travelling to hospital in Wrexham) albeit one not desired. As the stakeholder points out, southern parts of the North West, and northern parts of central Wales also look towards the East as well. Thus there are different sorts of ‘border flow’ going on which we might characterise and differentiate as:

- **Affective Flows**: Shared-spatial identities (e.g. cross-border, rural);

- **Pragmatic Flows**: New rationalities; Administrative boundaries dictating the direction of population flow across different local authority and national borders.

In the quote above therefore, the stakeholder provides a narrative of a *pragmatic flow* from Dolgellau to Wrexham, rather than an *affective flow*. The implication is that Dolgellau and Wrexham do not form part of the same ‘shared-spatial’, the interviewee indicates that people in Dolgellau would ‘naturally’ turn West and South towards Aberystwyth for certain services, but instead are being asked to travel East. Policy and other changes can therefore give rise to what seem to be ‘unnatural flows’ where people are asked to shift towards thinking further afield to a different socio-spatial. This suggests that spatially-orientated mentalities and historically established connections matter with regard to how people understand a particular spatial relationship; a journey might seem a long way, but if it is ‘what we’ve always done’, then this is a taken for granted, habituated norm, reflective of a shared spatial identity. People’s perceptions of ‘what works’ with regard to policy flow thus relate to their ‘spatial imaginaries’. This is reflected in the spatial plans, with their emphasis on ‘affective flow’, the shared spatiality of the ‘deep rural’ in Southern Gwynedd and Mid/West Wales. But it also indicates ways in which flows between West and East result from practical policy relationships but which may or may not be imagined or identified with by citizens themselves, at least initially:

People in the West are more willing to travel than they used to because they’ve actually had to for the health services for example, they have to travel, because the hospitals have been more sort of specialised now. Where people from our end have travelled to Glan Clwyd [hospital in North Wales], for example whereas before they wouldn’t and people are now much more willing to travel and it’s easier for them to travel. I think there is a positive element there in some respects people aren’t so, quite so tied to their square mile as they used to be. (Economic regeneration)

This stakeholder suggests a changing picture in which people are perhaps more willing to travel than previously because of new rationalities. Thus new ‘affective flows’ may develop over time as a result of policy changes which themselves become habituated, the new norm; these are ‘spatial imaginaries’ in the process of co-construction.

**d. North Wales**

Politically I think there is a feeling that there is a need for North Wales to speak with one voice. Some members do view that government working is centralised in Cardiff, probably more so than it’s ever been...some also feel that the politics behind the setting up of the spatial plan in North Wales.
There’s also a tendency to split North Wales up into, well into two and a bit really, spatial plan areas…that’s a weakness at the moment in the current system because there’s no mechanism that allows projects to be run on a pan North Wales basis (Economic Regeneration, North Wales)

In the extract above, this economic stakeholder questions the logic of splitting North Wales into two spatial plans, arguing that ‘thinking as a region’ would be better for overall economic development. This again picks up the point that spatial ‘place – shaping’ may be seen or experienced as an imposition, rather than as reflecting ‘common knowledge’. Again, it is likely that different domains/policy areas (and accruing forms of knowledge) – in this case, economic development- can understand place and space differently and hence have a different account of what would ‘work’ in terms of connectivity or contrast between regions, and in terms of their role and policy area. This has implications in terms of policy and strategy, as how a region is defined, where boundaries are drawn, and how the needs of a region are understood can vary depending on the context. Different policy sectors, different goals and different knowledge bases, all contribute to how ‘North Wales’ is defined and delineated. The same concerns about splitting North Wales into two (and a half) spatial plans are to the fore in this account from a tourism stakeholder, who brings his knowledge of his own sector (tourism) to bear on the issue of ‘fuzzy boundaries’:

From a tourism perspective, um, we automatically think from a customer’s viewpoint because the customer, visitor sees none of these boundaries and we try and harness those boundaries, um, as appropriate whilst we’ve developed our most recent strategy, we have an overall action for North Wales we have got, err, a chap that discusses the issues of the North West, discusses the issues of North East. Identifies the differences between those two spatial plans, err, and then we have the two action plans so one says all these things in one shopping list and another. The line is not perfectly the same as a spatial plan. Um, we see the North West spatial plan stopping just west of Llandudno… but from a visitor perspective we think Llandudno is in the West. So, you know, that little wedge in the middle, our fuzzy line will include Llandudno in the west whereas the spatial plan would include Llandudno in the east. Um, and I think if I look at the way the spatial plan is evolving, um, I think the Welsh Assembly Government is less sensitive about conformity with a highly precise boundary by now (Tourism).

PLACE AND COMMUNITY REGENERATION

Concepts of ‘community’ and ‘community regeneration’ are understood and operationalised differently within different places. This difference relates, in part at least, to differences in geography and demographic trends which affect how communities are understood (by policy makers, community members, other stakeholders), and thus how community regeneration strategies are rolled out and responded to. Thus far we have focused on baseline quantitative data as well as qualitative interviews with senior managers in local authorities and public bodies. In this section we turn our attention to the perspectives of local level actors in the form of community workers and activists. Two sites are examined: a rural village in North West Wales and a deprived housing estate in Wrexham. The first is one of the former slate mining villages to the south of the Snowdonia mountain range which historically
look more towards Caernarfon, with high levels of Welsh speakers. The second is urban, situated close to the English border with historically high levels of in and out migration and population flow. Both are areas identified for Communities First funding which since 2001 has been WAG’s flagship community regeneration programme (see WAG 2007).

We identify that notions of community regeneration ‘play out’ differently in these localities. Through this focus, we illustrate the way place, and its situatedness within a broader knowledge of locality, shapes the way individual capacity building translates into community regeneration. What is of note is how patterns of mobility, discussed in previous sections, have an impact on community regeneration, as is evidenced in the extract below by what was termed the ‘churn effect’:

one of the things that we’re looking at now is a evaluation framework for our whole community regeneration programme …we’re looking at the impact on the individual with [our] local learning programme….One of the things that buggers it up is the ‘churn effect’, so if you get that degree, you leave the area… how do you prove that community economic development is effective and if it is worth investing [in]...(Economic Regeneration)

The suggestion here is that in areas where there is high mobility such as North East Wales/Wrexham, the ‘churn effect’ may be more of a factor. Therefore the experience of community regeneration in Wrexham, according to this stakeholder, is that individual capacity-building and up-skilling often leads to out-migration which doesn't actually help the place itself (community capacity-building). Thus there is a difference between understanding the ‘success’ of community regeneration as a) individual capacity building and b) building the capacity of the place itself; community sustainability. An interview with a Gwynedd stakeholder, by contrast, indicated that individuals who built capacity in relation to regeneration used these acquired skills to develop community capacity:

community development as in capacity building...: Skills for, getting people involved in their communities… people do develop themselves into a voice for a certain group …or to represent a certain issue in the communities …but also to develop specific capital and revenue projects that meet a need (Health and Social Care)

These stakeholders thus provide interesting differences in their accounts of community regeneration. In Wrexham, individuals who have built capacity in the community regeneration area (skills, training) then leave the area. In Gwynedd those individuals who acquire skills do so seemingly from the outset with the explicit intention of staying put and using these skills for the benefit of their community. This focus on community regeneration as meaning community capacity building is also expressed by those Gwynedd stakeholders tasked with delivering the regeneration programme - it is a conscious strategy. This may relate to the fact that Gwynedd is, as previously described, more ‘self-orienting’, and demographically does not experience the same levels of in and out migration as North East Wales does, as previous sections

---

5 Like attrition or turnover, churn refers to the number of individuals or things which move in or out of a collective over a period of time (see Communities and Local Government 2009).
have demonstrated. Because of its lack of connectivity to other places, Gwynedd therefore draws more on a historical practice of sustaining and developing internal capacity; for example, preserving the Welsh language and halting the out-migration of young people (see Williams 1980 for a previous account of rural Wales which takes this argument). Hence community regeneration is seen in these terms by local stakeholders and community members, as well as within the North West Spatial Plan.

The North Wales village pilot study also provided evidence of communities looking to themselves to develop and sustain capacity. In this interview extract below, a key local figure, Alun, provides a narrative of founding a long standing not-for-profit community organisation focused on community and economic regeneration:

I was one of the instigators who formed [the company]...I suggested that we invited somebody from the WDA to give us a talk about what plans they had for the valley. This guy came from Bangor and he told us that this was just a travel to work area and they hadn’t got any plans, and it turned out into quite a row and I got asked to leave by the Chairman because I just couldn’t understand how they could look at a valley which had had so much industrial involvement in the past could be ignored for any industrial development in the future. Following that I called a meeting of the Community Council, and had the members here, in my house, and I said ‘right nobody’s going to help us, we’ve got to form some kind of something to help ourselves’.

This narrative closely maps onto the ‘spatial imaginary’ of the North West spatial plan, with regard to the identified need to sustain communities in areas experiencing the out migration of young people post industrial closure. However in relation to community capacity building, Alun goes on to say that

…I’d say now that without the people who have moved in and that are taking part, hardly anything would happen here.

Alun is firstly identifying ‘churn’ of a sort; while not at the levels of in and out migration experiences on the North East borders, this village in Western Snowdonia has experienced the out- migration of young people, and relatively modest levels of in–migration. Secondly, Alun’s account highlights that this narrative of ‘self sustaining communities’ in North West Wales is in fact more accurately a narrative of localities which are significantly dependant on outside inputs (in-migrants). The pilot study further identified that while many in migrants (who could be generalised as being middle class English) were very keen to put down roots in their community, various divisions and differences in culture and outlook (class, language, insider/outsider status) were a stumbling block affecting uptake, mobilisation and capacity building with relation to regeneration initiatives (see Mann, Plows and Paterson (2011). Whilst a clear contrast can be made to the ‘churned’ status of community in the Wrexham example, it is also the case that North West Wales communities are not wholly ‘self sufficient’ but indeed draw on outside inputs for community capacity building and regeneration.
CONCLUSION

To what extent, and for whom, is North Wales a coherent socio-spatial form? Drawing these different evidence bases together, in what sense can one talk of an overall similar trend taking place across North Wales? Differences between North Wales localities - between West and East, for example - are perhaps more striking than the points of similarity and convergence. Parts of North East Wales are characterised by their embeddedness within a cross-border region. This is sometimes contested by those advocating the promotion of a North Wales economic region. But it does appear to be reflected in community regeneration strategies. Parts of North West Wales, particularly in the ‘deep rural’ away from the A55 coastal strip, could be described as less connected and less mobile, and focused on internal capacity building, for example having a strategic focus on community capacity building where individual capacity is envisaged (and hence planned for) as feeding into broader community benefit.

Data on North East Wales suggests a high degree of inter-relation with England, compared to other parts of Wales. The salience of these cross-border networks and ties would suggest that the border region of North-East Wales is an appropriate location for considering the impact of policy divergence between England and Wales on the lives of ordinary people. In-depth qualitative research, in combination with survey research, would be needed in order to interrogate these relationships. The salience of these cross-border networks and ties would suggest that the border region of North East Wales is an appropriate location for considering the impact of policy divergence between England and Wales on the lives of ordinary people. For example, how living close to the border shapes their choices and decision making with regard to access to services. Mobilities, and the limits of mobilities, need to be factored into place-based policies aimed at community regeneration and increasing educational and labour market opportunities. Strategies for community regeneration need to address the issue of what ‘success’ looks like, and of the translation of individual into community capacity building.

Different goals, values and different knowledge bases all contribute to how ‘North Wales’ is defined and delineated. For example, different knowledge bases embedded in various policy sectors (crime, housing, economic development) mean that people can understand place and space differently, and thus have a different account of what would ‘work’ in terms of connectivity or contrast between regions. This has implications for policy and strategy, for example, with regards to the uptake of the spatial plan; as how a region is defined, where boundaries are drawn, and how the needs of a region are understood can vary depending on the context. In some circumstances, there is evidence that the spatial plans are reflective of existing knowledge and identity claims about a region, and ‘ways of doing things’; in other cases, it would seem as if the spatial plans are ‘place shaping’ in new ways, which may not reflect existing spatial imaginaries but may come to reflect them over time. We have also identified that there are many different sorts of flow happening, across many different borders, and that the ‘fuzzy boundaries’ identified in the Spatial Plan are reflective of many shifting and fuzzy boundaries, as people negotiate across space and place in different circumstances. We have shown that ‘the shared spatial’ can account for what might be termed ‘affective flows’, for example, between mid and North Wales. Other flows are more pragmatic, catalysed by new types of policy.
delivery, such as the movement between Dolgellau and Wrexham to access health services. Over time, these may develop into new ‘affective flows’ and develop a historical affective resonance of their own, reflective of new working and governance patterns.

REFERENCES


