

**EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS
OF AGENCY IN OLD INDUSTRIAL
TOWNS IN WALES**

Presented for the degree of PhD

2023

Ani Saunders

SUMMARY

To this point, dominant discourses in regional development theories and related policies have been, to a great extent, informed by the experiences of larger urban areas which have offered very little to smaller, more peripheral regions. Meanwhile, existing debates around change in these places have tended to focus on the lack of agency which has fuelled a culture of development that has seen change being done *to* people in places as opposed to *with* them. As a result, such approaches have contributed to a growing sense of mistrust between communities and governing authorities and this, in turn, has made the process of implementing change even more difficult.

This research addresses and challenges the limitations of these existing theories and policy approaches by trialling a new, more granular, and grounded approach to framing agency. It explores how agents of change work within and across boundaries, their perceptions about change as well as their role within the process, and how what they choose to value effects it. By examining the dynamics of agency in two small towns located in old industrial regions in Wales, this research focuses on the increased prominence and influence of alternative approaches to change and brings to light new development paradigms around well-being (rather than growth) and culture (rather than jobs).

The stories of these towns are explored through four chapters – two for each case study. The first chapters present their political, economic, and cultural stories as a way of contextualising the process of change. This is then followed by a brief overview of the selected development projects. The second chapters explore the dynamics of agency in these places which help to explain how and why these development projects came to be. This innovative approach to exploring change in old industrial towns highlights the need to consider more actively how agents might draw upon, use, and indeed propel change as opposed to focusing on how they might react to it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to firstly thank Nadir for developing the ACORE project, of which this PhD is a part. Without this structure, I'm not sure if I ever could have contemplated let alone completed a PhD. Thank you also for securing funding from the Volkswagen Foundation and for welcoming me into the fold. A big thank you also to the rest of the wonderful team – Kevin, Linda, Markus, Franziska, Erika, Melinda, Jan and Vladan – your knowledge, advice, and kindness has been invaluable and I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to share this journey with you. A great big thank you of course to everyone who took part in the interviewing process – without your generosity and kind spirit it's fair to say that I'd have nothing to write about. Your stories about the places that you deeply care for and all the work that you've done over a number of years to try to change things for the better has energised me throughout.

I'm not entirely sure how to express my gratitude towards my supervisors Kevin and Gill who have been so kind and encouraging throughout. I can't believe how fortunate I was to have been supervised by not one but two incredible people. Kevin – thank you for taking a gamble on me, I'll be forever grateful that you did. Your tireless work in seeking better ways of doing things through your work in Wales and beyond has and will continue to be an inspiration – Ymlaen! Gill – thank you so much for being so kind and patient and for always making the impossible (i.e. finishing this thesis!) seem possible. Your advice and guidance, especially from the perspective of a female researcher, has been invaluable.

My fellow Basement Dwellers past and present – especially my dear friends Nia, Amy, Jen and Cheales – thank you. I'm thrilled and extremely grateful that I was placed in an office with you. You are all so kind, funny and supportive and it would have been an absolute nightmare to try and embark on such a journey without you! I'd also like to thank my friends and family for their kind support throughout these past years. Diolch Mam am fod mor garedig a chefnogol drwy'r amser, am wrando arna i'n parablu'n ddiddiwedd ac am brynu lot fawr o goffi i'm cadw fi i fynd. Dad – meur ras bras dhis rag dha gysul, rag kuntell lyvrow hag erthyglow dydhan dhym ha rag bones mar guv dre'n termyn – Sonderyon bys vyken! Ac yn olaf, yr anhygoel Rhys – y person mwyaf caredig ac amyneddgar i mi erioed gwrdd ag e. Diolch am fod yna yn gefn i mi bob cam o'r ffordd. Rwy'ti'n sant, a dim llai.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES & IMAGES.....	vi
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Aims and Objectives.....	7
1.3 Research Questions.....	8
1.4 Structure of the Thesis.....	8
2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
2.1 Introduction.....	10
2.2 A Place to Live – The Political Story.....	15
2.3 A Place to Work – The Economic Story.....	21
2.4 A Place to Gather – The Cultural Story.....	25
2.5 Chapter Summary.....	30
3 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	34
3.1 Introduction.....	34
3.2 Methodology.....	34
3.3 The Empirical Field.....	39
3.4 Methods.....	44
3.5 Ethics.....	51
4 THE STORY OF LLANELLI AND THE CASE OF PENTRE AWEL.....	52
4.1 Introduction.....	52
4.2 A Place to Live – The Political Story of Llanelli.....	52
4.3 A Place to Work – The Economic Story of Llanelli.....	55
4.4 A Place to Gather – The Cultural Story of Llanelli.....	59
4.5 The Case Study - Pentre Awel in Llanelli.....	63
5 EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF AGENCY IN THE CASE OF PENTRE AWEL.....	70
5.1 Boundaries – The First Dimension of Agency.....	70
5.2 Perceptions – The Second Dimension of Agency.....	83
5.3 Values - The Third Dimension of Agency.....	97
5.4 Chapter Summary.....	109
6 THE STORY OF WREXHAM AND THE CASE OF TŶ PAWB.....	111
6.1 Introduction.....	111

6.2	A Place to Live – The Political Story of Wrexham	111
6.3	A Place to Work – The Economic Story of Wrexham.....	114
6.4	A Place to Gather – The Cultural Story of Wrexham	118
6.5	The Case Study – Tŷ Pawb in Wrexham.....	122
7	EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF AGENCY IN THE CASE OF Tŷ PAWB	128
7.1	Boundaries – The First Dimension of Agency	128
7.2	Perceptions – The Second Dimension of Agency.....	144
7.3	Values – The Third Dimension of Agency	159
7.4	Chapter Summary	173
8	CONCLUSIONS.....	175
8.1	Introduction	175
8.2	Pushing Boundaries.....	176
8.3	Challenging Perceptions.....	184
8.4	Re-evaluating Values.....	188
8.5	Addressing the Research Questions	193
8.6	Final Thoughts and Reflections.....	201
9	REFERENCES.....	203
10	APPENDICES	214
10.1	Appendix A: Interview Schedule	214
10.2	Appendix B: Anonymised Interviewee List	215
10.3	Appendix C: Ethical Approval Form	218

LIST OF FIGURES & IMAGES

Figure 1: Changing the Political Discourse (Source: Ani Saunders)	17
Figure 2: The Waves of Cultural Change (Source: Ani Saunders)	29
Figure 3: The Journey of Action and Change in Places (Source: Ani Saunders)	33
Figure 4: GVA Per Head - Productivity (Source: WSP and Parsons Brinckerhoff 2017, p. 5)...58	
Figure 5: Summary of Economic and Earnings Statistics 2018 (Source: Statistics Wales 2020, p. 5)	117
Image 1: Map of Carmarthenshire and Llanelli (Source: Wikipedia).....	53
Image 2: Welsh Tin Plate & Metal Stamping Co. Ltd. in Llanelli 1951 (Source: Aerofilms Collection)	56
Image 3: Stepney Street in Llanelli 1936 (Source: Llanelli Star)	57
Image 4: Stepney Street in Llanelli 2019 (Source: Ani Saunders)	59
Image 5: Llanelly House in Llanelli 2013 (Source: John Davies)	60
Image 6: Llanelli beat the All Blacks at Parc y Strade 1972 (Source: Alan T Richards)	61
Image 7: Wetland Centre in Llanelli 2021 (Source: Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust)	62
Image 8: Pentre Awel Design, Bwlchygwynt in Llanelli (Source: Carmarthenshire Council)...63	
Image 9: Bwlchygwynt in Llanelli 1948 (Source: Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photography)	65
Image 10: Bwlchygwynt in Llanelli 2019 (Source: Google Earth)	66
Image 11: Map of Wrexham County Borough and Wrexham town (Source: Wikipedia)	112
Image 12: Brymbo Steelworks in Wrexham c. 1980 (Source: Heritage Fund)	114
Image 13: Hope Street in Wrexham c. 1900 (Source: The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)	115
Image 14: Hope Street in Wrexham 2011 (Source: The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)	116
Image 15: The Vegetable Market in Wrexham c. 1970 – now Tŷ Pawb (Source: The People’s Collection)	118
Image 16: St Giles’ Parish Church in Wrexham (Source: Diocese of St Asaph)	119
Image 17: Wrexham knock FC Porto out of the Cup Winners Cup 1984 (Source: The Football History Boys)	120

Image 18: Self Esteem at Focus Wales 2022 (Source: Tim Rooney)	121
Image 19: Opening night of Tŷ Pawb 2018 (Source: Tŷ Pawb)	123
Image 20: The People’s Market & car park c. 2016 (Source: Wrexham Council).....	124
Image 21: Tŷ Pawb’s useful arts space (Source: Wrexham Council)	126

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

It has been quite the journey to reach this point, and what a journey it has been. From being blessed with the opportunity of studying the impact of great societal changes to simultaneously having to navigate them in real life; through Brexit and Covid to more personal experiences of grief and all manner of other immeasurable moments that life throws at you. But through it all, this research has been the calm through the storm, the light in the dark, and my way of feeling and staying connected to the world. It was also a way of finding some order in this chaos, and the more embedded in the process I became, the more any feelings of hopelessness melted away.

And this in itself was an important lesson in terms of understanding how our experience of change can influence our outlook. It was also something that resonated with me when I read Jane Davidson's book *Lessons from a Small Country* about her journey to realising the important piece of legislation that is the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which will feature many times throughout this research. She too cited the 'importance of personal experience as a driver of action' (Davidson 2020, p. 17). So, when I started to think about the concept of agency, my first instinct was to try to understand the context of change – to understand what influenced some people in some places to become agents of change whilst other people in other places did not, or perhaps could not. How were their differing experiences of change in different places influencing their capacity to act?

My journey to this point has been somewhat unconventional. I'm a fashion graduate with a varied background in the arts - both as a practitioner and in administrative and managerial capacities - having worked across the sector in various roles and within many organisations. But like many undergraduate students, I moved away from home in Cardiff not only to study but more importantly to experience life on my own terms. I went on to live in many cities across England including Liverpool, Brighton and London playing in bands and working in retail but eventually made my way back home to Wales. It wasn't a particularly intentional move; it was meant as more of a stopgap, but as it turned out, I never really left (at least not yet!).

Until this point, and despite being raised within an actively political household, I had somehow managed to breeze through life without paying too much attention to far more important matters that were happening all around me. To tell the truth, it was as though I had been swimming under water seeing only that which was within my very narrow eyeline and by the time I came up for air after nearly a decade away, my hometown had become pretty much unrecognisable. It wasn't necessarily that I didn't like any of the changes, it was just that they didn't make any sense to me. Cardiff simply didn't feel like home anymore. And of course, I then spent a fair amount of time railing against these changes in the usual millennial manner – Twitter! But I came to recognise fairly quickly that this course of action wasn't helping and certainly wouldn't change anything, so I began searching for an alternative.

The connection between places and the art that they inspire is something that I have really come to appreciate over the years, and it was a prominent theme in a lot of the work that I viewed at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff in around 2016 for the Artes Mundi exhibition. I'm not usually one to read art blurbs; in fact, I don't particularly like them as a rule, but for some reason I did read this one. I don't really recall what it said that clearly nor the work it was representing, but I do remember reading a quote that referenced Jane Jacobs. Of course, at this point, I had absolutely no idea who she was, but what I do know now is that she was my introduction to the world of studying the intricate dynamics of urban life, and what an introduction that was.

She brought to life issues that I had been grappling with for some years but was unable to understand or articulate in a cohesive manner. She wrote in an engaging way that made me want to learn more. Throughout my school years learning had been presented as a practical pursuit that you had to do in order to graduate in life, to get a job and to be a successful individual, but as I recall, almost never as an inspiring and inspired pursuit that could not only change your own life, but also the lives of others. Now, learning had suddenly become something that I actively wanted to do, I wanted to be helpful to society, and this was an absolute revelation. Quite soon after that, I began looking for relevant courses at Cardiff University and found what I thought to be the perfect fit – a Masters in Urban and Regional Development. Of course, I was quite aware that my background would be radically different

from most others in the field and perhaps something that may even count against me, but I genuinely believed, as I still do, that there would be a place for this new left-field perspective.

During my year studying for a Masters I met the most enlightening and inspiring of colleagues who encouraged me (whether they knew it or not) to want to continue on this newfound path. As my understanding grew, pursuing a career in this field of study seemed like the only suitable option. I had mentioned to one of my lecturers (who later became the kindest and most patient of supervisors – thank you Kevin!) that I was interested in studying for a PhD and a little later he directed me towards an opportunity within the department which was a PhD position as part of a European project entitled Agents of Change in Old Industrial Regions of Europe (ACORE). Soon after, I found myself at a desk in the basement floor of the Glamorgan Building at Cardiff University embarking on this journey.

The ACORE project itself was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and included partners in Germany, Sweden, Czech Republic, Hungary and of course us here in Wales (UK). The broad premise of the project was to understand how new place-based thinking was aligning with changes happening in each of our respective countries. To this point, dominant discourses in regional development theories and related policies have been, to a great extent, informed by the experiences of larger urban areas which has offered very little to smaller, more peripheral regions. This fascination with the urban centre as a successful model on which to build theoretical concepts not only directed attention towards the few successful cases (Martin 2015) and thus away from those that had failed, but also warped views and perceptions about the role and nature of non-core regions.

And this was particularly interesting not only from a theoretical perspective, but also on a more practical level - for here in Wales, we simply do not have what (in global terms) are referred to as large urban areas, therefore these 'smaller, more peripheral regions' were our core. It was who we were and how we lived. Therefore, it was imperative that the research addressed the limitations of these existing theories and policy approaches, and it was decided at the project level that this would be done by focusing on the journeys of two small towns located in old industrial regions of Wales. Despite the scale and location of these places, it was quite evident that the severity and longevity of the issues present there were no less than

those of larger urban areas, quite the reverse if anything, and so it was important to understand the steps, if any, relevant governments of the UK were taking to tackle them.

Jackson stated that one of society's greatest obstacles to providing the progressive and sustainable change was the issue of the short-termism when tackling long-term crises (Jackson 2017). This was an aspect of the research that was extremely relevant to changes that had happened and were happening here in Wales – most notably with the introduction of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFGA). Davidson referred to the WFGA not as another tick boxing exercise, but as a moral agenda 'predicated not on what (was) right in the short term or for individual benefit, but on what (was) right for the well-being of communities, countries and (the) very existence (of) humans in nature' in the long term (Davidson 2020, p. 2).

I was aware very early on in the research process that much of my interest lay in learning about the journey of change – how and why as well as where and when changes happened - and so understanding the journey of this tremendously innovative piece of legislation became paramount as it would provide the broader political context of change in Wales. The subject and ambition of sustainable development, of improving the well-being of people and the planet whilst living within our means, was a key driver, yet at the dawn of devolution this was still a relatively new concept. In 1983, in an urgent call by the General Assembly of the United Nations, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) were tasked with formulating 'A global agenda for change' in order to propose strategies for achieving sustainable development with a specific focus on the common challenge of facing the future (Brundtland 1987). It was in this report, also known as the Brundtland Report published in 1987, that the concept of sustainable development was introduced.

A decade later in 1997 a cross-government approach which linked environmental sustainability with economic and social progress - known as Greening Government - was introduced by the incoming UK Labour Government (Davidson 2020). It established a new parliamentary scrutiny committee in the House of Commons and set up a new independent body to monitor progress across the UK. However what Davidson recognised was that although effort was being placed on creating new political structures to tackle this issue, far less focus was being placed on the important matter of making changes to policy delivery –

something that would prove very relevant to changes seen in Wales in later years (Davidson 2020).

Another book that I happened to come across around this time was a report entitled *Mis-measuring our Lives – Why GDP Doesn't Add Up*. In 2008, following the Financial Crisis, France's then President Nicolas Sarkozy asked economists Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi to establish a commission to discuss issues related to the way in which well-being was being measured. The result was this report which echoed many of the issues laid out by the UN in its 'Global agenda for change' report. In the preface Stiglitz wrote that an improvement in a measurement of well-being should not be confused with an improvement in well-being and that although the role of the economy may be to improve well-being, it was not an end in itself (Stiglitz 2010).

Therefore, this idea of recognising that our economic ways of measuring progress and well-being were becoming more and more out of step with the reality of daily life became another angle that interested me tremendously. It brought to light issues around value and values, i.e. the idea that values were not simply conventions about how we should think and behave, but also related to matters of well-being (Sayer 2015). In his co-authored book published almost a decade later, Stiglitz addressed this explaining that while the agenda for looking beyond GDP was often characterised as being anti-growth, what it in fact argued was that increases in GDP did not reflect important aspects of reality such as the well-being of citizens and environmental degradation (Stiglitz et al. 2019).

Then in 2015, the UN's Sustainability Goals were adopted by all UN Member States - they presented a universal call to action to 'free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet' (United Nations General Assembly 2015, p. 1). There were a total of 17 goals and the overall Agenda for Sustainable Development presented prosperity and progress as phenomena that should occur 'in harmony with nature' (United Nations General Assembly 2015, p. 2). This, to my mind, presented a shift in the way in which progress was being perceived – a type of progress that was wanting, willing and, quite frankly, needing to measure more than just economic growth.

This echoed Davidson's reframing of the idea of democracy for long-term good which emphasised the need for governments not only to own responsibility for decisions made in the present day, but also own their potential impact on the future (Davidson 2020). In addition, it also brought to mind her reflections on the need to make changes to policy delivery, which is most certainly something that the WFGA has achieved. This 'vision of a better, kinder, more tolerant future; a future where there was a paradigm shift away from the unicorn of infinite growth, away from our headlong dash for carbon, and towards the importance of community, of kindness, of a more responsible relationship with nature' (Davidson 2020, p. 51) was not only hugely inspiring, it was also urgently required.

Therefore, this research aims to theoretically argue and empirically illustrate the weakness and impracticality of applying the growth-focused theories and policies centred around the experiences of large urban regions to smaller, more peripheral regions. It also seeks to provide greater clarity on the varying roles of change agents whilst highlighting the contextual nature of their influence. Places matter. People matter. Whilst policy often tries to reflect this, their impact on the ground creates a barrier between these people and the process of change. The case studies presented in this thesis vary quite significantly in almost every aspect, yet the guiding theme of place-based agency ties them both together drawing parallels and distinctions whilst emphasising the importance not only of exercising existing agency, but also of building it.

All of these ideas; of reframing the boundaries of change, of understanding how our experiences of change were influencing our perceptions as well as recognising how the broader economic values of progress were dominating our visions for change began coming together to shape my ideas around the concept and framing of agency. Existing debates around change in smaller, more peripheral regions have tended to focus on the lack of agency which has fuelled a culture of development that has seen change being done to people in places as opposed to with them. This research addresses and challenges the limitations of these existing theories and policy approaches by trialling a new, more granular, and grounded approach to framing agency. By examining the dynamics of agency in two small towns located in old industrial regions in Wales, this research focuses on the increased prominence and

influence of alternative approaches to change and brings to light new development paradigms around well-being (rather than growth) and culture (rather than jobs).

As I sit in a coffee shop in the centre of Cardiff writing some notes on Jon Gower's Real Llanelli, I am politely interrupted by a gentleman who seems drawn by the book. After reciting my well-rehearsed verse on the research parameters, he begins talking of his own connection to and affinity with the place; the kind nature of the people there and of course the undeniable toll that industry and industrial decline has had on the town. Our conversation continues for several minutes, each input as enthusiastic as the next. Such interactions continue to prove to me that it's quite impossible to quantify the extent to which places shape us and how the people we meet there influence us, but it is however true that once a bond between the two forms, it is remarkably difficult to break.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

This research aims to describe, analyse, and understand aspects of development in old industrial Welsh towns with a particular focus on the role and influence of change agents. By examining the dynamics of agency in specific places, this research also focuses on the increased prominence and influence of alternative approaches to change that challenge the dominance of growth-focused models.

The general aims of the research are:

- i. To review the literature on concepts of and approaches to economic and regional development in old industrial towns;
- ii. To examine the extent to which the unique characteristics of places dictate the actions of agents and their approaches to change;
- iii. To explore the impact of an increasing interest in a well-being economy and consider this in a comparative Welsh context.

To address these aims, initial focus is placed on the 'front line' of regional change thus on actors who are quick to recognise opportunity and keen to establish new development paths.

1.3 Research Questions

This research is guided by the following question:

- **To what extent are levels of human agency determined by the political, economic, and cultural context of a place?**

This main question is accompanied by the following sub-questions:

- Who are the agents of change responsible for recognising new opportunities and driving the agenda for change?**
- How are they connected through extra- or intra-regional networks?**
- How prominent is the new well-being paradigm in the development of new opportunities in old industrial towns in Wales.**

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is organised into seven subsequent chapters. In the second chapter I introduce the various literature that underpins this research. I do so in three parts, each of which brings together topics that reflect the main conceptualisations of this research which are place and agency. The first part introduces a selection of literature that concern the political dynamics of place, the second part presents a variety of literature that concern the economic dynamics of place, whilst the final part concentrates on literature that concerns the cultural dynamics of place. This is done as a means to contextualise the process of agency within places.

Chapter three focuses on the research design. In this chapter, I initially explore the foundations of my methodology by presenting a brief overview and rationale of the epistemological approach. I do this as a way of explaining the actions taken throughout this research. I then highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the methods used whilst also emphasising the nature of these decisions within the wider ACORE project.

Chapter four presents the political, economic, and cultural story of the first case study town of Llanelli which provides the context within which to study the dynamics of agency. Chapter five is the first empirical chapter, here I explore the dynamics of agency presented within the case of the Pentre Awel development project and explain as well as emphasise the role of places in influencing the nature and direction of change.

Chapters six and seven follow the same structure as the two previous chapters but instead follow the story of Wrexham and the dynamics of agency in the second case which was the Tŷ Pawb development project. I suggest that agents who seek more sustainable approaches to change do so by building the capacity of those around them which in turn increases agency. I conclude in chapter eight by summarising these findings and untangling the significance of the core themes.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Ie Talybont yw canol y byd

Ma popeth yn troi rownd fy mhentre hud

Ma'r lleuad yn gwybod hynny'n iawn

A ma'r haul yn gwamalu ambell i bnawn!

(Gruffudd 1976, p. 17)

In the Welsh poem cited above, Gruffudd describes his home - the small village of Talybont in mid-Wales (with a population of approximately 700 people) as the centre of the world. He says that everything revolves around this magical place. But how is this perception of a small Welsh village, one which is so far removed from the bright lights of the cosmopolitan capitals of cultural exchange – the London, Paris and New Yorks of the world – not blinded by their power and influence? And it often seems as though there's an unwritten understanding that in poetry and art in general, important, influential, and profound things (and of course dull, mundane, and uneventful things) can and do happen away from these places.

In this context, an artist's sense of place is guided to a significant extent by their ability and ambition to present work that critically analyses whilst simultaneously creatively observing that which is around them in a focused, meaningful, and often powerful way. And it could be said that this ability allows them to challenge (whether intentionally or not) normative claims of value and worth. Tomaney presents a similar argument in the context of debates around relational accounts of place that defend parochialism against normative claims of cosmopolitanism (Tomaney 2012). He views the local and all that it entails to be the 'moral starting point and (the) locus of ecological concern' and refers to the study of art, literature, and poetry in particular as an effective way to explore these ideas (Tomaney 2012, p. 658).

Whilst this research will not delve into this particular issue, it's an important and critical observation to make as it encourages a far more rounded view of what constitutes place writing in this context. Cooper and Lichtenstein's view of place writing is that it's a broad genre that overlaps and intersects with life writing thus allowing for a variety of text-based

artworks (Cooper and Lichtenstein 2020). But this perception of place within the creative and cultural realms feels quite alien to those often presented within the fields of economic and political geography – whose values tend to be measured according to their economic status and capacity for growth. This results in any non-metropolitan areas being placed on the periphery of all dominant political and economic thinking and action. However, given the contextual nature of place, a study that would allow for both critical analysis and creative observation – one that would take into account the influence of economic measures whilst also considering other creative methods of measuring progress - would surely be the most well-rounded approach.

As the suburbs spilled and the boundaries blurred, the ideology of urbanisation and growth as core components of development continued to assert the notion that all roads (should) lead to Rome (the city). In this chapter, focus will be placed on analysing literature that discusses how this model of development has shaped old industrial towns in order to understand the extent to which these conditions frame perceptions of and approaches to change. But it will do so in a far more open and creative way that ensures that the human aspect of place writing remains at the core. It will consider how and why certain changes happen in certain places and will do so by focusing on the role of human agency and looking at the way in which people and places influence each other in this process.

Existing debates around change have tended to focus on the lack of agency in these places which has fuelled a culture of development that has seen change being done to people in places as opposed to with them. This research takes a different approach to examine change in old industrial towns, which has tended to focus on the change itself and how agents may react to it, by looking at how agents might draw upon, use, and indeed propel change. It explores the dynamics of agency in old industrial towns by presenting the journey of change in these places as a story. This story is guided by a grounded, granular, and people-driven conception of place which highlights the intricate nature of the relationship between people and place and emphasises the importance of understanding this dynamic in the context of change.

Focusing on human agency could be seen as a novel and disruptive way of approaching this research as it runs against the grain of conventional wisdom in the social sciences which has tended to focus on structures which both constrain and enable it. For example, the

structuration concept developed by Giddens emphasises that awareness of social rules characterises human agents and so as they act, they do so in respect of the knowledge which they possess (Giddens 1984). Gregory et al. define human agency in terms of a person's ability to act and whose actions result in observable effects (Gregory et al. 2009), and Grillitsch and Sotarauta similarly describe agency as intentional and meaningful actions that result in intended and unintended consequences (Grillitsch and Sotarauta 2020). They describe agency in the context of a person's capacity (or lack thereof) to influence and incite new economic development paths, however this research goes further by presenting a conceptualisation of agency that explains in detail the role of place in influencing and directing agents both within and beyond the economic realm.

Within this research, there is a clear focus on place as the recognised definition of space and as such, it was felt that the study would benefit from having a clear and simple conceptualisation of place as a point from which to study the actions of people. The political realm frames our thinking about change, the economic realm frames our actions around change, and the cultural realm frames the impact of change. This political, economic, and cultural conceptualisation of place (which will be explained in more detail in the following chapter) also guides the structure of this chapter and provides a framework within which to analyse and explain how places influence the actions (or inaction) of people and thereby the process of change.

Within each of these three realms the conceptualisation of agency is also presented as consisting of three aspects - boundaries, perceptions, and values. Boundaries represent an agent's capacity and their access to power and resources; perceptions represent an agent's approach to change; and values represent their motivations. Each of these aspects help to explain (at least in part) the role of people in shaping places (and vice versa). These conceptualisations are also explained in more detail in the following chapter. This conceptualisation developed more as a reaction to reading literature related to agency that tended to focus on the actions of agents and less about who they were and how they came to be in that position. As briefly alluded to in the introduction and emphasised throughout the literature review, there was a gap in terms of understanding how agency was being built meaning that there was an assumption that agents

simply appeared in places fully formed. Therefore, these three aspects represent this journey towards understanding how and why agents operate and what they did to influence change.

For example, the first aspect of agency – boundaries - was initially inspired by the work of Massey which explains that boundaries not only define spatial matters, but also those of an intellectual nature (Massey 2005). It is another way of explaining the relationship between ideas, action, and space. The second aspect of agency - perceptions - was inspired in part by Jane Davidson and her own journey to realising the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFGA) in which she suggests that in order to change perception, the system needs to change, and in order to change the system perception needs to change (Davidson 2020). This was a helpful way of explaining the relationship between perception and change. The final aspect of agency – values – was inspired in part by the works of Sayer and Sen. Sayer reflected on the notion of values saying that they are not simply conventions about how people should think and behave, but also relate to matters of well-being (Sayer 2015) whilst Sen presents well-being as an indication of how a person could function within a specific cultural context (Sen 1985). This brought to light ideas about how our measure of well-being and indeed the economic way in which it is measured impacts on approaches to change.

This chapter focuses on literature which discusses the concept of place, and in turn creates the context in which to explore concepts of agency and change. It begins by mentioning the work of Doreen Massey who argues that places are often defined by their historical and temporal realities (Massey 2005) and also reflects upon other conceptualisations outlined by Amin et al. which frame places in relational or territorial terms (Amin et al. 2003). This literature provides a context within which to examine debates about agency e.g. Emirbayer and Mische who argue that if the temporal dynamics of agency are influenced by places, then agency can both reproduce and transform those places in response to any changes (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

Tomaney delves deeper into these debates about places by highlighting that as well as having an awareness of the wider frameworks which exist in places, it is also important to have a clear understanding of the local dynamics (Tomaney 2012). This issue becomes even more prominent when reflecting upon debates about the dominance of GDP within the realm of local and regional development due to its influence in directing the actions of agents on every

level. It's a point emphasised by Morisson and Mayer who explain that agents of change are more often than not considered within this neo-Schumpeterian tradition (Morisson and Mayer 2021).

The chapter then focuses on literature which challenges economic approaches to change, i.e. Picketty who draws attention to issues relating to fiscal redistribution policies highlighting that whilst they may help to limit the effects of inequality, they are less useful in addressing the structural causes (Picketty 2015). This debate is important as it provides the context within which to explore ideas about sustainable development and, more specifically, lays the foundation for the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It is also an issue raised by Gibson-Graham who suggest that by addressing growing inequalities as well as environmental concerns, new accounting of economic success could change how well-being is measured (Gibson-Graham 2014). In addition, other literature, such as that of Sayer, reflects upon the impact of conceptualising the world through an economic prism which misinforms our judgement of value i.e. the value of unpaid work such as caring for others which is so vital to our well-being (Sayer 2015).

Focus is then placed on literature, such as the paper by Avdikos and Chardas, which considers the extent to which the issues of smaller more peripheral places are shaped and solved by dominant approaches to regional development that prioritise economic efficiency over equity (Avdikos and Chardas 2016). This point of view is underpinned by Williams et al. who suggest that public policy has encouraged lesser-developed regions to emulate successful regions on the assumption that it will increase well-being (Williams et al. 2018). This debate is then discussed in a cultural context with focus being placed on literature by Florida and Currid that highlights how an increasing emphasis on the city-centric definition of culture has signalled a growing prevalence of place-based identity in economic development policy (Currid 2007) (Florida 2012). This is done to contextualise the nature of agency in smaller urban places. For example, Hudson explains how the practice of branding a place has involved processes of representation of identity centred around the shared interests of particular social groups which Pemberton explains has had a significant impact on levels of agency and access to agents (Hudson 2019) (Pemberton 2016).

2.2 A Place to Live – The Political Story

A Temporal Tale of Boundaries

The first story begins by observing place from a political perspective and looks at the way both spatial and intellectual boundaries influence approaches to change. The complex and problematic phenomena of boundaries and their social construction within processes of inclusion and exclusion are particularly relevant in the context of regional development (Paasi 2002). Massey explains that places are often defined by their historical and temporal realities (Massey 2005) and so we often tend to measure change in this way. One example of this would be to consider when, how, and to what extent geographical boundaries of towns, cities or countries may have shifted over time. Changes in boundaries – both within an intellectual or spatial capacity – can be seen to reflect the way in which we humans have adapted our approaches to organising people in place and therefore sets a relatively clear outline of our understanding at any given time.

This brought to mind Amin et al.'s work on places that highlighted changes in the way in which places were being conceptualised. They stated that from an intellectual stance, places were more commonly being imagined in a relational sense as products of networks and relations, whereas in the past territorial conceptions of place would have been dominant (Amin et al. 2003). If we were, for example, to look at the political context of a place, we might begin by assessing the various ways in which it is and has been governed and, of course, by whom. Governance institutions steer and coordinate economic development initiatives and structure interactions between actors (Evenhuis 2017) and so heavily influence the landscape of change. Therefore, it would be appropriate to assess or provide an overview of these institutions in order to gain a broader understanding of the context in which they do and have operated. Yet whilst addressing issues of governance within spatial boundaries may go some way towards explaining how things happen, it may not necessarily explain why.

This could be partly understood by carefully assessing the intellectual context in which these institutions have been operating and the influence of dominant discourses on the way in which they have directed change. Dominant discourses within the fields of economic and regional development have been predominately guided by the concept of growth. On a

practical level, this specific vision for change has been interpreted in numerous ways, e.g. more recently in the UK through the growth-driven City Deal which is a regional and multi-scalar approach to development and something that will be discussed and explained in more detail later; but how does this all relate to the research in question?

Upon studying the phenomena of change in places, it becomes apparent that understanding the influential factors involved in this process (e.g. the growth agenda) that are often beyond the control of the agents is equally as important as considering those within their grasp. The reason for this being that despite the significant differences between places and their varying contexts and capacities, change and progress in most if not all of these places are driven and measured by the same principle – i.e. that of achieving economic growth. However, economic development theory, policy and practice and the measuring of value according to the capacity of a place to grow is inevitably discussed in the context of major cities and large urban areas and yet smaller places are still encouraged to follow a similar path whether it benefits them or not.

Nonetheless, agents of change will seek opportunities wherever they may be, but how do they know when to take action? Emirbayer and Mische suggest that if the temporal dynamics of agency are influenced by the environments and structural conditions of places, it means that agency ‘both reproduces and transforms those structures in response to the problems posed by changing historical situations’ (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Grillitsch and Sotarauta also address this temporal aspect of agency when they refer to opportunity spaces - they state that an opportunity space represents a certain time and space when change is possible (Grillitsch and Sotarauta 2020). Yet although it’s clear that these opportunity spaces can be recognised by agents, it’s not all that clear at which point in time such activity can occur (Morisson and Mayer 2021).

The Core Issue of Perception

The core issue of perception in this context relates to ideas around how or why we view certain things in a certain way – in this case why is our notion of change and progress in relation to places centred around growing the economy and increasing urbanisation?

Tomaney challenges this when he speaks of a poet’s ability to ‘test the ground between the local and the universal, the particular and the cosmopolitan, in ways that social scientists often struggle to do (Tomaney 2012, p. 668). He suggests that an emphasis on parochialism, on the importance of understanding local dynamics needn’t necessarily mean a lack of awareness for the wider frameworks which exist in places. But certainly, conceptualising the phenomena of places from a broad perspective will not help to shed light on changes that happen on a human scale. A localised view is required for this.

But as mentioned previously, places play a key role in shaping our perceptions, and so this part of the story considers the influence that politics and political thinking has on our perceptions. Massey states that ideas around intellectual and spatial boundaries are mobilised in political discourse (Massey 2005). For example, if successive governments tell us that increasing globalisation equates to progress, it is probable that our ideas and views around change might be driven in part by the broad concepts that encourage this - e.g. economic growth. And given the dominance of growth and the significant influence it has on approaches to change; time is often spent discussing and dissecting the impact it has on society with less emphasis being placed on challenging its authority and validity.

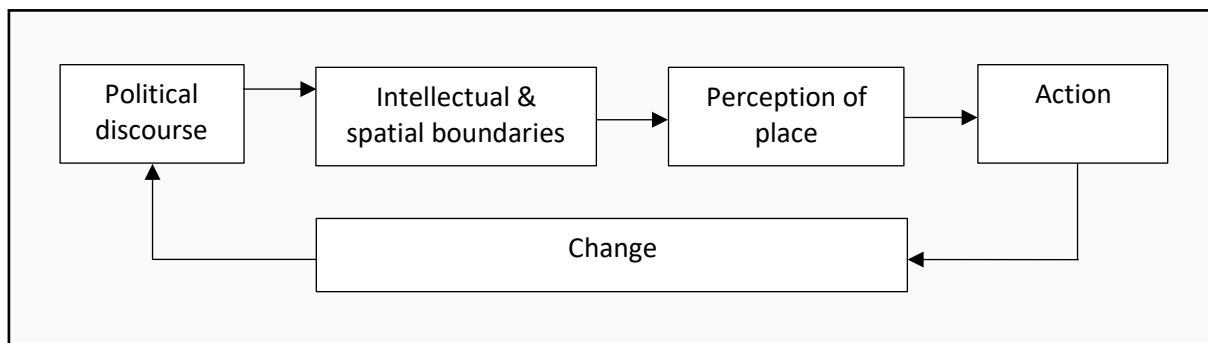


Figure 1: Changing the Political Discourse (Source: Ani Saunders)

But Massey views globalisation not as a term to describe how the world is or is going to be, but rather an image of it being made which suggests that perceptions of this process are always under construction (Massey 2005). This promotes the idea that no matter how dominant or influential certain ways of life may be, changes to them – no matter how small or gradual - are inevitable. It could therefore be assumed that as the political discourses continue to evolve, so too do our boundaries and perceptions, and ultimately our approach

to change - more clearly defined by figure 1 above. Viewing such concepts in a more fluid and dynamic way makes challenging them seem more effective.

Because indeed, as suggested earlier, broad, and abstract terms such as globalisation do not take into account the complex nature of daily life in localities (Escobar 2001) and so cannot explain – with enough detail and accuracy – why and how things happen as they do. The theory outlined in figure 1 emphasises the role of political discourse in influencing the process of change in places. So, if we follow Massey’s way of thinking, which suggests that political discourse can be influenced and is always under construction, then it must be true that the dominance of ideas (such as eternal economic growth) can also be challenged. Within this approach to change, current political discourses place major cities and larger urban areas at the core of intellectual and spatial developmental narratives. Shearmur suggests that as well as requiring intangible resources such as governance, networks, and knowledge, maintaining innovation requires close proximity and ease of access to the physical infrastructure and basic services that major metropolitan areas could provide, which is why they are often presented as key economic focal points (Shearmur 2011).

These places are presented as innovative, populous, and productive. They generate products, services and ideas and are creative in their approach to fuelling (our fascination with) growth. Indeed, New Economic Geography presents metro areas as the favoured sites for economic growth, most notably due to the general correlation between agglomeration on the one hand and productivity and innovation on the other. In the World Development Report published in 2009, density and development were presented as being intrinsically linked to the agglomeration of capital, consumers, and workers resulting in a hierarchy of places (World Bank 2009).

However, it is obviously not the places themselves that are innovative or creative. It is the people who inhabit them. Yet not everyone is born or educated in a city; many come from other places and sometimes from smaller or more rural places – i.e. old industrial towns such as Llanelli and Wrexham for example. So, if we reflect upon the idea that these places are also tied to the same vision for change – of eternal economic growth, we reach the conclusion that they too are competing with these larger urban areas to attract the skilled workforce required to achieve it. And given the pull of these capitals of cultural exchange, the capacity of smaller

places to direct and implement such changes become limited. This in turn brings to the fore issues concerning inequality, not only between but also within places, which have become central to many political conflicts (Picketty 2015). As Myrdal demonstrated in his theory of circular and cumulative causation, the play of market forces tends to increase inequalities between regions because as one region expands, the cumulative process evolves – upwards in the expanding regions and downwards in the poorer ones (Myrdal 1969).

The Measure of Value

This part of the political story considers the way in which our measure of value, and in fact our values in general, influences the way in which change is approached. Economics is widely recognised as the international language of progress, so it's worth considering how this language that we use, how those very words and terms have influenced and continue to influence how we think and behave. For example, GDP (Growth Domestic Product) – this common abbreviation (which is 'the standard measure of the value added created through the production of goods and services in a country during a certain period' (OECD 2022)) is frequently thrown around in debates, reports and policies related to change and progress and has dominated local and regional development. However, definitions of local and regional development are particularly context-dependent (Tomaney 2017) – and so implementing broad brush approaches to change that do not adequately take into account the specifics of the place in question as a rule, do not work.

Conventional ways of theorising and measuring the economy fixate on boosting GDP, yet growth in GDP often fails to translate into improvements in living standards for many (Morgan 2021a). For example, whilst the top cities and regions may have the highest rate of growth, they also have the highest cost of living which means that self-identified levels of well-being are often lower than those in the more affordable places. However, the Foundational Economy focuses on more inclusive forms of development and on sectors like energy and eldercare that are typically sheltered from international competition (Morgan 2021a).

The reason why this is so significant is that GDP tells us a lot about production and income yet it says very little about wealth, which is considered to be a fundamental source of

inequality (Picketty 2015). And practically speaking, this emphasis on GDP feels, or has felt somewhat out of step with reality because the effects of rising fluctuations don't appear to directly reflect changes in our daily lives (Button 2019). Although, as I write this in November 2022 in the midst of an energy crisis and possibly on the brink of yet another recession, it could quite rightly be argued that these fluctuations do indeed appear to be having a significant and direct impact on our daily lives. Yet whilst this may well be the case on this occasion, it doesn't negate the fact that the values that have driven 'progress' as we know it have been at the helm of almost every crisis that we have faced in recent times.

In this context, agents of change are considered within a neo-Schumpeterian tradition where multiple entrepreneurs are seen to affect new path development (Morisson and Mayer 2021). Effectively their role is to recognise and instigate economic development opportunities within their localities, which might ultimately have a positive impact on GDP. However it would be unwise to state that current measurements do not have the power to transform the lives of some of the poorest in society (Pilling 2018), but their real impact is heavily dependent on the values, vision, and mechanisms for redistribution (Sen 1999) – meaning that it is the governments in power that decide how they choose to do this, if at all. So, theoretically fiscal redistribution policies can indeed help to limit the effects of inequality, but they are less useful in addressing the structural causes (Picketty 2015).

How, therefore, can issues of inequality be addressed more effectively? It could be argued that increasing awareness of social and ecological issues from all sections of society is leading to a gradual departure from current models of measuring the health of the economy towards more inclusive concepts based on well-being. Some have considered 'degrowth', a movement that calls for a dramatic reduction in energy consumption, thus inevitably shrinking GDP, as a serious alternative (Love 2019). Whilst the continual expansion of the economy had been synonymous with the idea of social progress, it no longer reflected the reality of everyday life for ordinary people (Jackson 2021). Following the financial crisis of 2008, more and more people began questioning the validity of this framework for change.

In a post-growth world, this new accounting of economic success could fundamentally change how success and well-being are measured, by not only addressing growing inequalities but also environmental concerns (Gibson-Graham 2014). One of the main reasons for bringing

these wider discussions around GDP and well-being to the fore was to present the wider context in which the WFGA was created. This innovative and influential act – the first of its kind in the world – has placed Wales at the forefront of theoretical development and policy design and has generated a culture in which visionary thought and experimentation is (potentially) achievable.

2.3 A Place to Work – The Economic Story

A Tale of (More Than) Two Cities

The second story observes place from an economic perspective and looks at how dominant political ideas (as outlined in the previous section) have influenced approaches to change – i.e. how have these ideas been realised on a practical level. Firstly, one would need to establish the economic context of a place. Considering the focus of this research on smaller urban places, one could begin by looking at the industrial history and legacy of these places, and perhaps consider the extent to which approaches by the varying levels of government to managing their economic trajectories have been influenced by dominant approaches to development. As mentioned previously, this economic way of organising places has involved establishing and institutionalising processes that facilitate urbanisation which has inevitably led to the enhancement of city boundaries.

Yet what does this mean for smaller places that lie beyond these boundaries? For example; how and to what extent have their issues been shaped and solved by these dominant approaches to regional development that prioritise economic efficiency over equity (Avdikos and Chardas 2016)? As has been suggested on numerous occasions, this uneven distribution of both economic and population growth has been seen as a typical feature of contemporary capitalism (Leick and Lang 2018), which ultimately suggests the need for a more equitable and sustainable solution to urbanisation (Klinenberg 2018). So how might such a solution look?

A more holistic approach might perceive improved well-being as the key to a sustainable economy as opposed to the other way around thereby potentially setting the tone for a greater sense of equilibrium between and within urban spaces. Yet, whilst the importance of well-being is often discussed, it's not always particularly clear what it actually means in any given context and therefore establishing an understanding of this is imperative. Sen presents well-being as an indication of how well a person can function, and says that this might be in relation to activities such as eating or states of being such as being well nourished (Sen 1985). The extent to which these activities can be achieved, he continues, is the prime feature of well-being and such activities are often ranked in line with common valuations or what has been referred to in this research as the cultural context in which a person lives (Sen 1985).

It could therefore be suggested that 'functioning' is another term for agency i.e. that achieving individual well-being means that people can function/have the agency to effect change in their own lives. Discussions around well-being of course inevitably stray into those around health care, but often there can be an inability to define well-being and health beyond 'the absence of disease... which is a way of thinking that underpins most health systems' (Tamber and Kelly 2017, p. 6). However, whilst addressing ill-health and understanding the contributing social risk factors are absolutely key, there needs to be a greater awareness of the impact that a lack of control or agency has on well-being (Tamber and Kelly 2017), as suggested previously by Sen. Tamber and Kelly add that 'this core importance of agency extends to collective agency. A sense of being able to come together to create change is conceivably as crucial to the health of a community as a sense of control is to an individual's health' (Tamber and Kelly 2017, p. 7).

Urbanist Perceptions

The previous section established how influential the narrative of growth and urbanisation had been to our thinking around change, however this part of the story will continue to focus on how this has worked in practice. For example, the incessant reworking of state geographies (Brenner 2004) has given rise to the renaissance of the city-region and its framing as the ideal spatial concept capable of engendering economic development (Beel et al. 2018). Therefore,

new economic boundaries are being generated to reflect this idea. Yet how does this framing influence perceptions of place and approaches to economic challenges?

Tomaney explains that the way we define development directly influences our perceptions of places, particularly in terms of how 'developed' we think they are (Tomaney 2017). Yet if being 'developed' means emulating what are perceived to be successful places – or large urban areas as the case may be, then smaller places will inevitably be considered 'less developed'. Kitchen suggests that towns and rural areas have been perceived mainly as consumption zones for urban populations, a narrative that is almost certainly exacerbated by the promotion and execution of City Deals (Kitchen 2011). These bilateral arrangements (trilateral in devolved nations such as Wales), between a government and a city region, give the city and surrounding areas powers and resources to generate what they perceive to be the appropriate conditions for economic growth (UK Government 2013). As these deals actively promote the concentration of resources in a very few select places (Rachman 2018), they are seen by some to contribute to an increase in pressure and conflict within the wider regions and countries (Rachman 2018), often exacerbating existing disparities and inequality (Pike et al. 2007).

But what are the incentives or benefits (if any) for this continued state of urban bias in the field of economic geography? It may well be true that encouraging and facilitating economic agglomeration can have a positive impact on national growth, however policies that address economic inequality may in fact counteract and contradict such initiatives (Gardiner et al. 2010). At present, public policy encourages lesser-developed regions to emulate successful regions with the assumption that it will increase well-being (Williams et al. 2018) – or increase GDP as the case may be.

However, practically speaking (and as mentioned previously), as our incomes and commodities are used as the material basis of our well-being, it's not possible for these metrics to fully consider the contingent circumstances in which they are used (Sen 1999) – which of course would vary significantly between, say, a large city and a small town. And given the diversity of cities and the complex nature of their context-specific conditions, there are quite rightly concerns about the relevance of mainstream conceptualising to explain change in places (Tomaney 2017).

Price-Based Values

The third part of the economic story considers how our incessant focus on the economy as a measure of change has influenced the way in which much of our activity as humans is valued. This price system has meant that the primary aim of creating investment environments has, thus far, continued to triumph over more meaningful aims of generating intergenerational security (Gibson-Graham 2014). As previously suggested, this notion and reality of conceptualising the world through an economic prism brings to the fore many issues around the themes of values and value with some suggesting, for instance, that they are not simply conventions about how we should think and behave, but also relate to matters of well-being (Sayer 2015). And so, it could be argued that even our interpretations of well-being, as a broad concept, have been shaped and moulded by economic measures.

If our judgement of value is measured according to economic worth, what – for example – would be the value of unpaid work? It is widely accepted that the (often unpaid) work of caring for others is vital not only to our well-being (Sayer 2015), but to the capitalist system as a whole (McDowell 2019). Yet the people who undertake such work (traditionally women) are frequently judged to have little (economic) worth, i.e. they are paid very little or nothing at all. In her book *Labours of Love: The Crisis of Care*, Madeleine Bunting talks of the need to re-value care work and also brings to the fore its crucial gendered dimension (Bunting 2020). And this presents a conundrum - is care work economically undervalued, is it that care work requires an economic value in order to reflect its true worth or is there, in fact, more to work than employment (Sayer 2015)? In fact, can there ever be an antipode to the economic world (Bogle 1970)?

In her book *Who Cooked Adam Smith's Dinner?*, Marçal portrays a theoretical image of the Economic Man – a rational man who sets and achieves his goals by any means possible (Marçal 2018). Traditionally, Economic Man has had no need to be preoccupied with such (vital) tasks as raising children and running a household. Why? Simply because he is not employed to do so. But by maintaining the economy as the collective environment (Murphy 2017), we deepen our dependence on the institutionalised processes of generating growth which in turn narrows our definitions of development and progress.

In his most recent book, Carney emphasised the changing nature of value and its relationship to time and place (Carney 2021). He went on to suggest that one of the implications of our moving from a market economy to a market society is that that which is not priced has little or no value (Carney 2021). Whilst studying this phenomenon is an extremely important endeavour, the overwhelming and long-term impact of this framing of human activity as a commercial society has had a significant effect on our perceptions of reality.

For example, with regard to the town centre problem and the issue of the dwindling high street – until recently reversing this decline in transactional activity has been the driver of most changes seen in these places. However, such problems and issues are not just an outcome of a decline in retail activity but rather reflect far broader changes seen in the relationship between people and towns (Calafati et al. 2021). This in turn highlights the need for putting more thought and consideration into what these places mean to people, to understand why and how they are valued, and to do so by placing more emphasis on their social function.

2.4 A Place to Gather – The Cultural Story

A Different Tale

We begin the third story by observing place through a cultural lens which considers the impact of our political thinking and economic approaches to change on places. The study of culture in and of itself is complex, therefore establishing an understanding of the concept in the context of this study is important. Nowadays, culture generally refers to people's behaviour based on their background and community affiliations, but it should also be considered that culture is highly contextual and therefore varies quite significantly between and even within places. Therefore, when seeking to understand how and why places change, it is crucial to study the various aspects that influence these differences.

However, as with any terminology, we often assume that it has always been used in the same way. Yet it was only during the industrial revolution that culture – and a number of other

words - came into common use, and the subsequent importance of such words represented a critical shift in social discourse highlighting a more general change in our collective ways of thinking about common life (Williams 2017). As the power and might of industry grew, so too did places - their expanding boundaries bringing diverse cultures together thus allowing new ways to creep into old systems and structures (Streeck and Thelen 2005). In turn, this fast-paced development reshaped our attitudes and behaviours in ways that could not be envisaged (Vohs et al. 2006).

From thereon in, the language of progress began reaching far beyond financial markets (Raworth 2017) extending deeper into the socio-spatial culture of places (Huggins and Thompson 2019). As expressions of culture became more tangible and increasingly commercial, so too did their economic value. As a result, it became more commonplace for political thinkers and those in authority to make calculations about the value of a place according to the culture that it produced – i.e. fashion, art, music and sport. This specific definition of culture, which Currid argues only happens in select places (Currid 2007) – namely large urban areas, is particularly interesting and relevant due to its significant role in influencing policy makers and urban economists in recent times to look towards these more conceptual forms of generating vitality and diversity.

Although said to be a natural occurrence in big cities (Jacobs 1992), these growth-generating conditions are those which policy makers also seek to reproduce in smaller urban areas. Dismissing for the moment any notion that it's even possible to reproduce these conditions, when reflecting on the dynamics of smaller urban areas, how appropriate are such policies? One would of course need to consider what kind of activities were already taking place in these smaller places, who was leading and what were the ambitions and motivations of the actors involved and would growing or increasing the levels of activity in that particular place be appropriate or sustainable.

Huggins et al. argue that although culture matters for regional economic development (Huggins et al. 2021) cultural factors often remain absent from its analysis, and this adds to a sense of separation between the nature of social places and the economic spaces within which they are situated (Huggins and Thompson 2015). Huggins and Thompson point to a link between greater levels of social cohesion and high levels of deprivation thereby suggesting

that the community culture traits of Wales are negatively associated with economic success (Huggins and Thompson 2015).

Changing Perceptions

This part of the story considers the importance of examining different approaches to place-based policies that focus on cultural activity and why they may generate a more balanced outcome. And when we talk of different approaches, it needn't necessarily refer to anything particularly radical, but rather a more sensitive approach that adequately considers the context of the places in question. One of the main reasons for doing this is to bring to light how the dynamics of places impact on the culture that they generate thereby representing both the impact of past changes as well as the context of any future changes.

Yet why would we need to consider other approaches? The increasing emphasis on this city-centric definition of culture has signalled the growing prevalence of place-based identity in economic development policy (Florida 2012). The practice of branding a place in order to promote and sell it to new capital interest has involved processes of re-presentation and re-formation of identity centred around the shared interests of particular social groups (Hudson 2019). Generating these asymmetrical power relations has inevitably empowered some actors over others (Pemberton 2016) and has further emphasised the varying levels of influence and resources available to them (Hudson 2019).

MacKinnon and Cumbers outline the importance of context in effecting the process of exercising power (MacKinnon and Cumbers 2011) and so by reflecting on the culture that is presented and promoted within a place, the levels of agency that certain groups may or may not have, become easier to determine (Hodgson 2009). Equally, the impact of these past and existing power struggles may also be reflected in any spatial inequalities generated as a result (MacKinnon and Cumbers 2011). It's therefore plausible to suggest, in the context of understanding this definition of culture as a driver of change, that there appears to be some correlation between the identities represented and promoted in place-based policies, those who are empowered by them, and the places and people that benefit as a result.

Bearing this in mind, could a more balanced representation of cultures within place-based policies therefore have a positive impact on power relations, which would give agency to a wider variety of actors? Could this in turn lead to a reduction in spatial inequalities? One challenge with such an approach might be that if, as suggested earlier, culture is partly based on behaviour (which is monitored almost entirely within an economic framework), it can only account for economic motives. Therefore, does this mean that agency, within the context of development and progress, can only be accounted for if the motives are measurable within this economic framework?

It is once again, in the spirit of seeking alternative ways of measuring progress that the concept of well-being becomes relevant. Tomaney suggests that 'the use of well-being metrics is designed to inform better policy-making by highlighting how economic growth translates into improved 'non-economic' outcomes and whether development is shared among groups and place' (Tomaney 2017, p. 104). However, it is still the case that well-being is considered within an economic framework. And so whilst the power and might of the financial markets cannot be ignored, there is much to be said for considering economics as one of many measures as opposed to the main one, as is done within the WFGA. This alternative perspective on change reflects a growing trend towards more sustainable solutions to change that may indeed reflect more inclusive and substantive forms of progress.

Value beyond Measure

The final part of the story considers the concept of change within a cultural framework and looks at how it influences agency. A sociological interpretation of agency could be understood as a habitual, imaginary and realised process of engagement – one that's informed by the past, driven by the future and contextualised in the present (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Having habitual and contextual knowledge and experience of a place could also be another way of expressing an understanding of its culture. So once again, this encourages one to consider the importance of understanding the context of a place when trying to effectively influence or implement change.

For example, a culturally-informed agent might be more attuned to the momentum of a place. They would understand how and why changes have or haven't worked in the past and thereby have a greater awareness of the dynamics of any future changes. One could therefore argue that effective and sustainable development can only truly be realised when the waves of change (e.g. policy proposals/development plans) are attuned to the cultural momentum of a place which would allow them a greater opportunity of becoming embedded within systems and structures.

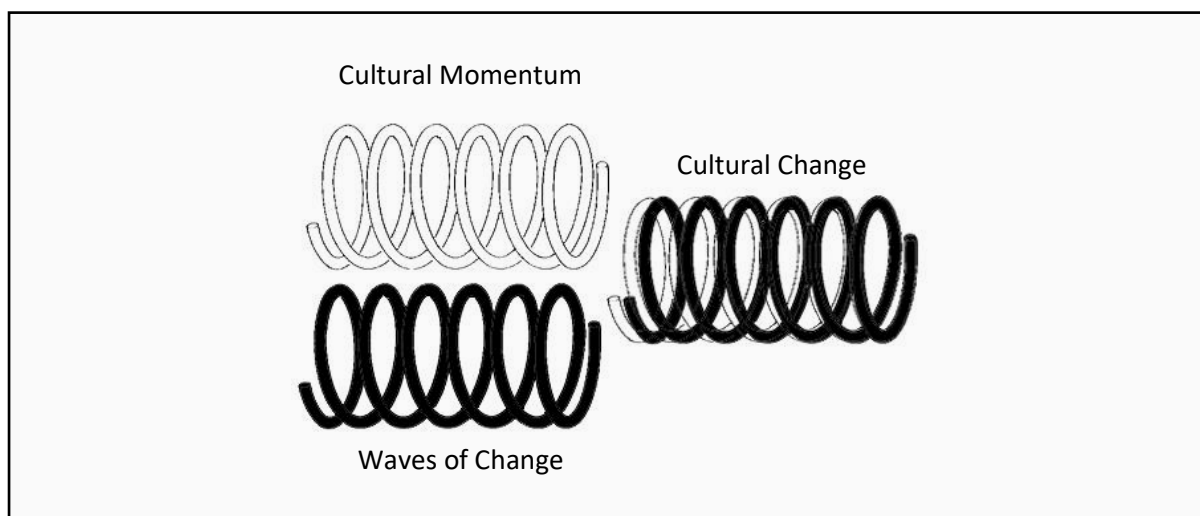


Figure 2: The Waves of Cultural Change (Source: Ani Saunders)

Presenting change as something which is cyclical in nature seems appropriate in many ways. For instance, when a change is implemented, certain aspects of the process may become embedded into the culture of a place, whilst others will have little or no impact at all. These new aspects will then all merge with the old aspects of the place to form what then becomes the current context. And so presenting this process as one which demonstrates forward motion, momentum and gradual alignment seems to be most apt (see figure 2 above).

Grillitsch and Sotarauta argue that the power and capabilities of agents relate to their experience and societal position (Grillitsch and Sotarauta 2020), which links somewhat loosely to the waves of cultural change theory mentioned above. Their Trinity of Change theory - which involves three distinct types of transformative agency - identify actions that are directed towards creating economic and institutional change in order to develop new growth paths (Grillitsch and Sotarauta 2020). Despite the learned validity of such a theory,

from a broader perspective, it does seem somewhat limiting to restrict or minimise the role of agents to change as defined in one-dimensional economic terms. The fact that there is an established mechanism in place that appears to quantify a certain definition of change should not justify its authority. Yet it does.

It could well be suggested that our emphasis on economics as the language of progress has instilled in us a somewhat sterile approach to change, one which strips away any meaning and human emotion from the process by encouraging us to quantify the value of our activities as people. This may be why the approach of an artist is increasingly valid as they continue to deal with questions of local belonging and attachment to place with subtlety and depth (Tomaney 2012) without reducing the human experience to a number. And this approach is particularly relevant in the context of regional development, which links directly to issues of sustainability, because it encourages a 'different outlook on the relationship between humans and nature, and humans and others (humans and non-humans. Such an outlook would mean) not only theorising on the alternatives but also corresponding action in the real world... (implying) a radical, intentional, adventurous societal shift on a very large scale (Nesterova 2021, p. 2).'

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on literature related to understanding places from a political, economic, and cultural perspective in order to determine their influence on the process of change. It has also helped to explain how agency within places operate by looking at factors, such as boundaries, perceptions and values, i.e. that each plays a part in influencing the action or inaction of people. The first story observed place from a political perspective and established that our understanding of change to date has, to a significant extent, been guided by the experience of cities and larger urban areas (MacKinnon et al. 2019) and therefore from a metro-centric bias. This in turn highlighted an urgent need to study change from the perspective of smaller places that lie beyond these boundaries.

A key observation made was that the dominant narratives within the field of economic and regional development represent a certain view of how places should be organised. These

views - which measure the value of a place according to its economic capacity - were then reflected in the way in which places were organised and the manner in which their boundaries were set. One related theory, as visualised in figure 1, shows the role of political discourse in influencing the direction of change in places. Within this framework, it demonstrated how current dominant intellectual and spatial developmental narratives - that placed cities and large urban areas at their core - significantly impact on the capacity of smaller, more peripheral places to direct change. This in turn highlighted glaring issues of inequality between and within these places.

In analysing the story of change within the context of place, the role and dominance of growth and GDP as a measure of well-being was highlighted and challenged. It was recognised that although such measurements have the power to transform lives (Pilling 2018), meaningful impact was heavily dependent on the vision and values of redistribution (Sen 1999). When reflecting on the way in which values shape an agent's approach to change, a fundamental shift in the political discourse was highlighted – one that hailed the concept of well-being as the most suitable and sustainable alternative measure to growth – realised in Wales through the WFGA.

The second story told the tale of a place from an economic perspective and outlined the role of economics in dominating the landscape of change thus resulting in places being viewed primarily as spaces to generate growth. In addition, it also drew attention to the relationship between wealth and power and suggested that the increasingly economic way of organising places had played a role in facilitating rapid urbanisation thereby resulting in uneven development. It was also suggested that established patterns of uneven development were not only reflective of past economic policies but also represented the biased nature of economic opportunity which meant that smaller places on the periphery were significantly disadvantaged.

It was suggested that despite recent attempts to rework state geographies in the form of City Deals, these newer interpretations of boundaries - that aimed to engender economic development – had also encouraged uneven development due to the way that resources were being concentrated (Rachman 2018). In addition, it was recognised that as current metrics did not fully consider the varying contexts and circumstances of places (Sen 1999),

pursuing policies that encouraged 'lesser-developed' regions to emulate 'successful regions' would not necessarily alleviate underlying problems.

Pursuing the idea of a price system that prioritised the use of places as investment environments as opposed to spaces in which to generate intergenerational security (Gibson-Graham 2014) raised issues related to values and value. It highlighted significant weaknesses in the way in which unpaid work such as care was valued and brought to the fore systematic issues of gender inequality related to the traditional idea of women as care providers. Despite its vital contribution to well-being (Sayer 2015) and the economy (McDowell 2019), there was little evidence to suggest that the value of this work was reflected in the economic sphere. It therefore concluded that by promoting a narrative of development that was so reliant on such unequal measures of value, the places and people without the means to contribute were afforded very little agency.

The third story observed place through a cultural lens and outlined how the industrial revolution not only brought diverse cultures together, but also presented places with new ways of thinking about common life (Williams 2017). The story argued that this economic environment encouraged the promotion of place-branding - centred around the shared interests of particular social groups (Hudson 2019) - in order to sell them to new capital interest. This particular definition of culture inevitably empowered some actors and places over others (Pemberton 2016) and promoted a narrative that valued economic actions above all other forms of human behaviour.

The final part of this story focused on understanding the extent to which our judgement of value and wealth was guided by economic measures and one observation made was that we tend to define our understanding of motive, action, and agency within this particular sphere. The importance of having cultural and contextual knowledge of place was highlighted as key to recognising how change in place happens – a theory visualised in figure 2. It concluded that restricting the definition of agents to the economic process alone meant that we underestimated and undervalued the wider capacity of places and their people to improve their own well-being.

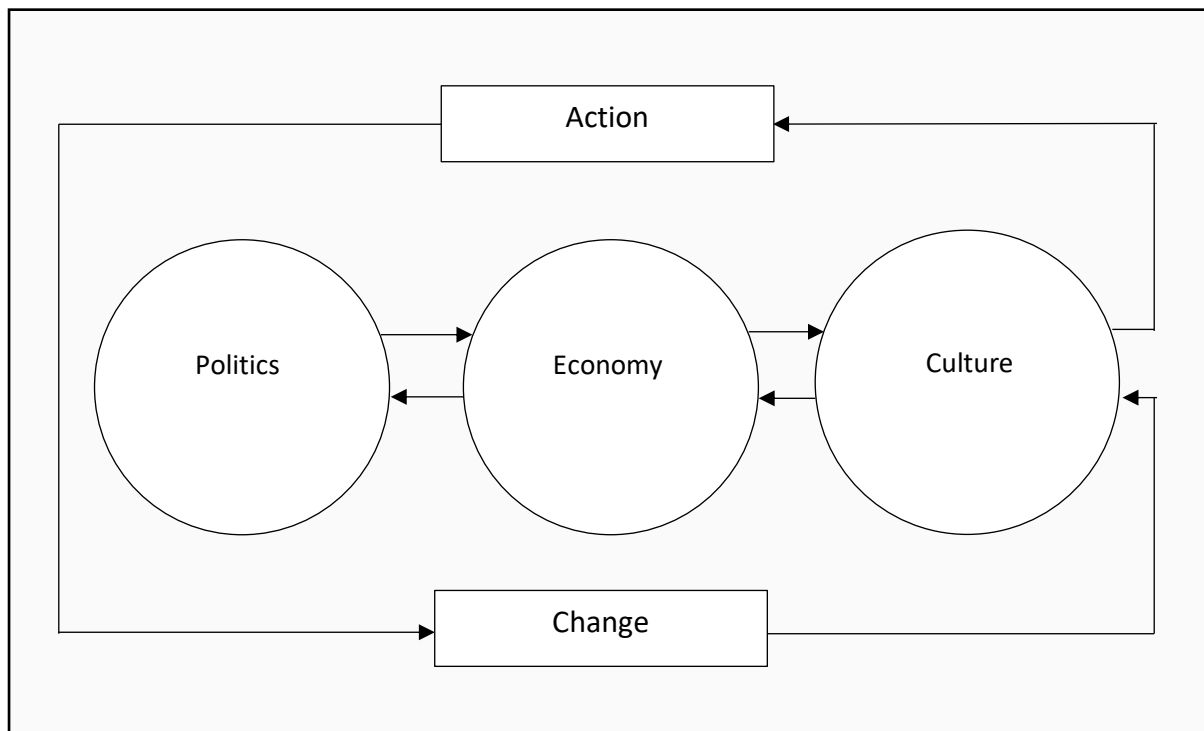


Figure 3: *The Journey of Action and Change in Places* (Source: Ani Saunders)

Figure 3 above outlines the hypothesis which relates to the journey of action and change in places. Throughout this literature review, focus has been placed on presenting the varying boundaries, perceptions and values that impact on and influence agency through a political, economic, and cultural lens. This hypothesis postulates that action and change (or lack thereof) in any place is deeply tied to and reliant on the political, economic, and cultural contexts that have been generated there over time. Therefore, in order to understand how and why agency in places operates, it is important to understand those places on a local level.

This chapter has helped bring the main themes of the research questions to the fore by highlighting the importance of providing a context to any process of change in a place. Therefore, it was important that the framework enabled the questions to not only explore how the dimensions of a place, as outlined previously, influence the process of change there but also how agents of change relate to and navigate them.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The conceptual framework of this thesis, as outlined in the literature review, considers the extent to which the political, economic, and cultural context of place impacts on the pace and direction of change, and examines the role of agents in this process. The empirical work focused on identifying the key conditions for change and how they dictate the agendas of agents and vice versa. The chapter begins with a brief overview and rationale of the epistemological approach as a way of contextualising and explaining the actions taken.

The empirical field is divided into three parts: the political, economic, and cultural realms which represent the framework used to examine the actions of agents. It also provides a vantage point from which to examine the nature of inequality, both as an outcome and driver of change, and considers the impact of dominant ideas on this process. By establishing the operational context of agents, the three dimensions of agency can be examined. This conceptualisation of agency is then translated into a working method which can be used to identify and isolate localised practices. This is then followed by an outline of the methods employed in the empirical work.

3.2 Methodology

It is important to establish and make clear the organising principle of the research – the thinking which guides it and the values that shape it. Therefore, before outlining the methodological approach, this section will present a brief overview and rationale of the epistemological approach as a way of contextualising and explaining the actions taken throughout this study.

A Feminist Approach

Upon venturing into this field, it became apparent that, much like every other no doubt, there was a long-established practice of promoting or encouraging certain ways of gaining and

presenting knowledge. The idea of working within what felt like a fairly rigid normal-scientific tradition (Kuhn 1970) was an aspect of the research that didn't seem to adequately represent nor reflect the fluid nature of the themes and concepts upon which this research was focusing. For example, the focus on change as a concept, on its evolving ability to be anything other than fixed, signalled a slightly different approach. One that perhaps reflected the nature and reality of people's existence in places more effectively.

In the context of old industrial landscapes, Gibson-Graham presented social research and mining as parallel activities that probed and disturbed their surroundings uncovering hidden layers (Gibson-Graham 1994). They conceptually explored their subject matter in the same manner as the surrounding landscapes would have been explored in the past. This extremely visual and perceptive way of viewing social research and of studying people in places seemed to be a very appropriate approach to take with regard to the research in question. For example, it was important that there was a variety of depth and breadth to the data captured in order to reflect this dynamic conceptualisation of social research. Therefore, not only was this dynamism reflected in the framework designed for this research, but also in the types of questions asked during interviews (see Appendix A).

The feminist angle is also considered in the act of challenging mainstream narratives and of 'listening to and hearing the voices of others' (Hall 2020, p. 243). What one is alluding to here is whether or not the established power structures that form and promote these narratives which, from a researcher's perspective, could be done theoretically, methodologically, or in a practical sense, are valid. This is a specific area that interests feminist researchers because it actively considers the gendered nature of development and encourages the researchers themselves to reflect upon their own position and privilege within their study (Jenkins et al. 2019). This was an angle that was actively pursued, especially with regard to challenging the dominance of economic ways of measuring change.

Power dynamics, especially from a developmental point of view, are hugely gendered in nature in that traditionally, men have been the ones in a position not only to implement changes but also to guide the conversations which drive them. With that in mind, the act of challenging the structures that have supported such unequal approaches to change is paramount if one is seeking to address some of the fundamental causes of uneven

development. Therefore, from the point of view of a female researcher, recognising these dynamics and challenging them in practice, as has been done throughout this research, is a practical way of contributing to this important area of work.

In her essay 'The Personal Is Political', Hanisch argued that it was important to see the political potential of all women and to recognise the validity of their personal experiences (Hanisch 1970). It was also around this time that scholars such as Kimberlè Crenshaw and Angela Davis were arguing that gender should be understood according to socio-spatial contexts of culture, class, race, sexuality, disability etc. (Hall 2020). In terms of the practical implications of this position for this research, it will offer 'empirical insights into feminist praxis (and) the gendered politics of carrying out such fieldwork as a female researcher' (Hall 2020, p. 243).

Existing debates relating to change in old industrial towns, for example, have tended to focus on the lack of agency – i.e. that development is done to people in these places as opposed to with them. However, my work challenges this by taking a granular and grounded approach to exploring agency through new development paradigms relating to well-being (rather than growth) and culture (rather than jobs). These new, more holistic paradigms not only challenge the dominance of mainstream approaches to change, but also allow us to see which agents are active, thereby challenging any assumptions about who the traditional actors may be. In addition, the presentation of a story-driven research framework is another reflection of a feminist approach in that it encourages one to view places and the processes that happen within them on a scale that is more human and relatable.

Rationalising Emotion

Broadly speaking, as social scientists we are encouraged to detach our own concerns from that which we study. But it seems a strange practice to be observing the objective well-being (or ill-being) of people without considering this matter as a fellow participant in life because as people, surely we all have an active interest in seeing ourselves and others flourish (Sayer 2011). Whilst the feminist approach outlined above addressed this to a certain extent, it felt important to delve a little to deeper and to reflect on the role of emotions in our understanding of judgement and choice (Kahneman 2012). For example, Sayer was of the

opinion that it simply wasn't possible to keep thoughts and feelings separate (Sayer 2011) but this didn't mean that values were a threat to objective social science just that they needed to be acknowledged and scrutinised.

For example, one might easily associate the ideas of rational thought as being non-emotional (clear and objective) and irrational thought as emotional (clouded and subjective, a sign of weakness if you like) with how men and women have been traditionally characterised; men as rational and objective and women as irrational and emotional – another aspect of research that feminists often challenge. But whether or not these traditional characterisations of men and women are accurate is not what is being challenged here, rather the general notion that the employment of emotion in the practice of decision making can be thought of as weak and irrational – specifically in the context of research.

The reason why this ought to be highlighted is because human beings are innately emotional beings; language exists to communicate, and one of its most important and effective uses is to express emotion (Lewis 1960). Therefore, it could be argued that to dismiss and underestimate the value of this fundamental aspect of our humanity would be, at best, short-sighted, or at worst, simply wrong. In light of this view, it seemed important firstly to address the aforementioned argument surrounding emotion and choice and to follow it with a justification of the position taken in this study.

I am researching the role of people in influencing the process of change in place and am advocating for, in line with my fellow feminist researchers, more clarity and openness when reflecting upon how one's own emotion relates to research practice. The long and short of it is that this research is being undertaken because, like all colleagues, I am concerned about growing issues of inequality within our society and feel it important that we each do all we can to try to challenge these imbalances. This is a clear statement. It is not irrational, but it shows emotional engagement and investment in the research. Of course, one might argue that the slight danger with advocating for such an approach is that it might have a significant impact on the researcher's own judgements, perhaps leading to misinterpretation of data. But as Sayer states, thoughts and feelings are one and the same (Sayer 2011) and so by clearly stating and justifying one's own position, there ought not to be many, if any further concerns about the matter.

Challenging the Language of Authority

Another matter that is striking about the practice of research is how quickly we learn to accept well-established language practices within any given field, and how infrequently we appear to challenge them. The reason for bringing this to the fore in this instance is in order to highlight its role in protecting and legitimising power structures and thereby facilitating inequality. For example, gendered attributes are equally as embedded in the social character of work as they are in the culture in which they are being considered (McDowell 1997).

Traditionally authority, power and decision-making skills have been associated with masculinity (McDowell 1997) and so presumably, not only will this have impacted on who makes decisions but also on the kind of decisions that are made. Therefore, it would seem wise to consider the suggestion that gender inequality is perpetuated by the way in which place has traditionally been studied, observed, and managed. It is with this in mind that I address the question of dominant narratives and their role in legitimising these inequalities that materialise in the form of political, economic and social rules (Piketty 2020).

It is my thinking that within these three categories, our boundaries, perceptions, and values are formed and by focusing on dissecting these rules, we will develop a better understanding of the process of change and the dynamics of agency. As well as considering the influence of overall narratives, it is also important to bear in mind certain key words which are frequently used within this field of research. Yet words constantly take on new meanings and Lewis presents this process not as an insect undergoing metamorphosis but rather as a tree throwing out new branches, and so concern for and knowledge of this tree should be paramount (Lewis 1960).

But how does it relate to this research? Essentially, by blindly accepting the authority of well-established language practices and narratives, one would also be accepting the authority of the temporal and geographical contexts in which they developed without even considering their relation to and impact on society today. It may not be the case that I make recommendations to change such words but rather that we become more aware of their power and influence on our overall thinking.

3.3 The Empirical Field

Conceptualising Place

In order to structure the study of place, the field was divided into three main parts: the political, economic and cultural realms. It is important to highlight that these parts were not necessarily meant to reflect isolated areas of knowledge, and that although they did take into account the impact of action that could and did cross these boundaries, they were selected in a practical way that afforded the researcher the space within which to isolate the practices of agents. These parts are described in the following sections along with the methods used to gather evidence.

This structure also had a significant influence on this research in an operational sense. As well as being selected for their role as agents of change, interviewees were also selected in almost equal numbers from these different realms. The number of interviewees identified within these realms were fairly well-balanced across both case studies which was important in order to ensure a sense of harmony within the field. An example of an agent from the political realm might be a government employee, an agent from the economic realm a business owner and an agent from the cultural realm an artist etc.

Political Context

The political realm in this context relates to the various levels of government and governance institutions that steer and coordinate economic development initiatives, and structure interactions between actors in place (Evenhuis 2017). This realm was examined in two ways, firstly an analysis was made of the governance structures which operated within a specified place which looked at local and regional approaches to development. Secondly, as part of the empirical work, qualitative interviews were held with key agents with various levels of influence who were or had been involved in the process of change or had experience of change within the case study towns. These agents included Councillors, Council Members of Cabinet, Mayors, Members of the Senedd, and former Members of Parliament.

Economic Context

The economic realm represents the context in which the change is designed and delivered and the direction in which change is steered. These changes are more often than not realised through economic development initiatives, e.g. City Deals, and are measured according to the impact that they have on the economic well-being of a place. This realm was examined in two ways, firstly by analysing development plans and reports along with relevant data and statistics in order to understand the approaches to and impact of change, and secondly by conducting qualitative interviews with key agents that included economic development managers, project leads for regeneration programmes, directors of industrial sites and large-scale employers.

Cultural Context

This realm represents the culture in which agency operates and considers the extent to which the legacy of industry, and therefore the social context of a place, impacts on actual and perceived barriers to change. This realm was examined in two ways, firstly by analysing the way in which social and cultural interactions have changed and developed over time, and secondly by conducting qualitative interviews with key agents including life-long residents of the case study areas, community coordinators, directors of cultural and community centres and local artists.

Conceptualising Agency

Working within the framework outlined above, this section explains the three dimensions of agency that operate within places, namely boundaries, perceptions, and values. This conceptualisation was designed by exploring literature relating to the role of people in identifying and directing path development and the role and influence of place in influencing or restricting people to act in order to instigate change. It was done in order to understand and explain the role of places in influencing the action or inaction of people. Whilst there may be other aspects of agency that these dimensions may not fully consider, what they do provide is a broad and holistic framework within which to examine the relationship between

people and place and how this influences the process of change. A description of each aspect is accompanied with an outline of the methods used to gather evidence.

Boundaries

Boundaries constituted the first dimension of agency - it looked at the way both spatial and intellectual boundaries influenced approaches to change and also considered the impact of dominant political ideas on different places. These ideas were examined through one-to-one interviews with agents involved in decision-making processes within the case study towns. This was followed by a thematic analysis of this data.

Perceptions

The second dimension of agency emphasised the role of experience in influencing perceptions towards the process of change and sought to understand the extent to which proposed changes in places reflected or challenged dominant ideas about how they should develop alongside more localised ideas based on lived experiences and actual need. These ideas were explored by conducting one-to-one interviews with agents involved in development initiatives within the case study towns. The data was then thematically analysed.

Values

The final dimension explored the theme of values and focused on the way in which economic measures of value have influenced approaches to change. It also considered the impact of this measure on the way in which much of our activity as human beings is valued. These ideas were examined by conducting one-to-one interviews with key agents involved in directing and contributing to the culture in each case study town. This was then followed by an analysis of the data collected.

Contextualising Agency in Place

The table below demonstrates the linkage between the multiple concepts that provide the framework for this study. Examples are included from the empirical findings to show how these concepts were operationalised.

	Political realm	Economic realm	Cultural realm
Place	<p><u>Concept</u> Looks at how interactions between traditional actors in place are structured.</p>	<p><u>Concept</u> Looks at how these structures are dominated by economic approaches to change.</p>	<p><u>Concept</u> Looks at the impact of economic (and other) approaches to change on a place.</p>
	<p><u>Method of Collecting Data</u> Analysis of governance structures and approaches to development.</p>	<p><u>Method of Collecting Data</u> Analysis of development plans and reports along with relevant data and statistics.</p>	<p><u>Method of Collecting Data</u> Analysis of the social and cultural dynamics of a place.</p>
	<p><u>Example of Data Collected</u> The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is an act that requires 'public bodies to do things in pursuit of the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales in a way that accords with the sustainable development principle' (National Assembly for Wales 2015, p. 5).</p>	<p><u>Example of Data Collected</u> In Llanelli, 25% were employed in the public sector in 2015, 10% in the manufacturing sector, and 15% in the wholesale and retail sector (WSP and Parsons Brinckerhoff 2017).</p>	<p><u>Example of Data Collected</u> Llanelli is one of the most famous rugby towns in the world, its first rugby team was formed in 1872. In 2008 after 130 years, the club moved grounds from Parc y Strade in the centre of town to Parc y Scarlets which was located further away. This had an impact on the town centre as a cultural centre and meeting point.</p>

	Boundaries	Perceptions	Values
Agency	<p><u>Concept</u></p> <p>Considers how spatial and intellectual boundaries influence approaches to change.</p>	<p><u>Concept</u></p> <p>Considers how agents perceive change and whether they are influenced by dominant approaches or more localised ideas based on lived experiences.</p>	<p><u>Concept</u></p> <p>Considers the impact of economic measures of change on the way in which agents value human activity.</p>
	<p><u>Method of Collecting Data</u></p> <p>Qualitative interviews with key agents.</p>	<p><u>Method of Collecting Data</u></p> <p>Qualitative interviews with key agents.</p>	<p><u>Method of Collecting Data</u></p> <p>Qualitative interviews with key agents.</p>
	<p><u>Example of Findings</u></p> <p>Industry has driven and shaped much of the large-scale changes seen in Llanelli and continues to do so, albeit perhaps not in such a dynamic way as it once did. Therefore, it could be suggested that whilst the remaining industries continue to demonstrate a culture of community, industrial decline has and continues to do quite the opposite.</p>	<p><u>Example of Findings</u></p> <p>The way people perceive a town reflects their experiences of it – which may vary significantly from one person and community to another. This in turn has an impact on perceptions of change – how change will impact upon them and whether or not they can have an impact upon it – thereby reflecting, to a certain extent, levels of agency or access to agents.</p>	<p><u>Example of Findings</u></p> <p>From the experience of those familiar with Llanelli, their responses could be seen to suggest that a thriving town centre mirrors a thriving local economy, and that the memory of the past motivates agents to want to recreate this dynamic. Town centres matter to people beyond the rational retail environment and are seen as places that have value.</p>

Translating Agency into Working Method

Whilst the practice of conceptualising agency within place was helpful in the development of theory, translating the concept of agency into a working method was particularly helpful in the practice of identifying agents and isolating localised practices. Adapted from Beer et al.'s methods on translating place leadership as a concept into a working method (Beer et al. 2019), the methods below focused on translating agency as a concept into a working method.

- 1) Define agency as a concept
- 2) Identify sites of sufficient scale to support a pool of agents and agency structures
- 3) Identify key agents willing to discuss their actions
- 4) Compare insights across localities

3.4 Methods

A Case Study

Firstly, one should address the parameters of the wider research project. As mentioned in the introduction, whilst a significant amount of freedom to explore different ideas and avenues was afforded to all partners involved in the ACORE project, there were certain aspects that were fixed and non-negotiable – and this included the methods. Despite this, it's important that the researcher can demonstrate a clear understanding of why this approach was taken and is able to justify these actions. This research adopted a case study approach, but why was this option chosen as opposed to an experiment, survey, history, or archival analysis for example?

In order to answer this, one needs, in the first instance, to reflect on how the literature review has shaped the direction of the research and how this is reflected in the questions that are being posed. In this case, one is seeking to understand and explain the role of people in influencing the process of change in place (and vice versa) and asking how this might fit into the framework of a case study. Case studies allow the researcher to focus on a case whilst retaining a holistic perspective (Yin 2018) and can also help to illuminate a set of decisions

(Schramm 1973). The decisions with which this research is concerned relates to those taken by agents whose actions have influenced change in the context of a particular case.

Establishing this helps to clarify how the research questions relate to the case study method. Yin mentions that when research questions focus mainly on the “what”, two possibilities arise (Yin 2018). Firstly, there are types of “what” questions that are exploratory in nature and that justify taking an exploratory approach, then there are others that form more of a “how many,” “how much,” or “to what extent” line of inquiry which would favour survey or archival methods (Yin 2018). The second relates to “how” and “why” questions which are more explanatory and deal with the tracing of operational processes over time, and in this scenario the use of a case study, history, or experiment is seen as the preferred method (Yin 2018). In order to contextualise this, it would seem appropriate to outline the research questions once again:

- **To what extent are levels of human agency determined by the political, economic, and cultural context of a place?**
 - i) **Who are the agents of change responsible for recognising new opportunities and driving the agenda for change?**
 - ii) **How are they connected through extra- or intra-regional networks?**
 - iii) **How prominent is the new well-being paradigm in the development of new opportunities in old industrial towns in Wales?**

Whilst the main question is led by the “to what extent” line of enquiry, it’s important to emphasise that this research is seeking to understand what is common and what is particular about this process in a particular place (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) and in order to do this, the use of a case study method is essential. And given the strong interest in gaining a greater understanding of the dynamics of agency within varying places and contexts, this approach required more than one case study – with this in mind, it was decided that there would be two case studies.

Secondly, it’s important to acknowledge not only the strengths of case study research but also the limitations. Yin suggests that one of the greatest concerns in undertaking case study

research relates to the need for greater rigour and points to weaknesses arising when systematic procedures are not followed (Yin 2018). In light of this, researchers are encouraged to employ various procedures to address this, for example triangulation can be employed to reduce the likelihood of misinterpreting of data by clarifying meaning (Silverman 1993). It does this by identifying different ways in which a particular phenomenon is seen, however one must of course acknowledge that no observation or interpretation is perfectly repeatable (Silverman 1993).

Flyvberg highlighted that conventional views of a case study approach were that they had little value in and of themselves unless they were linked to hypotheses (Flyvberg 2011). Whilst this view has most certainly been challenged over time, it's important to reflect somewhat on when and why such an approach may be of greater value in certain circumstances. For example, it's quite impossible to find predictive theories and universals in the study of human affairs, therefore context-dependent knowledge would hold more value in that particular area of research (Flyvberg 2011). It must therefore be concluded that the case study is both a necessary and sufficient method for conducting certain research tasks in the social sciences (Flyvberg 2011).

One aspect that this case study work did not initially address adequately was the process of familiarising oneself with the towns themselves. Whilst I had visited Wrexham on a number of occasions, I was less acquainted with Llanelli and was therefore keen to spend some more time in both towns in order to gain a greater understanding of the character of those places. I felt that by doing so, I would be in a far better position to contextualise the data I collected. Although I managed to visit both case study towns on one occasion before the outbreak of Covid-19, I was unable to return for another two years. Whilst I would've preferred to have visited both towns on more than one occasion before the interviewing process, it isn't an aspect of the work which I believe has impacted too greatly on the outcomes and was something which was entirely out of my control.

The Cases

In terms of the case study selection – this too needed to be done in line with the criteria as outlined by the ACORE project guidelines. They were required to be non-metropolitan urban centres with a population size of between 20,000 to 100,000, located in old industrial regions and able to demonstrate the emergence of successful new development paths. The towns of Llanelli and Wrexham were selected for a variety of reasons. Firstly, on account of their locations. Llanelli is located in South West Wales and Wrexham in North East Wales. Therefore, in geographical and even political terms, this ensured a balance i.e. that focus was not being placed on one area of Wales alone. The development projects themselves were selected not only to reflect the key dimensions of the theoretical framework within the wider context of change in Wales, but also to represent the variety of approaches to change that are adopted across Wales. Whilst they vary significantly in scale, structure, and approach, they were selected so that I could learn as much as possible from their successes and challenges.

Interviews

42 in-depth qualitative interviews were carried out between September 2019 and September 2021 ranging from 35 minutes to 1 hour 45 in length (see Appendix B for and Anonymised Interviewee List). Those conducted during late 2019 and early 2020 focused predominately on establishing the parameters of the research and the scope of the interviews. The bulk of the interviews were conducted throughout 2020 with a few follow-up interviews conducted during the end of 2020 into early 2021. 9 of the interviews were conducted through the medium of Welsh, 28 were in English and 5 were bilingual (as outlined in Appendix B). It's difficult to assess whether conducting some of the interviews in Welsh will have had any significant impact on the data, however, it would be fair to say that it will have added a certain amount of dynamic and depth – as would be the case if any other language was used.

It was decided that adopting a semi-structured approach to the interviewing would be the most appropriate (see Appendix A for an Interview Schedule). It would accommodate the need to cover the themes outlined in the literature review whilst also creating space for

interviewees to elaborate or expand on any particular related matters. This also reflected a method of data gathering that was prominent within feminist research frameworks (Bryman 2008) and therefore highly relevant to this particular approach.

Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, a significant majority of the interviews were conducted either online via Zoom or Microsoft Teams, or by phone. It cannot be denied that much will have been lost by not having been able to meet people face-to-face in their own settings. Context-related nuances and dynamics will have been missed and the traditional mechanism for building relations and rapport with people no-doubt hampered. However, it has been particularly interesting to reflect on the way in which this newfound way of working impacted on power dynamics established between interviewer and interviewee, especially those interviewed in positions of authority. This idea relates back to the organising principle wherein emphasis is placed on valuing the human faces and voices of individuals (Jenkins et al. 2019).

For instance, I held an interview with an MS (Member of Senedd) at their office in the Senedd in late 2019. In these kinds of spaces, the dynamics between both interviewer and interviewee are clear – the space, both physically and contextually, is well-defined. I must be honest when I say that I was initially intimidated by the space itself and the authority it represented. But this experience was extremely helpful and particularly relevant to the research in that it helped me recognise the influence that power – whether represented by a person, a building or both – can have on an individual's sense of agency (in this case for both the interviewer and interviewee).

What I found, however, especially when reflecting upon interviews conducted early on in the pandemic, was that both parties were equally compromised. The boundary between work-life and home-life was blurred beyond recognition and so the sense of self was somewhat altered in these newfound conditions, and this in a way had helped generate a greater sense of balance between both parties. And in light of this, it was important on the one hand not to exploit vulnerabilities that might undermine the integrity of the process, and on the other, from a personal perspective, to lead in the role of establishing a more balanced power dynamic.

In accordance with the research framework, initial key agents were identified within each realm. Whilst some may have been less directly involved in the development projects, their broad overview of the case study towns and projects was helpful in providing context. They were also well-placed to direct the researcher towards other people who were more closely involved. Given the relational nature of agency as a concept, the snowballing method was considered the most appropriate and effective way of identifying other key agents of change. The organic nature of this method was instrumental in the recruitment process and in guiding the mapping of networks. Almost all of those interviewed were agents identified by other agents and given their individual roles in driving and shaping change in their prospective towns, it was important to explore their perspective on the topics that were being proposed (McIntosh and Morse 2015).

Given the need to be flexible and adaptive, it was apparent that the most appropriate way to capture this kind of data would be to conduct semi-structured interviews. These one-to-one interviews were loosely structured with clear themes and points of reference. Much like many forms of research, a case study's conceptual structure is most often organised around a certain number of questions (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) which was the case with this research. The tone and direction of the discussions, however, were guided by the interviewees. In almost every interview, the narrative would often be presented through forms of storytelling, especially when the interviewees were reflecting on memories of place. It was, in a way, an opportunity to allow the case to tell its own story (Carter 1993).

Given the focus on human agency, this nostalgic aspect added a much-needed human element to the data and, in my opinion remains an extremely important and valid way of documenting the history of a place. In addition to selecting interviewees via the snowballing method, and as mentioned previously, the conceptualisation of place also had a significant impact on the interviews in an operational sense. An almost equal number of interviewees were selected to represent each of the three realms of place – the political, economic, and cultural - and this was true of both case studies. This was done in order to try to establish and present a balanced picture.

Desk-based Research

As well as conducting interviews, I relied on a wide range of resources including local and national development plans, strategies, reports, journals, newspaper articles and podcasts. This was an important aspect of the research as it provided an insight into the stories of the places in question which then helped to contextualise the information and data that the interviewees provided.

Analysis

An inevitable outcome of conducting so many interviews is the fact that a significant amount of data is generated. Whilst transcribing can, at times, prove to be an extremely arduous and time-consuming task, during such times of Covid-inflicted isolation, it was one of the most enjoyable parts of the research. The process was a way of re-connecting with the interviewees and their stories as well as the research itself. After all, so much emphasis has been placed on understanding how *people* direct and navigate the process of change in place, and so to overlook or dismiss the limited opportunities (given the restrictions posed by the pandemic) would have been a mistake. Whilst the use of software may have been an option to speed up the process (although it wasn't available for the significant number of interviews conducted in Welsh) its use to any significant degree would not have been appropriate for this approach.

After the task of transcribing had been completed, the stories that had been collected were then organised thematically to reflect the conceptualisation of agency that was established in the literature review chapter. For this I used the NVivo software which proved to be a relatively quick and effective way of organising the data. Once this was completed, focus was then placed once again on reconnecting with the data – an important aspect given the emphasis placed on recognising, employing and valuing emotion in research. Parts of the analysis could have been done using the NVivo software but given the qualitative nature of the research I felt that the use of such a method would result in unnecessary distance between researcher and data.

3.5 Ethics

Prior to conducting any fieldwork, and in accordance with ethical approaches to research, there were official forms issued by the university which needed to be submitted. These included the School of Geography and Planning's Risk Assessment form and the Ethical Approval form (see Appendix C) which were sent to and approved by the ethics committee. When reaching out to potential interviewees, I outlined via email how the data which they provided would be used and whether or not they would be happy to consent to this method. In every instance, approval was given. I also outlined this again ahead of every interview to ensure that all contributors remained aware of how their valuable contributions would be used.

Throughout this thesis, all participants were anonymised although their roles or positions within organisations were stated or outlined. This was an essential part of the research due to the implicit focus on agents and their networks. The audio content from interviews conducted in person was recorded on a portable voice recorder and on my phone as a back-up. The audio files from the interviews conducted via Zoom or Teams were recorded on those particular programmes, and phone interviews were conducted via the device's speaker so that the audio files could be recorded on the portable voice recorder. These audio files were then transferred to a Cardiff University-approved encrypted physical external hard drive and stored in accordance with Cardiff University's guidelines on data storage (2022) and then deleted from both the portable voice recorder and phone.

4 THE STORY OF LLANELLI AND THE CASE OF PENTRE AWEL

4.1 Introduction

Before studying the dynamics of agency in a particular place, it is helpful to review the characteristics of that place so as to provide some context for the nature and timing of actions taken by agents. Guided by the structure of the literature review, the first section of this chapter will look at the political, economic, and cultural context of Llanelli. This will be followed by an overview of the case study in question - the Pentre Awel Wellness and Life Sciences Village located in Llanelli - which will provide a framework within which to examine the role of agents and establish their influence on changes seen within the town.

4.2 A Place to Live – The Political Story of Llanelli

The first section of the chapter provides a brief overview of the political context of Llanelli – which is an old industrial coastal town located at the head of the Loughor estuary in the South-eastern corner of Carmarthenshire County, Southwest Wales (*see Image 1 below*). The town, which has a population of approximately 48,000 people, is located at the western end of M4 transport corridor and is connected to South East Wales and London via heavy rail (Carmarthenshire County Council 2018b, p. 22).

In order to contextualise and understand the governance structures of Llanelli, it's important to look at all the levels involved in shaping it politically. There is a total of 40 elected Members of Parliament (MPs) from Wales who represent their constituencies in the UK parliament in Westminster. Llanelli town is represented within the constituency of Llanelli and its current sitting MP is Nia Griffith (Labour Party). Since the first Assembly elections in 1999, following a referendum on Welsh Devolution in 1997, Wales has had its own devolved government. Devolved powers include agriculture, environment, education, health, housing, transport, energy and economic development. It has primary law-making powers over devolved areas and has some tax raising powers in areas that include Land Transaction and Landfill Disposal. The Central Government in Westminster retains powers over defence, foreign policy, immigration, and taxation.

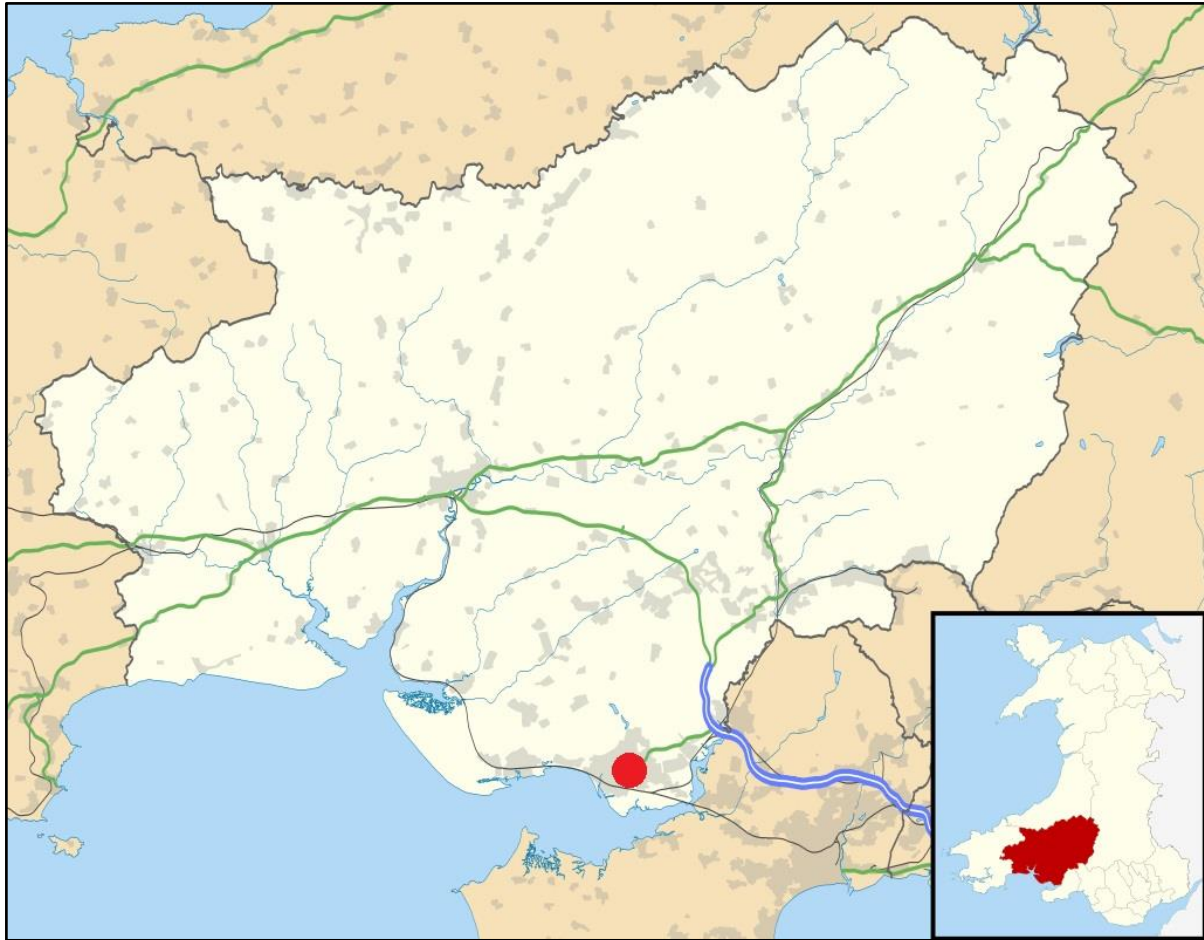


Image 1: Map of Carmarthenshire and Llanelli (Source: Wikipedia)

The devolved Welsh Government is led by a Labour government and has 60 elected Members of Senedd (MS). 20 MSs represent the 5 electoral regions and Llanelli Town is represented within the region of Mid and West Wales. 40 MSs represent geographic constituencies, which have the same electoral boundaries as the UK Parliament, and Llanelli town is represented within the constituency of Llanelli. The current sitting MS is Lee Waters (Labour Party). Wales has 22 Unitary Authorities and Llanelli town is represented within the Local Authority of Carmarthenshire County Council which is led by Plaid Cymru. Carmarthenshire County Council has 58 Wards and Llanelli Town is spread across 14 wards and at a community level, these wards are represented by two community councils: Llanelli Town Council and Llanelli Rural Council.

In terms of voting intentions, the Llanelli constituency has voted for a Labour candidate to represent them in the UK parliament since 1922 (Wikipedia 2021a) whilst candidates from

both the Labour Party and Plaid Cymru have represented the constituency of Llanelli in the Welsh Parliament (Wikipedia 2022). With regard to the 2016 referendum on EU membership, the constituency of Llanelli voted to leave with 56.7% of the vote (Mosalski 2019). The MS for Llanelli noted that ‘several people (had) said to (them) during the referendum campaign that (they remembered) what it was like before (they joined the EU), and (that) the town centre was thriving, and that’s why (they were) voting to leave.’ This notion of change as decline is a recurring and dominant theme throughout this case study and in some ways partly explains why the notion of change as progress has been such a difficult concept to design and deliver in Llanelli.

In terms of specific policies related to this particular case study, the main one in question is the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFGA). It is described as an act that requires ‘public bodies to do things in pursuit of the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales in a way that accords with the sustainable development principle’ (National Assembly for Wales 2015, p. 5)... In this Act, “sustainable development” means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action aimed at achieving the well-being goals’ (National Assembly for Wales 2015, p. 7). There are seven well-being goals in total and they include the aim to achieve a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language and a globally responsible Wales (National Assembly for Wales 2015, p. 8).

Netherwood et al explained that as a result of the WFGA, Wales now had ‘a clear meaning of well-being at a national level’ (Netherwood et al. 2017, p. 11). They said that the Public Service Boards (PSBs) that were established had ‘a legal duty to utilise the sustainable development principle and must demonstrate in their work that the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (was) not compromised by current and planned actions’ (Netherwood et al. 2017, p. 36). Their role was to ‘improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of (the local) area by contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals (National Assembly for Wales 2015, p. 26). Carmarthenshire Council’s Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager explained that their PSB had four statutory partners including the council, the local Health Board, Natural Resources Wales, and the Fire Service, as well as a number of other

partners including the Police, the Commissioner, Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services (CAVS), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the University of Wales Trinity St Davids, and Coleg Sir Gâr.

4.3 A Place to Work – The Economic Story of Llanelli

This second section provides a brief overview of the economic context of Llanelli. By the mid-eighteenth century, Wales had the second highest level of immigration after the USA (Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants 2011, p. 7) with many moving to Llanelli to work in the booming tinsplate, steel, and coal mining industries. Areas within and around Llanelli were renowned for their tinsplate production and by the 1880s there were seven tinsplate works in the town (Gower 2009, p. 24), which contributed considerably to world-wide production at that time, 90% of which was produced in Wales (Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants 2011, pp. 5-6).

Despite being a growing and thriving town in the 1920s and 30s, Llanelli began declining in the post-war era as heavy industries began contracting. By the 1990s, Llanelli's poor economic and environmental legacy – largely as a result of the town's industrial past - stimulated a response from the public sector to invest heavily in new infrastructure (Hall 2002, p. 91). In 1999, Llanelli was awarded Objective 1 status by the EU as part of the West Wales and the Valleys area thereby further emphasising its weak economic status (The Welsh Affairs Committee 2000). Employment levels in Llanelli remain relatively low and continue to fall as several manufacturing factories supplying automotive parts in the area close citing 'market instability' as a prime reason which some suggest has been compounded by Brexit uncertainty (Unite the Union 2019).



Image 2: Welsh Tin Plate & Metal Stamping Co. Ltd. in Llanelli 1951 (Source: Aerofilms Collection)

Today areas within Llanelli are some of the most deprived areas in Wales (Carmarthenshire County Council 2018a, p. 7) and the UK as a whole. In their 2019 economic strategy for the Llanelli constituency, the MS for the constituency noted that over the past thirty years around 30,000 manufacturing jobs had been lost in the Swansea Bay area, which included Llanelli (Waters 2019, p. 3). However, they emphasised that ‘despite (this) decline in the UK’s manufacturing sector, (Llanelli retained) a strong residual base of companies that (were) good employers (and who were) loyal to the area (Waters 2019, p. 3).



Image 3: Stepney Street in Llanelli 1936 (Source: Llanelli Star)

It is appropriate here to provide a little more insight into the economic context of Llanelli and the wider region. Figure 4 below shows GVA per head trends for Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Wales and the UK in 2017 and shows that GVA per head in Carmarthenshire lagged behind that in other areas and that it was increasingly lower than the UK average (WSP and Parsons Brinckerhoff 2017, p. 5). In 2021, employment levels in Carmarthenshire totalled 71.7% of the population compared with 76.4% in Wales and 78.4% in Great Britain, whereas workless households in Carmarthenshire in 2020 stood at 19.5% of the population compared with 16.5% in Wales and 13.6% in Great Britain (NOMIS 2021).

In terms of distribution across different sectors in Carmarthenshire, over 25% of the total were employed in the public sector in 2015, 10% of the total were in the manufacturing sector, and 15% of the total were employed in the wholesale and retail sector (WSP and Parsons Brinckerhoff 2017, p. 6). Self-employment also formed a high proportion of the total in Carmarthenshire with over 90% of private sector businesses in the county having nine or fewer employees with 28% of all businesses being in the 'agriculture, forestry and fishing' category (WSP and Parsons Brinckerhoff 2017, p. 6).

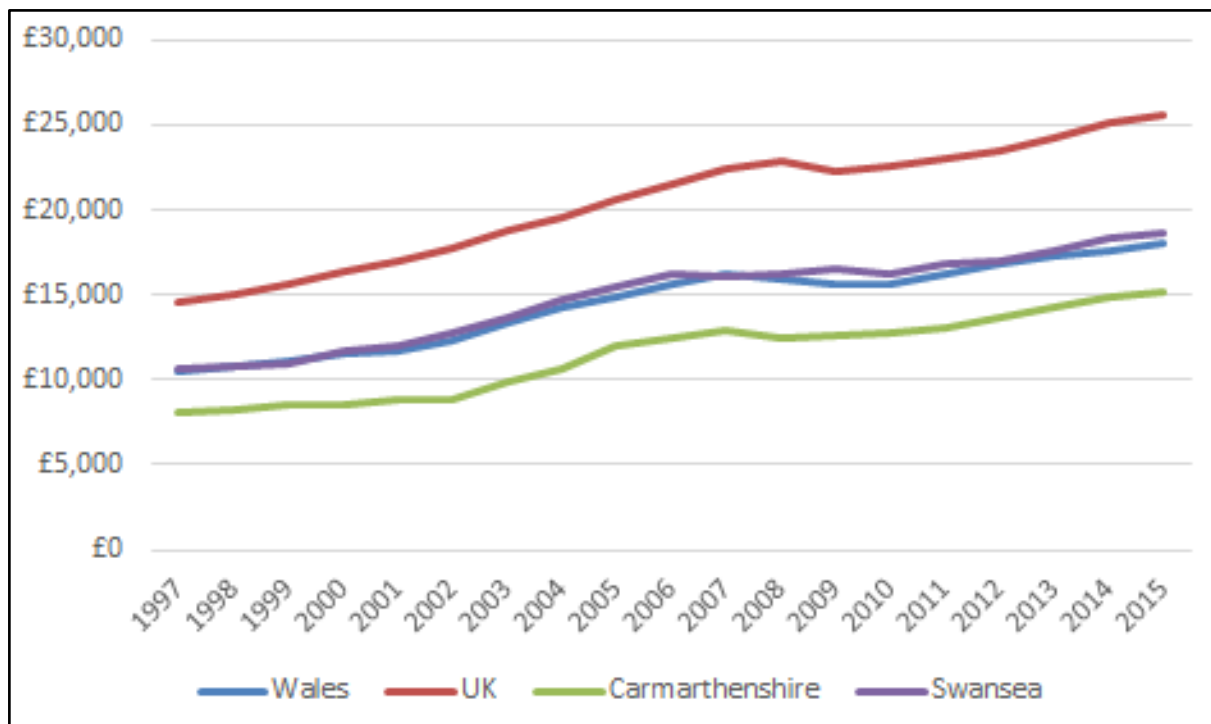


Figure 4: GVA Per Head - Productivity (Source: WSP and Parsons Brinckerhoff 2017, p. 5)

As some of the analysis will confirm in the following chapter, there was a general view amongst people that town centres represented far more than (what once were) economic and retail centres. The MS for Llanelli said that they would ‘speak to people about the economy and all (they could) think about (were) shops... they could not conceive of the economy beyond retail and the town centre.’ The MS for Llanelli felt that this showed ‘that town centres (mattered) to people beyond the rational retail environment (and that they were) places that (had) value as meeting places (and) civic spaces.’

However, as the Deputy Mayor of Llanelli pointed out, and certainly in economic terms, one of ‘the weaknesses of Llanelli (today was) the town centre.’ They said that they could ‘go to town on a Saturday and (that they) might (only) see around 20 people’, a far cry from the dynamic economic centre that it had once been. As with many high streets across Wales and the UK, Llanelli town centre has struggled to compete with more modern shopping trends and as a result, at least 20% of shops in the town centre remain vacant (Carmarthenshire County Council 2018a, p. 10). A Leading Business Representative from Llanelli cited Trostre – an out-of-town shopping centre – as one of the prime reasons for the town centre’s decline.

They said that ‘when (they were) first (in Llanelli), there (were) all sorts of high street stores’ but since then, they had ‘all gone to Trostre.’



Image 4: Stepney Street in Llanelli 2019 (Source: Ani Saunders)

4.4 A Place to Gather – The Cultural Story of Llanelli

This section provides a brief overview of the cultural context of Llanelli, a town once described by Gower as the ‘power house of the golden west’ (Gower 2009, p. 7). The town and the church were given their name by Saint Elli, and so Llan Elli translates as the parish church of Elli (Gower 2009, p. 8). He noted that the church stood opposite Llanelly House, a much-loved eighteenth-century Georgian town house built in 1714 by the MP Thomas Stepney (once a decaying old building and now a restored restaurant) (Gower 2009, p. 8). Llanelly House

(pictured below) is located at the head of the street that was named after him (shown in images 3 and 4).



Image 5: Llanelly House in Llanelli 2013 (Source: John Davies)

As well as being steeped in architectural history, Llanelli is also one of the most famous rugby towns in the world. Llanelli's first rugby team was formed in 1872 and has since produced legendary figures in the game including Phil Bennett, Gareth Jenkins, and Ray Gravell. The local team - Y Scarlets - is a highly successful rugby union team with a 15k capacity stadium located on the outskirts of Llanelli; a place that also regularly hosts large-scale concerts and events. As the Deputy Mayor of Llanelli pointed out, 'rugby was really big in Llanelli, (back) in the 70s there would be (thousands of) people going (to watch the games).' They recalled that 'when Llanelli used to play touring teams, (for example) South Africa (or) New Zealand, (they would) play on a Tuesday and all schools would close in the afternoon' to watch the games.

However, they felt that although it had been 'really big and successful (in the past, it had since) become an expensive game to follow' and pointed out that they were 'now (only) getting 7500/8000 people' through the doors to watch the games. They said that in 2008, the

club had 'moved grounds from Parc y Strade (after 130 years) to Parc y Scarlets' and added that one 'could (easily) walk to Parc y Strade (whereas one couldn't) really walk to Parc y Scarlets' as it was located further away from the town centre. There was a sense that the new stadium had lost its 'family-orientated' feel and this had certainly had an impact on the town centre as a cultural centre and meeting point.



Image 6: Llanelli beat the All Blacks at Parc y Strade 1972 (Source: Alan T Richards)

The fate of the old rugby ground and the impact that moving it has had on the town – not only from an economic perspective but also from a wider cultural perspective – added to the sense of decline in the town. The MS for Llanelli said that whilst 'the Scarlets (hold) pride of place, there is a sense that nobody delivers for (the people of the town, that) they're forgotten about.' They added that the 'engineering, manufacturing and primary industries (had) gone (without being) replaced' and that there was 'a sense in this area of 40 years of loss.' And whilst this does not reflect the wider culture of Llanelli as a whole, it does represent the general trajectory of change in the town which will have had a significant impact on the culture of change there.

Whilst the town continues to feel the impact of economic decline, there remains a relatively strong sense of community. The Former Employee at an Automotive Manufacturing Company felt that ‘the strength of Llanelli (was its) people’, as did the Economic Development Manager who said that there was ‘a can-do friendly attitude... (something) which (was) inbuilt into the character of the place. They felt that there was a perception that ‘Llanelli was still an industrial town (that was located) more inland than it really (was whereas it was in fact) situated on one of the best coastlines in Wales.’



Image 7: Wetland Centre in Llanelli 2021 (Source: Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust)

The Former Employee recognised that they were ‘very lucky because (they were) going to retire into a beautiful area. The downside (being) that all the good jobs in the factories (were now) gone’ so whilst they had ‘lovely cycle paths and golf courses’, they felt there was currently little for ‘young people coming through.’ However, this narrative of nature and well-being paving the way for change in the area is particularly related to the case study in question. It is an area, both in terms of location and vision where, as Gower describes, ‘Llanelli looks to the future’ (Gower 2009, p. 8).

4.5 The Case Study - Pentre Awel in Llanelli

Pentre Awel is a multi-million, multi-organisational collaborative project between Carmarthenshire County Council, Hywel Dda University Health Board, Swansea University, Cardiff University, University of Wales Trinity St David and Coleg Sir Gâr that aims to co-locate health, research, business, education, skills and training (Davies et al. 2020). It is the first development of its scope and size in Wales, bringing together life science innovation, community healthcare and modern leisure facilities at the 83-acre site on the Llanelli coastline (see image 8 below) (Swansea Bay City Deal 2021).



Image 8: Pentre Awel Design, Bwlchgywynt in Llanelli (Source: Carmarthenshire Council)

The project seeks to improve the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of Llanelli and the wider region and outlines four Community Benefit targets which the successful contractor would be required to achieve (Carmarthenshire County Council 2022, p. 1). The first looks at targeted recruitment and training opportunities that would address the WFGA goals of achieving A Prosperous Wales, A More Equal Wales and A Resilient Wales (Carmarthenshire County Council 2022). The second looks at supply-chain opportunities that would help to deliver the WFGA goals of achieving A Prosperous Wales, A Resilient Wales (Carmarthenshire County Council 2022). The third Community Benefit looks at community

Initiatives which would help to deliver the WFGA Goals of A More Equal Wales, A Wales of Cohesive Communities, A Healthier Wales & A Resilient Wales and the final one looks at education initiatives thereby addressing the WFGA Goals of achieving A Prosperous Wales, A More Equal Wales and A Resilient Wales (Carmarthenshire County Council 2022).

The Pentre Awel Wellness and Life Sciences Village in Llanelli forms part of the Swansea Bay City Deal which is a £1.3 billion investment in 9 major projects in the region over 15 years. The City Deal in Wales is a trilateral agreement between the partnering local authorities, the Welsh Government and the UK Government. This differs to their equivalent in England which are bilateral agreements between local authorities and the UK Government. The partnering local authorities in question are Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire (in which Llanelli is located), Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. The first phase of the project will benefit from around £70million of public sector investment and is one of the highest valued tender exercises that the council has undertaken (Swansea Bay City Deal 2021).

This cross-sector approach to addressing well-being objectives occupies an interesting and exciting space. Whilst sitting within a more traditional regeneration framework (the Swansea Bay City Deal) that focuses predominately on boosting the economy and creating new jobs with the aim of improving the well-being of people and the economy, Pentre Awel sees well-being not only as the goal, but also as the mechanism for achieving it – a means and an end if you like; not just a by-product or outcome but the driver of change. This is quite a significant shift which falls neatly in line with growing discussions and ideas about a well-being economy centred around the notion of putting people at the centre of a new economic purpose (Wellbeing Economy Alliance 2020).

This new approach not only reflects global ideals but is also a product of a new culture that's beginning to emerge here in Wales, driven – not exclusively – but to a large extent by the WFGA (as discussed earlier in the chapter). This act not only represents the burgeoning tide of a cultural shift but also a new framework within which to operate. It's an approach to change that significantly challenges the status-quo and sets a new precedent for future developments – such as Pentre Awel.

The Project Leader of Pentre Awel explained that the site in question was located on ‘old industrial land... (with) a huge legacy of social deprivation in the close proximity... (as well as) traditional legacy illnesses (including) a very high level of chronic conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.’ They said that it ‘was first reclaimed 25-30 years ago without a specific focus (but that) over a period of time Carmarthenshire County Council (began favouring ideas) around life science research.’



Image 9: Bwlchgywynt in Llanelli 1948 (Source: Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photography)

Known locally as Bwlchgywynt, the site at one time housed The Llanelli Copperworks and The South Wales Iron and Tin Plate Works (ARUP 2016) (*see image 2*). It is located at the eastern end of the New Dafen River watercourse and was formally the site of the Great Western Dock (ARUP 2016) (*see image 9 above*). By the early 1970s the industrial landscape of the area had changed dramatically as most of the industry that had once occupied the area had disappeared or relocated (ARUP 2016) which resulted in over 1800 acres of land on the coast becoming derelict (Hall 2002).

In 1994, a major regeneration of the area was undertaken which included the re-profiling of the New Dafen River (*see image 10 below*) – now a central feature of the Pentre Awel development (ARUP 2016). Two other large-scale investment programmes in the area were completed around the same period i.e. - the Millennium Coastal path and The Llanelli Wetlands Centre (*see image 7*). These developments paved the way for a new vision to emerge in the area, one that would emphasise the importance of improving the well-being of people in the area by focusing on more than the economy.



Image 10: Bwlchgywynt in Llanelli 2019 (Source: Google Earth)

The Project Officer for Carmarthenshire Council spoke of an ‘approach (that was) specifically developed for this project’ which was based around ‘the five stages of life.’ These stages were guided by ‘the health impact assessment (that was conducted and used as their) evidence base. This new approach was an attempt to ‘try and break away from convention of putting people into life courses by age... (and tried to emphasise that whilst) age (was) a factor, (they) didn’t want it to be the only factor.’ For example, ‘maintaining a healthy lifestyle could be early years all the way up to 70s, 80s 90s and... similarly, (they recognised that one didn’t) have to be old to be living with an illness.’ It was therefore ‘about keeping on top of (one’s) health (rather than being focused on) recovering and falling into old habits... (therefore)

rather than prescribing additional medication, the direction of travel (was more geared towards promoting) exercise.'

As previously mentioned by the Project Officer 'one of the main findings of (the) Health Impact Assessment (was that in order) to improve health and well-being... the wider determinants of health (needed to be addressed. This involved more than just) access to healthcare, (it also included) education and training, access to jobs, community cohesion and engagement.' They felt that this 'broader spectrum of activity (was) often overlooked when it (came) to deprivation. The Project Leader of Pentre Awel also recognised that 'the biggest impact (would) come from working with local colleges and schools' and the Project officer added that there were 'many people that (would) benefit from the different kinds of jobs that (were) going to be (created).

These jobs would be predominately based 'around life sciences because' as the Project Leader explained, 'on site, (they would) have a large, assisted living facility (providing work and research opportunities that would also act as a) catalyst for businesses.' In addition, an important aspect of job creation is linked to procurement, and in relation to this, the Strategic Programme Manager for Carmarthenshire Council emphasised that they wanted 'to insist that any sub-contracting (had) to be done locally as well as the supply of material.' The Project Officer said that 'community benefit (was) a key area of work for (them which would include) recruitment, training, apprentices and skills development opportunities offered to local people.' The Skills and Talent Initiative was designed as part of the Swansea Bay City Deal to identify the specific skills required to support development in the region and would involve the public and private sector training providers working together to ensure that local people were able to benefit from local employment opportunities (WSP and Parsons Brinckerhoff 2017).

The Strategic Programme Manager for Carmarthenshire Council recognised that if they were to 'look at health and well-being of people as the central focus, it was important that the buildings also reflected this.' Accordingly, the Project Officer for Carmarthenshire Council said that 'a lot of thought (had) gone into (the) design (of) the buildings' and noted that 'although Carmarthenshire County Council (was) the project lead, it (had) been codesigned by the health board, leisure facilities (and the) educational partners.' The Strategic Programme

Manager added that ‘a lot of research (had been done) about the history of Llanelli (as well as) the site (in focus) to ensure that the first building (was) extremely appropriate, (emphasising that) there (needed) to be a reason for every aspect’ of the design.

With regards to how the project came about, the Carmarthenshire Council’s Project officer as well as the Programme Director for Swansea Bay City Deal felt that the timing of the project had been ‘a perfect storm.’ The Project officer said that they ‘needed a new leisure centre (and) a new care home (noting that there was an) unmet demand for assisted living accommodation due to an aging population.’ They also recognised that ‘not many projects (of this scale came) around (and) described (it) as a once in a generation project.’ It was something, especially given the journey that this project had been on (something that will be explained next), that kept them ‘motivated and keen to see (it) through to completion.’

Pentre Awel is a tremendously ambitious project and it could be suggested that its evolving depth may have well been triggered in part by the significant challenges it faced as a result of a fairly high-profile controversy back in 2019 following a complaint by Swansea University (at that stage a key partner) regarding alleged bribery during the tendering process (Barry 2019). This resulted in the severing of links with many partners and key players (including Swansea University and all the international business partners) meaning that in essence, those managing the project – Carmarthenshire Council – had to rebuild the project from the bottom up.

The Project Leader of Pentre Awel said that ‘as a result (of what happened, they) started to talk more widely to the community and recognised’ the scale and impact of unemployment in the area. ‘Prior to this, (they said that their) educational element (had been) dictated by Swansea University alone (but that following the controversy) there was a point where (they) thought there would be no higher education... so (they) spent a lot of time going around the colleges and (talking to) the local population (which) fundamentally changed the project.’ The outcome of these changes was that they ‘developed a pipeline of education and skills bringing together colleges, FE and HEI.’

The Programme Director felt that since the controversy which resulted in the project being ‘re-branded and re-focused, there (had been) better engagement than before and (far) more

transparency.’ They said that ‘all of those things that (had) happened in the past was down to individuals, (and was) not necessarily (reflective of) the vision (which was) why (they believed that) the Local Authority (had) taken more of a leading role than it had (done) previously.’ By having the Local Authority take the lead, they were able to ‘make sure that (Pentre Awel was) there for the community... (and) not (just) a select few people.’ Although the project has ‘had its ups and downs’ the Project Officer also felt that ‘what has kept it going (was) knowing the tangible impact it would have on the local community.’

Whilst it could be said that by losing some other key partners - such as Pfizer (at that stage not such a household name) - some of its shine has been taken away, it could also be suggested that what’s actually been taken away is the glare. By no longer being blinded and bedazzled by the offer and investment of multinational corporations, the shape of the offer can be managed, moulded, and adapted more closely and in a way that suits the needs and capacity of the place.

5 EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF AGENCY IN THE CASE OF PENTRE AWEL

5.1 Boundaries – The First Dimension of Agency

Introduction

This analysis chapter is divided into three parts which constitute the three dimensions of agency, as outlined in the methodology chapter. Their aim is to explain, in practice, how agency operates and how it is influenced by place. The first section of this chapter looks at the first dimension of agency which is boundaries. From a theoretical perspective, the literature review framed the concept of boundaries as spatial representations of our intellectual understanding of place at any given time i.e. that spatial boundaries (be they political or physical) reflect dominant views and ideas of how places and people should be organised.

The following section studies this theory in practice and considers how an agent's boundaries are reflected in their capacity and access to power and resources, which in turn impacts on the process of change in a place. This case study focuses on this process in the town of Llanelli, Wales UK. Within this dimension, the data presented three distinct strands. The first looks at the influence that the culture of a place has on people's view of and approach to change, the second considers how the context of a place influences people's capacity to act and the third looks at how culture and capacity frame opportunities for change.

The Culture of Change – How culture influences the way people view and approach change

The first strand of this section looks at the way in which the culture of a place influences the way people view and approach change. There are a number of aspects of culture that could be considered within this study but, guided by the data collected, focus is placed on how the mass decline of heavy industry has impacted on and is reflected in the culture of change in the town. This in turn helps to frame the cultural context around the Pentre Awel development and partially explains the thinking behind and reaction towards the project.

Upon speaking to Carmarthenshire Council's Economic Development Manager, it was felt that 'the main strength of (the town was) the people.' They said that there was a 'can-do, friendly

attitude which (they thought reflected the town's) strong union background...', something which was 'inbuilt into the character of the place.' The Former Employee at an Automotive Manufacturing Company also saw the people of Llanelli as its greatest strength noting that 'they were good, dedicated people (with) a lot of loyalty (which they felt was essential) - especially in industry.' Carmarthenshire Council's Project Officer said that 'Llanelli (had) always been a tight-knit community, (which they also felt was intrinsically linked to) the industries of yesteryear.' According to the Former Employee, there was 'an awful lot of talent... (and) a lot of good and clever people' in the town which – in their opinion - made Wales 'punch far above (its) weight as a nation.'

Its identity has therefore been shaped, to a great extent, by the dynamics of industry, be it in a political, economic, or cultural capacity. The Head of Design Europe & North America of a local Automotive Manufacturing Company described Llanelli as 'an engineering town' and discussed the company's history and the important role it had played in the War effort. They said that the company now known as 'Calsonic started in 1943, during the (Second World) War, (and said that) the reason (that) it was (located) so far west was so (that) the Lufthansa couldn't drop their bombs (on the plant as) they were making parts for spitfires, amongst other things.' Given the history and influence of industry over the town, it would be fair to say that it has driven and shaped much of the large-scale changes seen there – and continues to do so, albeit perhaps not in such a dynamic way as it once did. Therefore, it could be suggested that whilst the remaining industries continue to demonstrate a culture of community, industrial decline has and continues to do quite the opposite.

It's also interesting to note the strategic location of this factory in Llanelli - away from the larger urban areas – something which would have been seen as a positive and a priority during war time. Yet within the context of economic growth, this location would perhaps not be considered quite as fitting. However, the Head of Design of a local Automotive Manufacturing Company seemed to argue quite the opposite, saying that it was 'one of the things (that) has helped (them)' explaining that perhaps 'somebody living in Cardiff or Bristol (wouldn't) want to move down to West Wales (as) the salary (wouldn't) be as high... (meaning that it would give local) people opportunity.'

Based on this example, it could be suggested that a large number of the changes seen in Llanelli post-industry have perhaps been managed rather than dictated by the local population – meaning that the negative impacts of industrial decline have been mitigated to a certain extent. For example, the Head of Design suggested that ‘if (they) had somebody who didn’t understand the culture, who (was from) outside the area (running the plant), then maybe (it) wouldn’t (still) be there.’ This suggests that having a good understanding of the town’s culture and its people was necessary in order to navigate and manage change within that specific industry.

For example, the Head of Design stated that they now used ‘local suppliers for (their) mouldings.’ They said that historically, they had ‘always bought (their) tools in the UK then (changed) to buying tools from China as it (was) cheaper.’ However, they soon recognised that they had ‘problems with... the quality (which increased) the total cost.’ And so whilst they continue to have some ‘suppliers from different parts of the world, (they’ve found that) if there (was) a competitive local supplier then (they would) always go for them first’ as they recognised that ‘it supports the local region’ as well as being better value for money overall.

Yet perhaps when change in a place has been managed rather than dictated over a number of years, an assertion of power or authority can manifest itself in different ways. The Economic Development Manager suggested that ‘there (was) a lack of self-confidence in the town’ and, according to the Head of Design ‘a town sort of mentality’ that they felt was demonstrated in ‘flexibility issues.’ The Former Employee added that ‘very often, things (didn’t) happen without a bit of pushing and shoving, but (said that they did) always happen.’ This might suggest that change is something that the people of Llanelli feel ought to be negotiated rather than accepted – again, perhaps something echoing the town’s strong union background.

However, it would be incorrect to suggest that industry in general in Llanelli and the wider region was stagnant and lacked vision. In fact, the Head of Design said that ‘quite a bit of product development (still happened) in Llanelli (as they have) a wind tunnel which means (that they) can test prototype cars or pre-production cars.’ They said that they ‘design products (and) cooling systems for Land Rover, Audi, Volkswagen, Peugeot, Renault’ and were (at the time of the interview) ‘developing a battery cooler for (the) next generation (of) Land

Rovers (which would make it a product that was) designed and manufactured in Llanelli.’ Therefore, whilst the Head of Design accepted that the innovation process may have ‘diminished quite a bit over the last few years.... (as companies looked to) centralise their R&D, (they had still) managed to keep certain people in place... (because they recognised) where (the) added value (was).’

Like many other old industrial towns and cities, there is a culture of change in Llanelli that has become accustomed to decline and managing the outcomes of this process. Whilst this may have had a significant impact on the way in which change is viewed, there still appears to be pockets of what has been described as ‘flexibility issues’, or perhaps in other words – resistance, i.e. resistance to the negative impacts of decline such as job losses. In this case in particular, the idea of adapting to change and of resistance to it has been balanced by the fact that there are local people managing the manufacturing plant i.e. individuals who have influence higher up within the company who are therefore better equipped to read and steer situations. The Head of Design said that ‘a lot of (their) management (was) local’ and the Former Employee agreed that ‘having the people running the organisation on (the) site (was) a big plus, (as) it (has helped) to keep the place open.’

The case of Pentre Awel is therefore interesting as it is not only seeking to manage the outcomes of decline but also actively aiming to change the town’s fortunes for the better. One might argue that proposing a development project in a place that has suffered decline is not particularly progressive, however there are several aspects to it that set it apart from others. The first is that this specific kind of change has been proposed by agents within Llanelli, thereby potentially challenging earlier claims that agents from Llanelli predominately seek to manage change rather than direct it. The second aspect considers why this development was proposed in Llanelli in particular and not elsewhere especially considering that the challenges it faces are not isolated to this town alone.

The Programme Director of the Swansea Bay City Deal didn’t feel that there was ‘something specifically about Llanelli’ that drove this initiative. They said that they thought Llanelli simply ‘needed it and (felt that) they (had) to have initiatives like this to create opportunities for people.’ It would be difficult to wholeheartedly agree with this view because it could be argued that all places require certain levels of input and investment in order to maintain or

improve well-being. Yet whilst they might need them it won't necessarily mean that they will acquire them or that the approach taken will be appropriate or effective. However, there is perhaps room to argue that the timing of the project was perhaps more integral to its development than its location, in that the agents involved recognised the changes required during the same period and sought to address them together rather than in isolation thereby emphasising the importance of collaboration to this project.

For example, the Project Leader of Pentre Awel said that 'although the region was looking at life sciences as a growth sector, (they were aware that) the area was deprived (and) decided to bring the life science and health industries together.' They had been tasked with taking 'these ideas forward (by) using the site (of Pentre Awel) in an optimal way to bring jobs to the area (and improve) health' and added that they 'also realised at this time that Llanelli needed a new leisure centre.' They said that there was 'money in the County Council Capital Programme (to) bring that to the site and (so they then began) talking about how health and leisure could (also) come together to improve the health of the population.'

Therefore, this timely coming together of relevant factors and actors meant that the project developed from a more traditional growth-driven development into a more integrated and specified one designed by local people with the local area in mind. The other more recent health-related matter to have a significant impact on the project was the Covid pandemic, which, according to the Project Leader, had 'brought into daily conversations things that people wouldn't normally have a care about (and had made) the language (of health and well-being) more familiar. (The) situation (had) allowed (them) to get a handle on (the) local population – having contacted everyone on (their) shielding list and hearing about their needs meant that (they had) a good idea about what (their) patch (was) like in detail.'

The third aspect is the approach to the development. One of the issues that the project was seeking to address was related to the poor health and well-being of the local population. The Project Officer for Carmarthenshire Council pointed out that they had conducted a 'Health Impact Assessment (and had used it as their) evidence base' for the project. They said that 'one of (its) main findings was that (in order) to improve health and well-being... the wider determinants of health' needed to be addressed. They felt that it wasn't just about 'access to healthcare, (but other) things like education, training, access to jobs, community cohesion

and engagement... (the) broader spectrum of activity which (was) often overlooked when it comes to deprivation.’ The findings of this report, which was published in 2018, brought to the fore these issues – such as ill-health and unemployment - and presented them as being intrinsically interlinked, meaning that in order to create a lasting impact, they would all need to be addressed.

The Capacity to Act - How the context of a place influences people’s capacity to act

This second strand looks at how the context of a place influences people’s capacity to act in order to generate change. Guided by the data collected during the interviewing process, it focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of Llanelli’s skills base and infrastructure which frame the wider context around Pentre Awel. This will then help to partially explain why and how the project was developed as well as providing insights into certain place-based factors that have helped to facilitate as well as hinder the process of change in the town.

The Head of Design Europe & North America of a local Automotive Manufacturing Company discussed the importance of their role in keeping the site open and explained that there were three individuals from the plant’s senior management team who were or had been on the board of directors and that all three were from Llanelli. They said that this did ‘have an influence (as they felt it was possible to) manage upwards and as long as things (remained) stable.’ In their opinion they felt that were there ‘a threat to the plant, it might be easier for somebody who (was) living in Cardiff to (feel somewhat) divorced from (the situation whereas) someone like (them who was from Llanelli and had) connections everywhere’ would most likely not feel that way – (something they recognised could) ‘be a good thing and a bad thing.’

In terms of assessing the capacity of this particular agent, there are two things to consider – firstly, the context in which the agent is operating and secondly the drive and ambition of the individual himself. When considering the context of this plant, location (i.e. away from larger more urban areas) has played a key role in allowing the local workforce to gain more opportunities which has in turn dramatically affected the level of agency potentially on offer or achievable. There would of course be certain parameters within which the agent would

need to work and areas where they would have little influence or impact – namely in light of the decline of manufacturing in Wales. Although they would be unable to reverse this trend, they would however be afforded the authority to navigate, manage and mitigate against the impact of such changes – e.g. by maximising R&D opportunities on the site; developing the skillset to manage the plant, and maintaining ‘a relationship with the union... (by working with them) as close as (they) can’, thus demonstrating the agent’s ambition to protect the plant and its workers.

When looking at the context of a place from a post-industrial perspective, one consideration would be the skillset of the local population. The Head of Design and Former Employee agreed that one positive legacy of industry was that Llanelli had a highly skilled and available (albeit dwindling) workforce. Being a town that had relied heavily on large-scale employers, the Former Employee felt that ‘the one thing that was missing more than anything (in terms of skills) was business sense’, suggesting that perhaps the culture of Llanelli was more geared towards developing employees rather than employers. According to the Head of Design, there was ‘still (a) working man mentality (and a) management mentality (that created an) us and them (dynamic)... (something which they felt impacted on levels) of trust’ between the two parties.

‘In terms of (developing) skills’, the Economic Development Manager said that the ‘local college – Coleg Sir Gâr... (was) doing very well (to recruit) highly motivated students (and to help them to develop a) relevant skillset to feed the local economy.’ They felt that although there was a ‘good dialogue between businesses and education institutions... (to) try to ensure that the needs of recruiters (were) matching the skillset coming through... much like the rest of Wales, (they thought that) it could be done better.’ Despite this work, the Economic Development Manager recognised that ‘historically (the region had suffered from) a “brain drain”’ which meant that the most skilled and educated people often chose to leave the area due to a lack of opportunities.

However, as the interview was conducted during lockdown when a different working culture was beginning to emerge, they also felt that ‘there may be a silver lining in that people might change their (habits) in terms of where (they could) work’ be it from an education or employment perspective - something that might encourage people to stay or move to the

area. They did envisage that this would 'create pressures on services and demands on IT in particular (as the digital infrastructure would require upgrading) in certain areas to accommodate the potential demand.' This does highlight that whilst retaining and attracting people to Llanelli would be beneficial to the town and wider region in the long run, the infrastructure in place would not at present be able to adequately accommodate them. Therefore, agents with grand ambitions for the area would have issues such as these to contend with.

The Programme Director for Swansea Bay City Deal echoed this sentiment saying that because Llanelli as 'a town, and as a region, (didn't) have enough infrastructure, the City Deal was (designed around) thematic areas (such as) digital, energy, health, and wellness' in order to address these weaknesses. For example, they said that there were 'very few tier 1 contractors - big companies which are able to deliver within the cost and timescale – (in the region) so what generally would happen is they would bring in a big company... who would need to have a proportion of local supply within that main contract.' They explained that 'all the Local Authorities are subject to doing (this), regardless of (it being part of the) City Deal, because (publicly funded projects) need to make sure that they maximise community benefits.'

Pentre Awel's Project Leader was particularly interested in how they could 'use procurement to drive local benefits and how far (they could) push (the WFGA) legislation. For example, addressing issues related to 'the circular economy and the green credentials of the site; (could they decide) only to use British manufactured steel? (Could they) go further (and) say that the steel should be provided in Wales? The Strategic Programme Manager also insisted that 'any sub-contracting (had) to be done locally as well as the supply of material... to make sure that the community (got) something out of it.' This however is a big issue in public procurement circles because public bodies cannot be seen to favour local businesses above any other firms. However it was suggested by McCann that fighting unemployment and helping disadvantaged groups were legitimate procurement goals which would therefore justify allowing job creation as a goal because it would add value to the purchaser and help them to achieve economic development (McCann 2016).

In addition, the Project Officer recognised that many 'people (from the area didn't) aspire to be in a job (as they were) perhaps second generation unemployed (resulting in) high levels of

benefit claimants.’ They felt that ‘if a project like Pentre Awel with the level of investment (that it had didn’t) benefit the adjacent community then it (will have) failed in its aims and objectives.’ As well as aiming to create a number of jobs in the area, the Project Leader added that they had ‘a certain number of apprenticeships that (would) be created per million pounds (spent on the project).’ The Community Development Officer said that ‘part of (their) role... (was) to make sure that (they were) supporting people prior to (the) development (of Pentre Awel by) promoting... opportunities (and helping with) qualifications.’ They said that they were ‘working with people now so that they (were prepared) when the opportunities (did) arise.’

As outlined in the case study section, there were events involving Swansea University employees that occurred during the early stages of the project which not only had a significant impact on the direction of the project but also threatened to derail it entirely. The Project Leader said that ‘there was a point where (they) thought there would be no higher education (provision at all as part of the project) and (only) further education’, this encouraged them to ‘spend a lot of time going around the (local) colleges and the population’ in order to gauge what they really wanted, something which they said ‘fundamentally changed the project’ for the better. Whilst it was not a situation that they wished to find themselves in, they admitted that ‘there (was) something quite fundamental about adversity’ and that as a result, they felt that it was now ‘a better project.’

When the whole development was in jeopardy, the Project Leader and their colleagues recognised that only a change in approach would save it from collapsing entirely. In effect, they ‘changed (their) roots’ as the Project Leader stated. For example, rather being a project which focused primarily on further and higher education, they took the opportunity to examine the field more rigorously and place a greater focus on the educational needs of local communities – something which, on reflection, probably should have been a firm focus from the outset. This in turn resonated with the aforementioned primary aim of driving local benefits. Whilst Swansea University and Cardiff University are by now both a part of the project, this deeply challenging situation encouraged a different approach which possibly gives the project more depth, allowing it to become more relevant and useful to the local

population rather than a “cathedral in the desert”, which is how large-scale developments are often described.

The Framing of Opportunity – How the culture and capacity of a place frames opportunity

The final strand of this section looks at how the culture and capacity of a place – as outlined in the previous sections – frames opportunities for agents in the area. Guided by the data collected during the interviewing process, it focuses on establishing why and when agents recognise opportunities for change. An example of this was presented in the previous section when the Project Leader of Pentre Awel changed the approach of the project’s educational offer because of the significant challenges it had faced (as outlined in the case study’s introductory chapter). One might say that this somehow echoes the approach taken by the Automotive Manufacturing Company because of certain events beyond their control – i.e. the decline of manufacturing in Wales. It was an approach driven by adversity and centred around protecting the area and its people as much as possible whilst taking any opportunity to innovate and accelerate change.

It is interesting to note that most of the agents of change that were interviewed for this case study were or had at one time been working in positions of authority at varying levels. It wasn’t necessarily planned this way, however given the scale of the Pentre Awel development and the levels of investment involved, it comes as no surprise that the agents involved had a certain capacity to either mitigate or influence change. However, it is important to consider that no change on this scale (although yet to be achieved in this case) could possibly happen in isolation. Pentre Awel represents a certain point on a journey and reflects the efforts not only of those directly involved in the project, but the town itself and the region as a whole over a number of years.

The Strategic Programme Manager recalled that ‘there was an old development project between the old borough and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) in the 80s.’ He said that ‘the old steel and tin works were closing in Llanelli and (that) the council and (the) WDA had the foresight to do something about it. (It involved) public money (being put) into cleaning (old industrial) land and re-homing those in the areas that were worst hit, putting in place

land reclamation schemes, drainage, and roads to create a path for the future.’ It could certainly be argued that had actions such as these not been taken at the time, projects such as Pentre Awel would be far more challenging and costly.

An interesting observation from the Strategic Programme Manager was that he felt that the Council was ‘still working on the same ambitions – like regeneration – as (they) were in the 80s.’ Whilst developments in larger urban areas such as ‘London Docklands, Salford or Cardiff Bay (would, in his opinion, be) fast-tracked, (change was a process that those) in West Wales (had) been working on for 20/30 years.’ Therefore, Pentre Awel could be seen as one of the outcomes of those earlier interventions; a project that perhaps may not otherwise have happened. The Strategic Programme Manager also recognised the important role that the Government (both Welsh and UK) was playing in the project noting that the region wouldn’t be ‘strong enough to (lure in) the private investors (to) create large-scale developments’ without their support.

As suggested earlier, there were certain events that had occurred – be it earlier interventions, challenges during the early stages of the project, the type of funding on offer – that meant that Pentre Awel happened as it did, where it did, and when it did. Whilst the project has had ‘its ups and downs, what has kept it going’ for the Project Officer and many others involved was ‘knowing the tangible impact it (could) have on the local community.’ There was also a distinct awareness of the scarcity of such a large-scale opportunity in the area, something described by the Project Officer as a ‘once in a generation project’, and so this made those involved ‘motivated and keen to see (it) through to completion.’

The funding structure is therefore an integral part of the project. The Strategic Programme Manager at Carmarthenshire Council felt that they (as a local authority) could have done the project themselves ‘if the funding was there, but it just so (happened) that the funding was only available through the City Deal.’ If such high levels of funding encourage large-scale approaches to tackling challenges, it could also be argued that were it not for the City Deal, such a multidimensional and ambitious project may not have been designed in the first place. And of course, there are debates to be had around the nature of competitive funding and whether it really is a fair and balanced process.

For example, the Economic Development Manager pointed out that ‘not all regions (were) like Cambridgeshire (which would of course have) a competitive advantage (over a region such as Carmarthenshire) if (they) were up against (each other)’ – mainly due to their close proximity to the top universities and talent pools in the UK. So, he felt that ‘there should be a balance in terms of how applications’ were assessed. He suggested that a programme could be devised ‘where a certain level of funding (was guaranteed but that a bidding process) for a top-up’ could be put in place, something that he felt ‘would (help to) sharpen pencils, sharpen minds and drive innovation’ in the area. There was also a clear emphasis here on scale – the Economic Development Manager said that if he were ‘looking (to create) a fund, (he) would want to (offer) half a billion (pounds) as an enabler.’ He felt that ‘if you (didn’t) think on that scale, you (were) not going to make the significant transformation that (was needed).’

‘The first phase’ of the Pentre Awel development would be ‘funded by the City Deal and the Council. (The Project Officer emphasised that) there (wasn’t) private investment in (this) phase, (which he felt to be) a bonus in many respects.’ He said that due to ‘the elements of this zone, (they hadn’t) really looked for private investment (and so it meant) that it (would) be public sector owned and managed... (meaning that it wouldn’t) have to be driven by profit.’ The Project Officer said that due to ‘the interest (they had) received... (from) third sector organisations (telling them) that they’d like a space where they (could) bring in clients or run group classes... (they) were thinking of creating a third sector space’ which could be used or rented. Had they ‘not have engaged with those organisations then (this idea wouldn’t have been included) within the design proposals.’ Although it would be difficult to know one way or another, it could be suggested that had the private sector been involved in this phase of the build, there may have been less room – both spatially and conceptually – to include the third sector.

Another example of agents recognising opportunities for change was in regard to a planned hydrotherapy pool at Pentre Awel. The Project Officer pointed out that they potentially had access to ‘£1.3m in charity funding to develop a hydrotherapy pool, (which he said came) from two sources. (The first was) a legacy fund in America... (the Project Officer said that it was) a wonderful story about someone who emigrated from Llanelli in the early 1900s, made

(their) fortune in America and left a legacy fund.’ The second was ‘a local hydrotherapy pool committee... (which had) raised £300,000 over the past 30 years through local fundraising.’ He said that ‘there (had) always been a need for a hydrotherapy pool in Llanelli (as) the nearest public hydrotherapy pool (was) in Carmarthen (which), by public transport, (was) about an hour-hour and a half away.’

It could be said that whilst large-scale opportunities such as Pentre Awel can be a catalyst for innovation, they can also play a significant role in bringing together other operations (such as the hydrotherapy pool) that may have otherwise been considered undeliverable or challenging. The Project Officer added that much of ‘the design changes or design inclusions that (they had) made (had) been in response to the feedback received (which they believed would significantly help) with ownership and community empowerment.’ This idea of community empowerment, of building agency, is an important aspect of the project that hasn’t been discussed much thus far – mainly as it wasn’t raised to any significant degree by those interviewed. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that building agency is something that a project of this size sees as an outcome, and given that the project is still under construction, it is something which is yet to be addressed on a practical level.

It could therefore be said that building agency has a direct link to well-being. In his Well-being, Freedom and Agency publication, Sen presented well-being as an indication of how a person could function, which he said could be in relation to activities such as eating or states of being such as being well nourished (Sen 1985). He said that the extent to which these activities could be achieved was the prime feature of well-being (Sen 1985). Another core function within our society relates to economic activities and, as the Project Leader pointed out, ‘well-being (cannot not be achieved) if everyone is unemployed and (has) no aspiration’ and so one of their key drivers was to help ‘people to have more self-worth (by giving) them support (in) working through the training pipeline.’

5.2 Perceptions – The Second Dimension of Agency

Introduction

This section looks at the second dimension of agency. The literature review presented perceptions as being related to our experiences and discussed their impact on our reactions and approaches to change. The following section considers the extent to which an agent's experience impacts on their approach to change and looks at how these approaches evolve over time. It also considers how their approach plays a role in changing others' perceptions. Within this dimension, the data presented three distinct strands. The first looks at the perception of change as an opportunity, the second looks at the perception of change as a challenge, and the third considers the perception of change as a threat.

Change as an Opportunity – How confidence promotes and facilitates change and opportunity

This strand focuses on the perception of change as an opportunity by considering the extent to which it influences the actions of agents, which agents see change in this way, and how it impacts upon the overall process. Carmarthenshire Council's Economic Development Manager noted how there was a series of interventions and developments taking place and due to take place in Llanelli town centre that would 'have a positive impact on the town centre' and 'make a big difference to perceptions of the town.' He said that despite the town being far from perfect, it was important that the perception of the place be more balanced, and that although 'there (was) a lot of work to do, the opportunities and the potential (was) there.'

In a sense, the Economic Development Manager is suggesting that perceptions, or even pre-conceptions of a place, may not necessarily reflect its reality. Another way of framing it would be simply to say that the town is not as it was, and that this is the only way in which people can measure change there i.e. – by comparing it to the past (something which will be discussed in the third section of this chapter). According to the theoretical framing of perception, the way people perceive a town reflects their experiences of it – which, as outlined in the previous chapter, may vary significantly from one person and community to

another. This in turn has an impact on perceptions of change – how change will impact upon them and whether or not they have an impact upon it – thereby reflecting, to a certain extent, levels of agency or access to agents.

There also seems to be a recognition or suggestion that the extent to which people engage with change has an effect on how impactful it can be in the long term. SBCD's Programme Director said that 'if the project has more community engagement aspects to it with schools and colleges, it probably will open opportunities that people didn't realise were there... So, it's a catalyst in effect.' Therefore, if done in the right way, this presents the idea of meaningful community engagement as a potential catalyst for further change. Another way to explain this would be to say that although the project itself will instigate a certain level of change, these changes could be better maintained and developed if those for whom they were intended felt engaged and included.

The Carmarthenshire Councillor explained how those leading the Pentre Awel project had 'spent a whole year consulting with people in the area, hosting events in community halls, setting up stalls in parks and outside schools with the aim of engaging with the community.' The Economic Development Manager also recognised that 'engaging with the community (was) going to be important going forward.' With Pentre Awel, much of the engagement had been led by a team member from the area in question, who had a deep contextual understanding of place, knew its history and was familiar with and within the community. This team member was the Community Development Officer who had, according to the Project Officer for Carmarthenshire Council, been able to maintain a 'continual conversation with communities (and) feedback community feeling and sentiment.' He felt that 'having that feedback in (their) team (had) really made a difference to how (they conveyed) particular messages about the project.'

This notion of a continual conversation was echoed in an exchange that the Community Development Officer had at a wedding party they attended in the local social club. There was concern and confusion from community members about the prospect of rehab facilities being located on the site of Pentre Awel. To briefly contextualise this, Llanelli, and the Tyisha area in particular, has in the recent past become an area synonymous with the issue of county

lines. In light of this, it would have been quite fair to assume that the rehab centre in question was to be associated with drug and substance misuse however, this was not the case.

In the practice of health and well-being, rehab is a broad term used to represent all forms of rehabilitation and this in fact was the intended context of the centre in Pentre Awel. Therefore, it was not at all concerned with drugs and substance misuse. As a result of this exchange between the Community Development Officer and community members, wording in documents and presentations were changed 'straight away'. This demonstrated the role of engagement in facilitating a sense of agency on part of the community i.e. – that there was power in knowing where to find answers to questions. This was an opportunity recognised by team members, including the Project Officer, who saw the difference their work was making to the project.

Carmarthenshire Council's Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager emphasised the need for change in Llanelli and presented Pentre Awel as a 'unique opportunity' for the area. It's important at this stage to take a moment to deconstruct the term 'opportunity' and to understand exactly what it means in this context. At a brief glance, it would seem that 'opportunity' is afforded its broadest possible meaning and serves as an umbrella term for all the positive aspects of the change in question. Presenting something as a 'unique opportunity' would suggest a certain kind of change, one that is time and place specific which adds a sense of urgency to the process.

The Former Swansea University Employee said that 'there were three sectors which were unique to the region – health and well-being, advanced manufacturing and energy.' They claimed that Pentre Awel presented 'a unique opportunity to bring everyone together to create some sort of project where all parts would cooperate' and that although 'it (seemed) simple and obvious, no one in the world was doing that' at the time. Carmarthenshire Council's Project Officer recognised that having a new leisure centre, or a new assisted living accommodation wasn't unique but that neither was having a business incubation centre or offering research opportunities, for that matter. The uniqueness, to his mind, lay in 'the fact that all those different component parts (were) together.'

There is therefore a very good reason for Pentre Awel to be built where it is. In Llanelli for example, the Project Leader of Pentre Awel explained that 'there (was) a huge legacy of social deprivation in the close proximity to the site (and that there was) also traditional legacy illnesses and a very high level of chronic conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.' The Strategic Programme Manager said that 'places close to and in the town centre (were) near to where the factories were... (adding that) those communities (had) really suffered.' There was therefore a clear recognition that the 'council along with the Government (had to) do something to change this. Another thing to consider was whether the opportunity in this case was presented as something that was given to people or something that was created or could be driven by them which, in turn, brings to light certain issues around the power dynamics of change and agency – an aspect which will be discussed in the third section of this chapter.

The involvement of the Community Development Officer and the focus of the wider team in developing a communication and engagement system that ran both ways (which will be discussed later) suggests that there was, at the very least, an awareness of this challenge and a willingness to address it. And this is extremely important because developments on this scale can so often be driven by the ambition to implement change in a place as opposed to building and growing change within it. This approach merely recreates the uneven power dynamics of agency, which in the long run, does little to address core issues of inequality. One such opportunity for change that might alter this dynamic would be the chance to learn, develop and change ways of working. A Former Employee at a local Automotive Manufacturing Company said that he had learned a great deal from his international colleagues following their takeover of the company for which he worked. There were opportunities for both parties to learn from each other's strengths whether they be related to approaches to problem solving and manufacturing or engineering, and that this, in the end, helped increase profit margins. In this case, the opportunities came as 'big changes of culture', as this Former Employee stated.

He also briefly discussed the potential impacts of Covid on his sector, the most notable of which being an overall reduction in globalisation. He said that he wouldn't be surprised if the company would 'prefer (to use) local suppliers as long as they (were) competitive.' There

would be several advantages to this, including a potential rise in local and highly skilled work opportunities leading to growth in the sector locally, a reduction in shipping costs and therefore an overall reduction in emissions. Whilst these potential impacts may be sector specific, they bring to light more general issues that could also affect how Pentre Awel could grow and develop.

The Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager felt that Covid could 'accelerate change especially from the point of view of social value (and felt that) the mindset in approach to well-being had changed.' They also suggested that 'due to the experience (they'd) had in recent months... nothing (seemed) too difficult.' The Project Leader of Pentre Awel said that Covid had 'brought into daily conversations things that people wouldn't normally have a care about.' They felt that 'the language (of health and well-being was) becoming more familiar, issues (such as meeting online had) been overcome... (and Covid had) allowed (them) to get a handle on (the) local population.' Therefore, the collective experience of Covid and its subsequent impact on communities not only highlighted the necessity for a radical change in the approach to achieving well-being but also demonstrated the ability of large, and often unagile organisations, to move at pace to achieve it. The act of simply recognising this is a significant opportunity.

Another consideration when reflecting on the perception of change as an opportunity is to ascertain who or which agents view the process in this way. In the case of the local Automotive Manufacturing Company, one such agent was an individual from England who led the successful management buy-out and its eventual sale to a multinational company. This agent was responsible for implementing many positive changes such as overseeing the building of a wind tunnel on site, the impacts of which are still being felt decades later. One might ask whether it is relevant that this agent was not from the local area. Was it simply that his experience of change elsewhere meant that he was less restricted by the boundaries in place locally and his perception of change was different from how it might otherwise have been? The Member of Senedd (MS) for Llanelli was of the opinion that as 'the story of decline keeps getting repeated... it (would) take an outsider to move in and see the potential in a way that the town's folk (couldn't).'

Whilst it was suggested earlier that the dynamics between Pentre Awel and the community had been facilitated to a significant extent by the Community Development Officer who was from the local area, she did not feel this to be significant. She said that engagement was 'the mission of the team. The only benefit was that (she) already had the connections so (everything) could be done quicker' and this reference to time is essential. When it comes to public funding and resources, projects are often limited and so the fact that those leading Pentre Awel were able to cut out a substantial amount of the work without cutting corners would have been invaluable.

Instantly recognisable opportunities in the context of regeneration projects are often presented in the form of employment, a point that the Swansea Bay City Deal's (SBCD) Programme Director also noted. The Deputy Mayor of Llanelli, the Head of Design Europe & North America of a local Automotive Manufacturing Company and Carmarthenshire Council's Strategic Programme Manager also referred to the town's lack of employment opportunities. The Head of Design Europe & North America recalled there being 'plenty of employment (and) plenty of good quality jobs' in the past, noting that 'there were special schools set up near the docks where they had apprentice training.' A Former Employee at the same company also reflected on the importance of training and how getting an apprenticeship 'was something to be quite proud of at the time.'

As these opportunities for training and apprenticeships have continued to decline, the 'sense in this area of 40 years of loss' as summarised by the MS for Llanelli, has only grown. The Project Leader stated how 'the project changed because (the community) told (them that they) wanted entry-level training' thereby reflecting this gap in opportunity to upskill and empower people in the area. Trying to develop a dynamic that encourages agency in all forms and on all levels will undoubtedly help to change perceptions and increase capacity making it easier for new agents to access resources and create opportunities. In turn, this gradual change in perception may encourage more agents to challenge the boundaries of what is considered possible.

Change as a Challenge – How low confidence levels presents change as a challenge

The second strand focuses on presenting the idea of change as a challenge, by once again considering the extent to which it influences the actions of agents, which agents see change in this way, and how it impacts on the overall process. This idea of change as a challenge appears to have two elements – firstly, that of designing a change that will create opportunity and secondly implementing the change and ensuring engagement. The first element requires an agent to look beyond the brief, to consider the wider possibilities and potential capabilities of the area where the change is to be implemented, to learn from others and to think of new and different ways of working.

The original Deal for the Swansea Bay City Region was one of digital infrastructure. The Former Employee at Swansea University ‘was of the opinion that (the area) needed more than digital infrastructure and (that) the university (would be) an integral part of any such project because it was responsible for creating the majority of intellectual property in the area.’ It is therefore extremely plausible to suggest that there would be very little opportunity for such a project to be developed in the area were it not for the university’s involvement. It is a certain level of challenge that few other institutions or organisations in the area could manage or conceive of.

The second element considers the challenge of implementing change and ensuring engagement which requires agents to pay considerable heed to the context and culture in which they are operating. New developments can be built in places and their many plausible and admirable reasons for being there may be very clear to those designing them, however there is very little that can be done to predict with any level of certainty how people will interact with them, and this is especially true if engagement levels have been low. The Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager of Carmarthenshire Council emphasised that ‘the build (was) one thing but (that) supporting the community (was) a bigger challenge.’ However, it could also be suggested that the build itself could contribute to and catalyse the bigger challenge of empowering the community by leaving a legacy of skills and confidence through the realisation of Community Benefit clauses in the procurement process (as outlined in the case study section).

A Former Employee at Swansea University involved in the design of Pentre Awel was 'of the opinion that (the) *build it and they will come* (way of working would) not (be) enough for a region that was so removed from the centre of the Welsh and British economy' and that 'there needed to be something to facilitate and support 21st century industries and to create a culture in the region where entrepreneurship was an organic process.' This echoes previous discussions about the challenges of attempting to implement changes in culture and how quickly they come to be seen as opportunities if the benefits can be communicated effectively. It also reiterates points raised earlier about the importance of changing ways of working in order to create a more democratic and dynamic culture of agency where people are empowered to create their own opportunities.

The Project Leader of Pentre Awel, who has experience of working on economic regeneration projects, recognised that in the past, developments 'weren't being rooted in the community... without (them) being embedded in the community, you're doing to the community rather than with it.' She recognised that if the community isn't empowered, the culture can't be changed. Yet how can such changes in culture be created? Assuming that the benefits are meaningful and progressive, people's perceptions of change could be challenged radically by clearly and explicitly demonstrating the benefits that could be gained from such levels of investment in people as well as infrastructure.

The Carmarthenshire Councillor emphasised that they were 'excited about this project' saying that 'it (would) be good to see whether (they) manage to turn the area around by developing the people as well as the infrastructure.' They said that they were 'interested in doing the two things at the same time' but recognised that in order to develop people, there was a need to address and understand their experience of change. The reason for this being that if change continues to happen to people as opposed to with them, there will be very little change seen to people's sense of ownership of the process and therefore their engagement with it.

Challenges are often presented as such because they require a different approach and changes to lifelong ways of working. One such example would be Carmarthenshire Council's focus on regenerating Llanelli Town centre. The Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager stated that they recognised 'that the high street chains (wouldn't) be returning (but) what (they could) do (was) to create a unique feeling in the town.' The Economic Development

Manager of Carmarthenshire Council added that they were ‘trying to create a destination and a place to live rather than a place to visit to do your shopping’ which could play a part in changing perceptions of the place.

It has been well-documented that high streets across the UK have been struggling for a number of years, yet many Local Authorities chose not to change their approach in tackling this issue. However, it appears as though Llanelli will change and that despite the challenges a different approach may present, that it acknowledges that the *business-as-usual* approach will no longer suffice – something Pentre Awel most certainly embodies. It’s not about recreating the economic structures of the past but rather by recognising that by challenging them, and communicating the changes effectively, a culture of agency may be built.

Other opportunities in the context of regeneration projects come in the form of direct benefits, i.e. those which are clearly presented and that are easy to see. In the context of Pentre Awel, one such benefit would be the new state-of-the-art leisure facilities, which are currently outdated in the town. The town was in need of a new leisure centre and the community was well aware of this. As the Project Leader of Pentre Awel explained, there was ‘money in the County Council Capital Programme (to) bring that to the site... and (to bring) health and leisure together to improve the health of the population.’ This much-needed change could certainly be seen as an upgrade to the existing facilities and so one might assume that the benefits would be easy to decipher.

However, this particular example is slightly different in that it is presented as part of a wider suite of opportunities. This leisure facility is not a stand-alone development, but one part of a far larger vision for change – i.e. Pentre Awel. Many of its proposed benefits (such as ‘improving well-being’) could be described as ambitious if not slightly vague conceptions of change, and therefore presenting this vision as a clear opportunity could be seen as more challenging, especially if those concepts are not always clear to those delivering them. The Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager of Carmarthenshire Council explained that ‘until now, people (had) been getting their heads around the concept of well-being and trying to understand what that (meant) to them in reality.’ They said that whilst ‘everyone (had bought) into the principle, (they had) struggled to see what they (needed) to do differently in order to work towards it.’

Another challenge when developing projects of this scale is to always keep in mind their real purpose and aim. The Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager spoke of challenges related to the level of focus placed on measuring outputs and how doing so increases the risk of a project losing its community aspect entirely. This brings to the fore issues of values and metrics, which will be discussed in the following section, but also demonstrates a conflict between the vision and structures in place to realise it.

One of the greatest challenges in old industrial towns is changing the perceptions of people in the area towards change. The MS for Llanelli reflected on interactions they had during the EU referendum campaign saying that 'there (was) a feeling (that) the government had sold them down the river.' Of course, it is not difficult to recognise that the timing of these experiences of change, of deindustrialisation, of job losses, of increasing ill-health and few opportunities broadly align with that of other large-scale political changes happening at that time that include joining the EU. It is therefore no wonder that perceptions of changes that do not challenge the status quo are frequently met with resistance, pessimism or worse still - indifference.

The MS for Llanelli told of an occasion when they went to a primary school to speak to a class of 10- and 11-year-olds and asked them who had heard their parents say that Llanelli wasn't going to get any better – he said that all of the children apart from one put up their hands. Therefore, one of the main difficulties with perception is that as it can be learnt, children can be taught from an early age to perceive a certain place in a certain way thereby influencing their approach to change in the future. The Community Development Officer mentioned that their 'daughter had told (them of a video) on TikTok presenting Llanelli in a bad light.' When they asked why so many people were watching it, their daughter had 'said at the moment there (was) nothing for young people (in the area), nothing to give them that boost' meaning that their experience of change had taught them that things rarely changed for the better.

However, it is hoped that this perception will be challenged by the development of Pentre Awel. The Community Development Officer recognised that this project was 'a massive thing for Llanelli because (it would) be situated in one of the most deprived wards in Carmarthenshire... (They also felt that it could) have a really positive (impact on) the young people... (giving them) that bit of hope... which (was) really important.' She also said that she

could already see that shift coming back into Llanelli and noticed that communities were engaged, excited and looking forward to the development. In this sense, this development could well have the power to radically influence perceptions of place, to make change something that is more frequently associated with improvement in prospects and opportunities in the area as opposed to decline.

Change as a Threat – How a lack of confidence generates mistrust and threatens change

The third strand focusses on presenting the idea of change as a threat, by considering the extent to which it influences the actions of agents, which agents see change in this way, and how it impacts on the overall process. To a large extent, the threat of change relates to negative perceptions of what impact such a change may or may not have. As the Programme Director of the SBCD said, 'It doesn't matter what initiative, there (would always) be a negative public perception on some things.' One reason for this could be that change can sometimes highlight imbalances in power – meaning that large-scale decisions that may influence how places operate could be made with people or communities who feel that they have had little or no say.

In addition, the threat of change may also come from a lack of information or communication, or from misunderstanding what exactly the change might entail. Addressing vital matters such as engagement with change is integral to the process of agency if the agent in question is seeking to make meaningful change. SBCD's Programme Director was asked whether local residents in the area would see themselves as benefiting from the development, and in answering this he said that he felt that although some might and others might not, he was confident that all would benefit either directly or indirectly. He continued by stating that 'if the community (was) engaged, and (felt) part of the solution then it (would) probably be easier whereas if (change was) just imposed on them' then they would be more likely to perceive change in a negative light. Therefore, one threat to change may to a certain extent be overcome by ensuring that there is an effective communication loop in place.

The team around Pentre Awel said that they had done a lot of work to try to alleviate any negative feelings in the community. The Community Development Officer said that from the

outset 'the team have wanted the community to be informed about what (was) going on... and aware of the opportunities (available to) them' and added that this has made 'the community feel valued which is why (they felt that) there (had) been such a positive buy-in.' For example, a community engagement event took place at a local social club in Morfa – another area bordering on the Pentre Awel site. The Project Officer noted that this was the 'first engagement event where (they) tried to set out the vision for the project (and) rather than do it in an official government building like the town hall... (they) held the event at a local social club so people didn't have to travel far.'

Carmarthenshire Council's Strategic Programme Manager recognised that 'it was a difficult sell at the Morfa Social Club initially.' However, by reaching out to the community and hosting the event in a space that was familiar to them, it became an opportunity to break down some of the barriers that may well have existed had the event been held in an unfamiliar and formal environment such as the town hall. The Project Officer saw that they were 'engaging with people in a setting they knew best and that they were comfortable with.' This approach relates directly to issues of agency as it promotes a rebalancing of power and, in a way, promotes conversation and rejects imposition. The Community Development Officer saw the event as 'an opportunity (for the community) to ask questions (and) to (have an) input... (and not just to) tell people what (was) happening.' This was an approach that they felt 'made people (have) a sense of ownership towards it.'

This single act demonstrates how space and what that space represents can impact on an individual's or a community's agency and behaviour. Another example is the Pentre Awel development itself; vast and imposing structures and spaces are always in danger of being perceived as 'elitist developments', but the Project Officer said they believed that 'changing that mindset (was) key to breaking the cycle of deprivation.' The Project Leader knew that it was important for the community to feel that the building was for them and said that 'it must be owned by people – not by (her) or the council – (and had to) be what the community (wanted).'

All the key people involved in the project attended the community engagement event and people arrived at various times throughout the day with an hour set aside for children from two local schools. The Project Officer said that they were asked 'what they would like to see

there, (which) helped to shape (their) thinking. Therefore, (it was decided that) the northern part of (the) site... (wouldn't) be developed (and would become an) open and (easily accessible) green space.' By trying to incorporate people of 'all ages... from primary school age to the bowls club' in conversations, as the Community Development Officer pointed out, there was an opportunity to build agency in the community, to create an environment where, from a young age, people felt that they had a say in the changes that were happening around them.

The SBCD's Programme Director said that 'the team (had) been doing lots of work around trying to make sure that (Pentre Awel was) accessible to as many people as possible.' The SBCD's Programme Director mentioned that one negative perception of the project centred around infrastructure. He said that 'the road access (to Pentre Awel was) good in terms of the bi-pass (but that) if somebody wanted (to use) public transport, or they wanted to come from outside of the area' it would be quite difficult. The Community Development Officer also pointed out that a 'lot of people (didn't have) cars in the area and (that) they (relied) on walking or public transport.' Therefore, it will be essential to build the infrastructure around Pentre Awel if the project is to be accessible. In a recent online article published in March 2023, Cllr. Sean Rees who represents the ward of Glanymor (which includes the development site) confirmed that there would be good, sustainable transport links to the site itself (Youle 2023).

Another aspect of accessibility relates to cost and the Project Officer said that he was frequently asked whether the new leisure facilities would cost more, and reassured the community that this wouldn't be the case. The term 'accessible' should therefore be viewed not only in a spatial and physical capacity but also an intellectual capacity meaning that the buildings and the infrastructure around them should not only of course be physically accessible, but that the information and messaging connected with the project should also be shared and presented in an open and accessible way.

The difficulty however is that when change has been challenging in the past, future changes can be perceived as a threat, as with, for example, changes to Llanelli town centre. The Deputy Mayor of Llanelli cited this as a weakness in Llanelli and felt it to be 'embarrassing at times – (that they would) go to town on a Saturday and might (only) see around 20 people.' The

Strategic Programme Manager recognised that the town centre had changed and said that 'it was at its worst when the factories were closing, and people were losing their jobs.' A Former Employee at an Automotive Manufacturing Company remembers 'the town centre being a thriving place... (but that by now, he would only) go there half a dozen times a year because (of) the retail park.'

Trostre is a typical out of town retail park built in the late 1980s on the edges of Llanelli town which, although very popular, many, including the Deputy Mayor of Llanelli, believe to be 'at the detriment of everything in town'. However, the Economic Development Manager argued that although this was to a large extent, true, he also believed that many of 'the multi-nationals (present there) wouldn't have gone to the town centre anyway and (that it created) around 2500 jobs.' Therefore, although Trostre could be considered a successful development in isolation, it also represents the threat of change in that if one area improves, it will be to the detriment of another. In a sense it represents the movement of capital as opposed to the creation of capital and this is a threat that Pentre Awel could also be seen to pose. Therefore, this area should not be seen to pull resources and opportunities from other areas but should aim to create them and build on them.

Perceptions towards change can be influenced by a number of factors. For example, the Project Officer recognised that 'there (was) a perception, not for this development but for others, that private sector companies (were only encouraged to invest) for one reason.' They continued by stating that 'there (wasn't) private investment in the first phase' of the project which they believed to be 'a bonus in many respects... (because) it (meant) that it (could) be public sector run, owned and managed.' As well as touching upon matters of perceptions, this also brings to the fore certain issues concerning values and motivations, which will be discussed in the following section. By aiming to ensure that this development is perceived as an opportunity for the local community, it is also challenged with the task of convincing the private sector of this for the next phases of the project.

It cannot be denied that investment by the private sector can also play a role in changing peoples' perceptions of a place for the better. For example, the Pentre Awel development plans to build a hotel on site, and the Programme Director of SBCD believes this will be 'a sign to show that things are on the up and that (Llanelli) is thriving again.' Despite this being a

fairly accurate observation, what this actually does, or has the potential of doing, place further emphasis on the idea of a place (and therefore its people) as only being of worth if they have economic value – i.e. things are on the up when the private sector say they are. There is no doubt that this narrative will directly or indirectly impact upon how people in such places perceive their own worth and capacity and therefore their ideas related to change – i.e. as something that is defined almost entirely according to economic value.

5.3 Values - The Third Dimension of Agency

Introduction

This section looks at the third dimension of agency - i.e. values and considers the way in which they shape and drive the motivation for change. The literature review discussed the role of economics in shaping much of our thinking related to change and progress and considered the impact of this on places. The following section studies these ideas in practice by considering the agents' motivations towards directing change. These are contextualised within two case study towns, this chapter focuses on Llanelli in Wales, UK. Within this dimension, the data presented three strands. The first looks at the motivation for change from an economic perspective, the second considers the role of health and well-being in motivating change, and the third looks at the motivation for change from a community perspective.

Economic Motivations – Achieving well-being by improving economic outputs

This first strand focuses on interpretations of change that are motivated by economic factors and considers their effect on the culture of expectation within communities. When the current of change has largely resulted in continuous waves of decline, it is often the case that communities look to the past with a sense of nostalgia and as a result, physical representations of times gone by, e.g. buildings, can take on symbolic meanings. Where once the town centre and its buildings reflected vitality and opportunity, the quiet streets and empty buildings now seem to reflect quite the opposite. For example, the MS for Llanelli

talked of conversations he had with constituents about the economy and how decline had impacted on their communities. He said that it was difficult for many to 'conceive of the economy beyond retail and the town centre' and that this was, in a way, seen as a reflection of the town's prosperity.

Whilst it could be said that the decline of town centres is more symptomatic of wider structural economic weaknesses as opposed to being the root cause of them, they are also a visual representation and reminder of how change has and is continuing to reflect the town's wider fortunes. The Carmarthenshire Councillor noted that 'when heavy industry was prominent, there was plenty of employment'. A Former Employee at an Automotive Manufacturing Company remembers 'walking down the high street of Llanelli and (reminiscing about) how it used to be in its heyday.' A Leading Business Representative said that 'the changes (seen) in the town (had) been astonishing... (and that) when (she was) first (in Llanelli), there was a Marks & Spencer, Top Shop, Dorothy Perkins – (but) now (they were) all gone... (she felt that) the town centre (had) dramatically declined.'

From the experience of those familiar with this town, their responses could be seen to suggest that a thriving town centre mirrors a thriving local economy, and that the memory of the past motivates agents, to a certain extent, to want to recreate this dynamic. The MS for Llanelli recognised that 'town centres matter to people beyond the rational retail environment of the town (and that) they (were) places that (had) value as meeting places or civic spaces.' Although council-led developments in the town centre such as the Ffwrnes Theatre had been 'very successful in raising the status of the area and (attracting) further development... (the Leading Business Representative felt that in her experience) once businesses moved from the town it (was) difficult to get them back.' Whilst isolated pockets of regeneration go some way towards addressing the symptoms of economic decline, they can do very little to influence the economic dynamics of the town unless core issues of inequality are addressed directly. Until this is done, 'the culture of expectation and of resignation to economic decline (will continue to be) palpable in Llanelli' as the MS for Llanelli stated.

If low expectation is prevalent, then any kind or level of change implemented is far less likely to succeed because, from the perspective of the community, its failure has already been foreseen. Therefore, we should now be asking how the culture of low expectation might be

changed and challenged? It is certain that this low sense of expectation will not be changed simply by economic factors however relevant, but also by demonstrating a different approach to change. If we use Llanelli's town centre as an economic barometer one could say that it was fairly clear from the responses above that there is an understanding or a feeling that the town thrives when it is busy and employment plentiful. Therefore, if the town's dynamism and optimism is reflected in its centre, and this centre shows only minimal progress or development, then the expectation will be of very few opportunities when it comes to meaningful employment.

Carmarthenshire Council's Community Development Officer in Llanelli recognised that the town experienced a lot of change following the decline of the industries and said that 'people's skillset weren't matching what opportunities there were.' A former employee at an Automotive Manufacturing Company said that 'as the industries started closing and the jobs started going – the well-paid jobs' were going with them. Therefore, there is acknowledgement and memory of a time gone by when not only were there plenty of employment opportunities but that these were also well-paid and highly skilled. For example, the Head of Design Europe & North America of the same Automotive Manufacturing Company said that where once there had been almost 3000 workers on his site, there were now only 350. These losses not only have a direct impact on the economic dynamism of the town centre, as aforementioned, but also on the health and well-being of the population (as their standard of living falls) as well as the wider dynamics and cohesion of the community at large.

Therefore, one of the main challenges for agents in such places is to consider the wider implications of their economic motivations. If they seek to address the economic struggles of the town but choose to do so without adequately considering the cultural context in which they are operating, there is little chance that the changes they implement will be long-lasting or meaningful. In point of fact, it is far simpler to throw money at an issue in the hope of this having a positive impact than to attempt to tackle it at the root. Providing communities with opportunities without challenging the culture of low expectation will create a change that can only last as long as the opportunity itself, it will not help develop a lasting change that is driven by the community.

The Pentre Awel project (as mentioned earlier in the chapter) forms part of the Swansea Bay City Deal, 'the overall strategy (of which) was to close the economic gap within Wales and Britain' as the Former Swansea University Employee pointed out. He said that his role was to 'add to the original digital infrastructure proposal, which was essential, but (that) the sectors needed to be added so as to be a platform to create jobs and companies of value in the region.' One could say that from an agency perspective, the inclusion of these sectors was a vital aspect of the proposal because they were sectors which already held some weight in the area and were valued and respected forms of employment. He suggests that whilst there were definitely weaknesses in the digital infrastructure of the town and wider region that needed to be addressed, significant value would also come from investing in and strengthening sectors that were already part of the region's culture because these would not need to be embedded – which would of course require further resources.

From an economic perspective the Programme Director of the SBCD recognised that Delta Lakes – the site upon which Pentre Awel would be built – was 'a massive area for growth and for development.' He said that local business, and even those further afield, would be 'keen to engage with activity there' as 'it (was) not just about the centralised project, (but) all the things around it (such as) supply chains.' He felt that this kind of activity 'could fertilise the kind of thinking that (they could) do something in the town... (which was) needed for Llanelli and the region as a whole.' The Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager also recognised that opportunities needed to be created in the area in order to build leadership skills. He felt that this didn't necessarily reflect a lack of entrepreneurship, but rather a lack of confidence and capacity on the part of people when starting from scratch that could be addressed by signposting and 'a little handholding.' Once again, this reflects the culture of low expectation that was said to be palpable in Llanelli, not only with regard to the impact of changes implemented in the town, but also from a community and personal point of view in terms of aspiration.

The Community Development Officer felt that Pentre Awel could present a lot of opportunities to those living nearby 'because (it would be) located close to two of the most deprived wards. (Its location could make people) feel that they're being invested in (giving them a) sense of hope and (increasing) aspiration.' Despite this intention, it is however,

important to remember that close physical proximity should not necessarily be equated with social inclusion and that care would need to be taken to ensure a maximum impact. The Project Officer pointed out that ‘a lot of people (didn’t) aspire to be in a job, (because many were) second generation unemployed.’ They felt that ‘if a project like Pentre Awel with the level of investment (didn’t) have that impact and benefit for the adjacent community then it (will have) failed in its aims and objectives.’

However, opportunities should not of course be confined to employment alone, as previously discussed, they should also relate to the building of the capacity of people themselves to generate their own opportunities. One way of doing so would be by ‘going into the schools and inspiring the next generation’, as the Project Leader of Pentre Awel pointed out. The Project Officer felt that the graduate provision would take care of itself due to the roles of Swansea, Cardiff and Trinity St David’s Universities in the project, but said that if they were to have maximum impact, they would need to address educational needs on all levels. He said that it wasn’t ‘just primary and secondary school but (that they also needed to engage with) NEETS... to make sure that (they were) giving equal opportunities and changing aspirations.’ In effect, and as the Economic Development Manager pointed out, it wasn’t ‘about the council coming in and (dictating change), it (was also) about empowering the various stakeholders to show their true potential’ and drive their own vision of change.

Motivations driven by Health & Well-being – Achieving well-being by improving health

The second strand focuses on approaches to changes that are motivated by matters of health and well-being and again considers their potential effect on the culture of expectation within communities. When looking at matters relating to health and well-being there are certain factors beyond personal health, such as the overall environment, that can have a direct impact on the well-being of people. For example, the Strategic Programme Manager remembers the industries on Llanelli’s coastline – now the proposed site of Pentre Awel – being ‘tough places to work... (adding that) it was difficult for families.’ He felt that it was ‘great that the same area (was being developed) to make something that (was) appropriate for now.’

There is something cyclical and almost inevitable in the way that the land has been treated in the past compared with how it will be treated in the future and the impact it has had and may have on the well-being of communities as large. During the reign of heavy industry, wealth and resources were extracted from the land and the area which in turn resulted in ill-health, environmental degradation and ultimately unemployment. The present plan for Pentre Awel is to create meaningful employment by improving the health of the environment and that of the local population. Whether purely intentional or just a natural step in the story of this town, there seems to be a drive to right the wrongs of the past and to address the weaknesses of economic motivations by placing more focus on health and well-being in a more holistic sense.

As well as Pentre Awel itself being a facilitator of opportunity in terms of employment, its location is another factor that may help contribute to its success in the future. A Leading Business Representative said that ‘the thing that most people (didn’t) think about Llanelli as an industrial town (was) how wonderful the area by the beach (was).’ The Strategic Programme Manager pointed out that the ‘Millennium Coastal Path (was) a stone’s throw from the site’ another development – as mentioned in an earlier section – which was adding to the new narrative of change in the area and one which was focused on trying to improve the health and well-being of the local population and environment.

However, accessibility remains a key focus again, not only in terms of transport and infrastructure, but also in relation to issues of poor health. According to a survey cited in Carmarthenshire Council’s Rights of Way Improvement Plan, some of the most common reasons for not visiting parts of the county’s rural networks (that includes the Millennium Coastal Path) was physical disability and poor health (Carmarthenshire County Council 2019). And so given that these are prominent issues in the areas that neighbour the Pentre Awel development site, it would be worth taking this into consideration – i.e. that despite seemingly having easy access to spaces that could help improve health, those that suffer with poor health still struggle with accessibility.

Going back to the idea of buildings and spaces representing the economic dynamism and therefore the overall well-being of a town, Pentre Awel and the environment around it could, if presented and executed correctly, become a symbol of hope and progress. For example, in

terms of the swimming pool that would form part of the new leisure centre, the Strategic Programme Manager explained that they had adopted the natural light principle adding that 'plenty of light (made) people feel safe.' They also said that the project's 'use of timber (would) help with acoustics and sound within the pool and (that it was) also a sustainable material.' They wanted 'the building to be user-friendly and a great experience for people... which (they said differed) significantly from a (traditional) lecture hall, a leisure centre or a hospital' which could often be cold and sterile environments.

The Strategic Programme Manager said that there were six aspects of well-being in which they were to specialise in order to create the most appropriate building. These included a space with a whole-life value for those ranging from the very young to the older members of the community, a flexible and adaptable space, a sustainable community and environment, a space that was accessible and empowering to those who worked there, visited, and lived nearby, a co-create community (the Strategic Programme Manager explained that this was an aspect which the architect particularly endorsed – he said that it was an opportunity for those who worked for the health board, for students, for those visiting the pool and businesses to co-exist and collaborate in a single space), and a space that was permeable and connecting – not only throughout the building but also within the community.

Prioritising such aspects of new builds is extremely important because large-scale developments will often dominate and impose themselves on the landscape as well as the communities that surround them. When the architecture of these new builds neither reflects nor shows any consideration for their surroundings, the developments often fail in their attempts to blend into and influence the culture in which they are set. Therefore, implementing such ideas will help to make the change appear more of a progressive process aimed at improving lives as opposed to an oppressive process connected to degradation and decline. However, it would be crucial here to ensure that not only are the benefits clear and readily accessible, but also that engagement with and ownership of this space by the local communities and wider region is encouraged and enabled.

When reflecting on some of the area's greatest health-related concerns, the Former Swansea University Employee reflected on the 'legacies of the industries – such as pneumoconiosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and diabetes.' The Carmarthenshire Councillor also

added that 'one of the greatest challenges is combating the loneliness which (was) manifested in the decline in community support.' He said that 'when people are lonely, they become more vulnerable and so infrequently leave the house thus ensuring less activity on the streets and therefore giving space to facilitate anti-social behaviour.' Pentre Awel's Project Leader also became aware, after speaking to the community, of the saddening truth that rates of teenage self-harm and suicide were very high. Therefore, as well as dealing with very specific industry-related matters of physical ill-health in the local population, it became apparent by engaging with the community on a deeper level, that there were also significant matters related to mental health that would need to be taken into account.

However, long-term and complex issues such as these cannot be addressed without a long-term strategy. A short-term approach can only do so much in practice and even then, will do absolutely nothing to change the culture of low expectation, if anything, it could even worsen things by reaffirming negative perceptions, such as lack of commitment on part of the authorities, concerning change. With regard to actively addressing matters of well-being on a policy level, the Project Leader of Pentre Awel said that in the past she had 'spent a lot of time retro-fitting the Well-being of Future Generations Act into projects', but that in this case, had 'been able to design (the project) based on the goals and ways of working, embed them in the plans and influence how they develop.'

In effect, Pentre Awel as a development project is tasked with improving well-being in the short and medium term (but) is now also underpinned by the WFGA which seeks to improve well-being in the long-term. Therefore, motivations that draw heavily on matters of health and well-being in Wales, which are also underpinned by this legislation, have a significantly higher chance of implementing changes that will be long-lasting and meaningful. Much of this is of course down to execution and a continued commitment to addressing the issues at hand (which is often tied to the availability of resources). However, this new approach to development in Wales makes it – at least on paper - more achievable. As a result, the culture of low expectation may well be challenged.

Other motivations within this strand concentrated on trying to think of new ways of working to improve services in the health and well-being sectors, which is an important aspect upon which to focus. The Former Swansea University Employee said that he had 'spent (his) career

in the life sciences, and (was) of the opinion that (what was) needed (was) a public sector where health and social services were joined.’ He ‘could see the waste and missed opportunities of not having these sectors integrated’ and said that ‘any opportunity to be innovative was difficult because these two sectors were not working hand in hand... By joining them together (he felt that) it would not only be more effective, but it would also be a way of providing a better service as there would be fewer people providing the various services allowing for a building of relationships.’

Another aspect of joint-working and joint-thinking relating to Pentre Awel looks at the care and leisure areas and facilities. Within its design, the Strategic Programme Manager explained that these areas were close together because, for example, ‘if a referral (from the health board involved) physiotherapy, (it would mean) that (patients could) use the facilities in the (same) building instead of having to go to the hospital.’ Is this innovative? Indeed, it seems so obvious a thing to be doing that it leaves one slightly aghast that such things are not already in place. However as this is not the case, one could argue that it must be innovative, to be aligning the health and leisure facilities of two major stakeholders (the health board and the council) together, in this way.

Community-focused Motivations – Achieving well-being by improving community cohesion

The final strand focuses on agents’ community-focused motivations and again considers their potential impact on the culture of expectation within communities. To provide some kind of context, Tyisha – a ward neighbouring on the site of Pentre Awel – is one of the most deprived wards in the UK. The Carmarthenshire Councillor noted that child poverty, long-term illness and unemployment were some of the main concerns in the area and added that there were also significant problems with a large number of old and inadequate housing facilities which were not fit for purpose. He said that it was an area which had declined significantly over the last 20 to 25 years.

The Carmarthenshire Councillor and Leading Business Representative also highlighted the area’s increasing problem with drugs and alcohol and cited specifically the Station Road area which lies within the Tyisha ward ‘which has developed some kind of stigma over the past

few years' according to the Councillor. He continued by saying that 'if you were to go to this area during the day you would notice gangs of boys drinking and drugs being openly traded' and the Leading Business Representative noticed that 'the town (would change) dramatically when the sun (went) down.' In reflecting more widely on the area's concerns, the Carmarthenshire Councillor felt strongly that the children of Llanelli shouldn't need to suffer more than children in other areas, and that, according to the Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager, 'it was (their) duty (as a Local Authority) to do right by them.'

In terms of how specific motivations have impacted on communities in the past, the Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager felt that 'perhaps (the Local Authority had) focused too much on economic development as opposed to looking at the core community in the first instance.' She added that 'the bit that (they were) missing in terms of economic development (was) community development.' She felt that 'if you (didn't) have a strong community, it (would make) no difference how much economic development you (did) because without strong people in a stable situation, it (wouldn't) work.' This relates back to ideas presented in the literature review that question the effectiveness of approaches to development that focus primarily on addressing economic weaknesses without considering the wider context of the places in which they were set. She continued by saying that she would 'like to see Communities First returning to their community-based work, even though (she felt that this work was) difficult to measure – (because) without that aspect, (they would see) other projects fail.' She is referring here to how our ways of measuring outputs or putting a price on progress, can influence our approach to change thereby encouraging us to place less importance on other, perhaps more meaningful ways of working that may be more difficult to measure.

The Community Development Officer reflected on her early career as a community development officer in the area. She said that part of her role involved 'working with communities and getting them engaged, setting up groups and supporting them to take responsibility of the area and to make positive change.' She explained that this work 'was part of the Communities First programme, (but that when) the funding changed, it went into a (more) employment(-focused) direction.' By reflecting on the view of these two agents of change in Llanelli; one who has significant experience working alongside stakeholders and the

other who has significant experience of working closely with communities, it seems as though both are advocating for an approach to change that is driven less by economic motivations and more by matters of community development.

This is where the approach taken by Pentre Awel becomes interesting and highly relevant. One specific aspect of development which can and does have a direct influence on community benefits relates to procurement practices. The Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager said that she had been having 'a lot of discussions around public procurement, and (had thought that the WFGA) would help (them) to move along the path that (they) would like to in terms of buying local and putting more emphasis on value as opposed to cost.' She is referring here to the influence that the WFGA is having on this specific project and how it has driven certain aspects of community benefits relating to procurement.

The Project Leader of Pentre Awel emphasised that 'community benefit (was) particularly important... in order to address the socio-economic issues... (she wanted to see how she could) use procurement to drive local benefits and see how far (they could) push that legislation' – i.e. the WFGA. She questioned for example whether they could opt to use British Steel as opposed to importing steel, or even go further and say that the steel should be provided in Wales. The Community Development Officer also pointed out that, 'they (wanted) to make sure that all of the contractors (were) involved in the community, (saying that it wasn't) just going to be somebody coming in, building and leaving (but that) community elements (were) built in so that the connections (could) continue.'

Swansea Bay City Deal's Programme Director talked of the deal's specific 'procurement principles that (involved) local supply but also things around community benefits.' The Project Officer said that 'when (they) did procure a development partner, (they) had quite a strict scoring criterion... (and that) during this process, the development partner had to outline exactly how they would integrate with the community and ensure that the community was as much a part of the journey as they were.' Yet in the midst of all of this talk concerning the importance of procurement, there lies a great challenge. As Morgan pointed out, 'one of the great paradoxes of British economic policy over the past half century is the fact that successive governments have devoted a great deal of effort to things beyond their control, such as the external value of sterling for example, and had neglected that which they could

control, such as the procurement of goods and services in the public sector' (Morgan 2012, p. 1).

He pointed out that in the UK in 2020 roughly £1 in every £4 was spent by the Exchequer on public procurement – a market worth more than £230 billion – making it a 'sleeping giant because of its untapped potential to effect social, economic and environmental change' (Morgan 2021b, p. 1). As well as being an aspect of development that has the power to effect positive and progressive change in communities, public procurement also has significant purchase power, so why has it not asserted its influence in any meaningful way? Morgan suggests that in Wales, this might be due to a lack of competence or confidence, or even both, that are linked to a current skills deficit in Wales's public sector (Morgan 2021b, p. 2). Therefore, in this context, the WFGA could itself be considered an agent of change in Wales, as it provides public sector workers with a modern framework on which to build new development practices. Yet whilst this legislation provides guidance, its success is heavily depended on how it is interpreted and enacted.

Reflecting on Pentre Awel's approach to ensuring that the project's community benefits are maximised, Carmarthenshire Council said that it was 'committed to promoting social value... (and that) through the pursuit of Community Benefits in this Project (it would) seek to improve the economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being of the County (Carmarthenshire County Council 2022, p. 1). The Council noted that it was seeking a contractor to work with them to 'provide Targeted Recruitment and Training opportunities..., to create opportunities for SMEs to bid for work through its supply chain..., to deliver meaningful community initiatives that would benefit the surrounding communities..., and to engage positively with school-age children and college/university students within the surrounding area (Carmarthenshire County Council 2022, pp. 1-4).

As mentioned several times throughout these analytical chapters, there is one agent in particular – namely the Community Development Officer – who has done more than she may appreciate to marry the needs of the community with the objectives of the project. This is probably primarily due to her deep understanding of the language and culture of these neighbouring communities and her ability to communicate effectively and not only listen, but really hear their concerns. She said that 'the team genuinely (cared) about the benefits of this

project and what it (was) going to do for different sections of the community (and that they recognised) the importance of community engagement because it (had) been a key focus from the start.’ Her focus on the strength of the team as a unit is in some way a means of expressing her collaborative approach to agency, which is something that should be shared and nurtured.

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter was divided into three parts which reflected the three dimensions of agency and focussed on understanding and explaining the dynamics of agency in Llanelli in the case of Pentre Awel. Upon analysing the process of change in Llanelli, it became apparent that its political, economic, and cultural identity had been shaped significantly by the dynamics of industrial growth and decline. It was suggested that a large number of changes seen in the town post-industry had been managed rather than dictated by the local population which meant that the culture of change in Llanelli had become accustomed to the idea and impact of decline. It was concluded that experiences of change had a significant impact on actual and perceived levels of agency.

The consideration of where changes were taking place and who exactly they were aimed at became one of the key points of interest. It was highlighted that Tyisha - a ward which neighbours the site of Pentre Awel – is one of the most deprived wards in the UK, and this relates back to the point made previously about the impact of industrial growth and decline on the town. During the reign of heavy industry, wealth and resources were extracted from the area which resulted in ill-health, environmental degradation and ultimately unemployment. Whilst it was recognised that the Local Authority had focused too much on economic development in the past as opposed to looking at the core needs of community, the plan for Pentre Awel was to challenge negative perceptions of change by creating meaningful employment which would improve the health of the environment and that of the local population. However, it would be fair to argue that this approach – of focussing predominately on creating employment (no matter how meaningful) – was not challenging traditional ways of working in the way that it could be argued that Tŷ Pawb was.

Another key conclusion related to the idea of meaningful community engagement as a potential catalyst for further change. It was established that engagement played an important role in facilitating a sense of agency on part of the community and that if the community didn't feel empowered, the culture of change in a place could not change. It could certainly be argued that agents involved in the Pentre Awel project aimed to improve levels of and approaches to community engagement however, it was difficult to establish the impact of this as the project was still in its developmental stage. It may be useful to revisit this in the future after the project has been realised in order to gauge whether early approaches to community engagement had any positive impact on the community's overall engagement with the project.

6 THE STORY OF WREXHAM AND THE CASE OF TŶ PAWB

6.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the second case study, which is located in the old industrial town of Wrexham in Wales, UK, and will look at the way in which agents have shaped the direction of change in the town. In order to provide context for the nature and timing of approaches to change taken by agents, it is helpful to review the characteristics of the town in question. Guided by the structure of the literature review, the first section of this chapter will look briefly at the political, economic, and cultural context of Wrexham. This will be followed by an overview of the case study in question - the TŶ Pawb development located in the centre of the town - which will then provide a framework within which to examine the role of agents and the dynamics of agency within this project.

6.2 A Place to Live – The Political Story of Wrexham

This section of the chapter provides a brief overview of the political story of Wrexham - the largest town in the north of Wales which is situated close to the boundary with England to the East (*see image 11 below*). It has a population of approximately 47,000 and as part of the wider Wrexham County Borough (*highlighted in red*), is the fourth largest urban area in Wales with a population of 134,844 (Wrexham County Borough Council 2018, p. 4). Wrexham is well connected to most of the UK, through road and rail links and is a 50-minute drive from major airports in Manchester and Liverpool. The Bidston railway corridor provides connections to the Wirral and Liverpool and Wrexham General provides a direct train link to Cardiff and Chester, with Chester Station linking to Manchester and London (Wrexham County Borough Council 2016, p. 8).

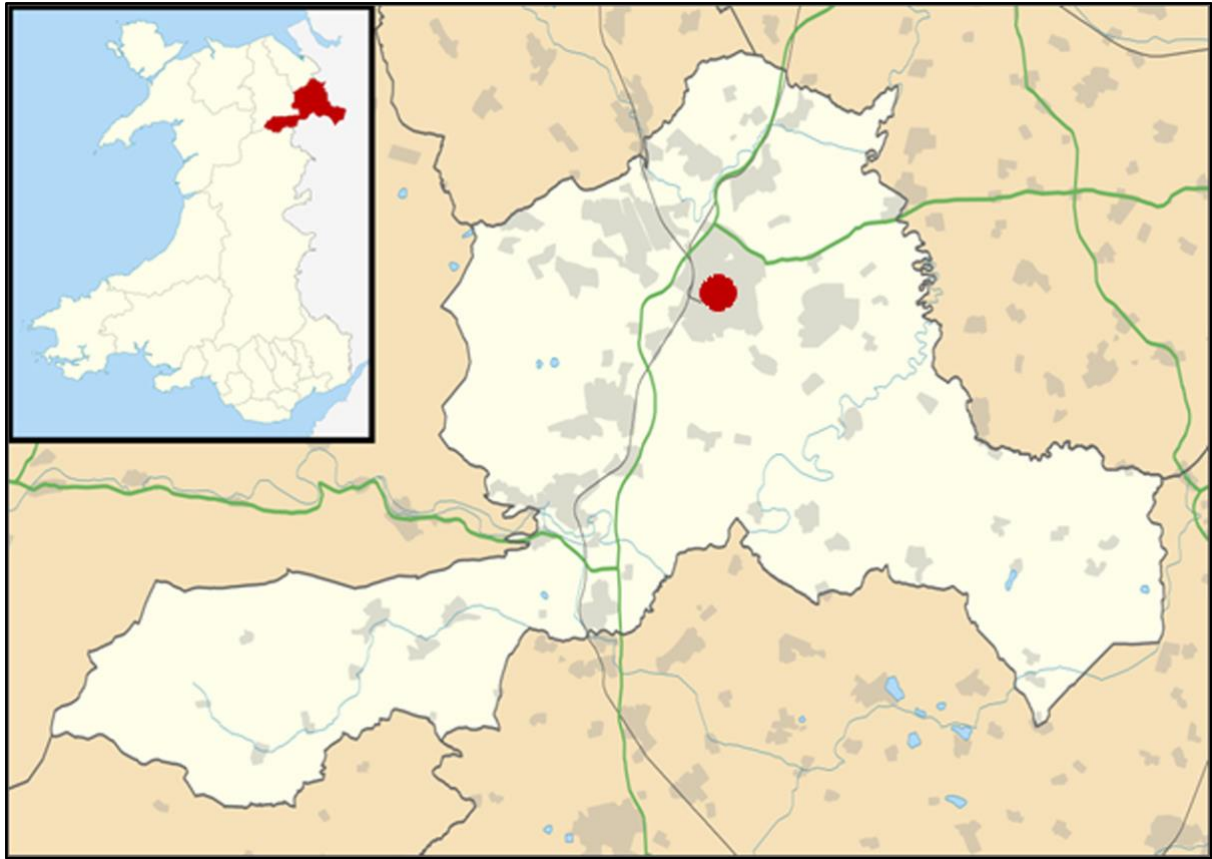


Image 11: Map of Wrexham County Borough and Wrexham town (Source: Wikipedia)

As was done in the previous chapter, it's important to contextualise the governance structures of Wrexham in order to understand how the town has been shaped from a political point of view. There is a total of 40 elected Members of Parliament (MPs) from Wales who represent their constituencies in the UK parliament in Westminster. Wrexham town is represented within the constituency of Wrexham and its current sitting MP is Sarah Atherton (Conservative Party). The devolved Welsh Government has 60 elected Member of Senedd (MS) and is led by the Labour Party. 20 MSs represent the 5 electoral regions of Wales and Wrexham Town is represented within the region of North Wales. 40 MSs represent geographic constituencies, which have the same electoral boundaries as the UK Parliament, and Wrexham town is represented within the constituency of Wrexham. The current sitting MS is Lesley Griffiths (Labour Party).

Wales has 22 Unitary Authorities and Wrexham town is represented within the Local Authority of Wrexham County Borough Council. The council is led by a coalition between the Independent Group and the Welsh Conservatives. Wrexham County Borough Council has 49 Wards and Wrexham Town itself is spread across 17 wards. In terms of voting intentions, the constituency of Wrexham has voted for a Labour candidate to represent them in each UK parliamentary election since 1935 until 2019 when they voted for their first Conservative MP (Wikipedia 2019). Candidates from the Labour Party have represented the constituency of Wrexham in the Welsh Parliament since its inception in 1999 and a mix of candidates from the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, Plaid Cymru, UKIP as well as independent candidates have represented Wrexham on a Regional Level (Wikipedia 2021b). In the UK's 2016 referendum on EU membership, the constituency of Wrexham voted to leave with 59% of the vote (BBC 2016).

With regards to specific policies and acts that relate to this particular case study, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFGA) is once again the one in focus. It is described as an act that requires 'public bodies to do things in pursuit of the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales in a way that accords with the sustainable development principle' (National Assembly for Wales 2015, p. 5). Whilst the previous case study focused on innovative health-related approaches to improving well-being, this case study focuses more on the role of arts and culture in helping to improve well-being. In its Well-being Assessment published in April 2022, Wrexham's Public Service Board explained that the way to understand cultural well-being was to distinguish between cultural well-being outcomes for individuals and those of communities (Wrexham Public Service Board 2022, p. 38). It highlighted the town's range of cultural gems which included Tŷ Pawb and emphasised its role in helping Wrexham to achieve its well-being objectives.

6.3 A Place to Work – The Economic Story of Wrexham

This second section provides a brief overview of the economic context of Wrexham. Wrexham developed as a trading town in the early 12th century and prospered as a market town during the 14th and 15th centuries trading wool and leather (Wrexham County Borough Council 2009, p. 5). Coal mining was well-established in surrounding villages such as Brymbo by the mid-16th century. There was an ironworks at Bersham near Wrexham from the mid-17th century onwards and due to increased orders during the late 18th century, it rapidly developed and expanded (Wrexham County Borough Museum 2019).



Image 12: Brymbo Steelworks in Wrexham c. 1980 (Source: Heritage Fund)

The Football Correspondent moved 'to Rhiwabon which is an industrial village (on the outskirts of Wrexham) in 1979 (which) was at a point when Britain was falling into the grip of a severe recession. (Wrexham) had been hard hit and... (and he noticed) a lot of poverty (and) social tension (at the time which he felt) was driven by economics (and the fact that) a lot of people were out of work. Brymbo Steelworks (*pictured above in image 12*) was a major employer (that closed during this period) along with a few others, (which was then followed

by) the coal strikes.’ He remembered this having ‘a massive impact on the high street, (nudging the authorities) to fight back (which resulted in) the industrial estate’ being established and built. The Wrexham Industrial Estate is one of the largest in Europe and is home to over 340 businesses in a range of sectors including, automotive, aerospace, food, pharmaceuticals and engineering and has created employment for over 10,000 people (Wrexham Industrial Estate 2022).



Image 13: Hope Street in Wrexham c. 1900 (Source: The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)

Wrexham is home to a strong education sector including Wrexham Glyndŵr University, Coleg Cambria and the Wrexham Maelor Teaching Hospital which are all within a short walk of the town centre (Wrexham County Borough Council 2016, p. 8). As will be highlighted in the analysis chapter, one of the key agents involved in shaping and steering change in the town was Wrexham Glyndŵr University. In its Campus 2025 strategy published in 2021, the university announced its plan to invest £80m to enhance all of its campuses and the local region and

ensure that its students were equipped with modern facilities and learning environments (Wrexham Glyndwr University 2021)

Although Wrexham town is based within a relatively affluent county, it has pockets of significant deprivation (Bennett and Batty 2018, p. 4). Since 2010 the borough has been subject to an average of £729 cuts to welfare spending per working age adult, per year which has taken its toll on public services. Wrexham has relatively low unemployment due to its proximity to large urban areas such as Liverpool and Manchester, as well as being the location of a large industrial park (mentioned earlier) (Bennett and Batty 2018, p. 4).



Image 14: Hope Street in Wrexham 2011 (Source: The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)

For Wrexham County Borough in 2020, the greatest employment activity was seen in manufacturing (18.3%) and human health and social work (18.3%) followed by administrative and support services (13.5%) and the retail trade (11.7%) (NOMIS 2022). Despite Wrexham

County Borough having one of the highest rates of productivity in Wales, its growth in productivity and living standards has been slow (Wrexham Public Service Board 2022, p. 52). Whilst there was an 18% increase in the number of jobs, most of these were in temporary and zero-hours employment meaning that the share of employment accounted for by permanent employees on full time contracts was broadly unchanged (Wrexham Public Service Board 2022, p. 52).

	North Wales			Wales			UK		
	Level (£ bn)	Rate	Change on year (%)	Level (£ bn)	Rate	Change on year (%)	Level (£ bn)	Rate	Change on year (%)
GVA ⁽¹⁾	£14.2	.	4.1 ↑	£65.1	.	3.3 ↑	£1,892.7	.	3.1 ↑
GVA per head ⁽¹⁾	.	£20,389	3.8 ↑	.	£20,738	2.9 ↑	.	£28,489	2.4 ↑
GDHI per head ⁽²⁾	.	£17,871	4.8 ↑	.	£17,100	4.4 ↑	.	£21,109	4.6 ↑
Average earnings ⁽³⁾	.	£530.00	6.4 ↑	.	£535.00	5.1 ↑	.	£584.90	2.9 ↑

Figure 5: Summary of Economic and Earnings Statistics 2018 (Source: Statistics Wales 2020, p. 5)

It is appropriate here to provide a little more insight into the current economic context of Wrexham. Employment levels in the period from April 2021 – March 2022 stood at 72% in Wrexham, 73.6% in Wales and 78.5% in Great Britain (NOMIS 2022). The percentage of households that were workless in the same period stood at 15.8% in Wrexham, 16.5% in Wales and 13.6% in Great Britain (NOMIS 2022). As figure 1 above summarises, the total GVA in North Wales (the economic region in which Wrexham is located) in 2018 was £14.2 billion, up 4.1% over the previous year and up 85.4% since 1999 (Statistics Wales 2020, p. 5). GVA per head in North Wales stood at £20,389, an increase of 3.8% over the previous year and of 74.7% since 1999 (Statistics Wales 2020, p. 5). Of course, these figures are not unique, as was demonstrated in the case of Llanelli, and in fact only exemplify the general economic fortunes of much of post-industrial Wales.

6.4 A Place to Gather – The Cultural Story of Wrexham

This section provides a brief overview of the cultural context of Wrexham – a town well-known for its markets, three of which survive today. Both the Butchers' Market, built in 1848, and the General Market, built in 1879, are Grade-II listed buildings, and the People's Market (formerly the Vegetable Market – *see image 5 below*) which opened in 1992 was later relaunched on the same site as part of Tŷ Pawb in 2018 (BBC News 2014).



Image 15: The Vegetable Market in Wrexham c. 1970 – now Tŷ Pawb (Source: The People's Collection)

As with many towns on these islands, churches and chapels have played a leading role in their early histories. Located near to the town's centre is the parish church of St Giles which is considered one of the finest examples of ecclesiastical architecture in Wales (St Giles' Parish Church 2022). Whilst there is some evidence of a church on the site as early as the 11th century, the building in its present form dates from the late 15th and early 16th centuries (St Giles' Parish Church 2022). A particularly interesting, yet relatively little-known fact about the church is that this is where Elihu Yale is buried. Yale is of course famous for being the

benefactor and namesake of a top ivy-league American university but he also had strong family links to Wales and the Wrexham area in particular (National Trust 2022).



Image 16: St Giles' Parish Church in Wrexham (Source: Diocese of St Asaph)

Over the past 150 years or so, a significant part of Wrexham's culture has revolved around football (a matter which will be discussed further in the analysis section). Wrexham AFC was established in 1864 making it is the oldest football club in Wales and the third oldest professional club in the world (Wrexham AFC 2022). Twelve years later, the Football Association of Wales (FAW) was also established in the town in 1876 (Football Association of Wales 2019). Wrexham's home ground - the Racecourse – previously used for horse racing and cricket, hosted Wales's first ever home international match a year later in 1877 – making it the oldest international football stadium in the world still in continuous use (Wrexham AFC 2022).

In terms of success, Wrexham AFC has certainly had its share. One particular example is when it knocked FC Porto out the UEFA European Cup Winners cup in 1984 (*pictured below in image 17*). Like many other football clubs, it has also faced significant financial struggles and uncertainty over the years which eventually resulted in the team dropping from the Second Division (now the Championship) down to the National League (which is the fifth tier of the

English Football League pyramid system) in which they remained for almost two decades. However, in April 2023 they were finally promoted back in to the fourth tier, now the Second Division, in spectacular fashion – leaving their new owners speechless on the side-lines. Wrexham AFC had been a fan-owned club since 2011 until its new chairmen were announced in 2021 i.e. - Hollywood actors Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney who have since released a documentary series on Disney+ entitled ‘Welcome to Wrexham’ about their journey with the Welsh football club to-date.



Image 17: Wrexham knock FC Porto out of the Cup Winners Cup 1984 (Source: The Football History Boys)

Another significant and noteworthy development in the town’s cultural offering revolves around the annual Focus Wales international musical showcasing festival that takes place in music venues and other spaces across the town over a long weekend during May. It is a not-for-profit organization that was established in 2011 to provide a platform for emerging

musical talent in Wales as well as promoting new acts from across the globe (Focus Wales 2022). It attracts over 20,000 people to the town each year and as well as showcasing music, it also hosts interactive industry sessions, arts events, and film screenings (Focus Wales 2022). One of the venues that hosts Focus Wales is Tŷ Pawb (which is the case study in question) - a cultural community centre and arts hub that comprises of a gallery, stalls and restaurants (Wrexham Public Service Board 2022, p. 38). In terms of engagement with the arts, culture, and heritage offerings (of which Tŷ Pawb plays a leading role), Wrexham's Public Service Board (PSB) noted that in 2017/18 69% of adults in Wrexham attended or participated in such activity at least 3 times a year (Wrexham Public Service Board 2022, p. 40). They also noted that participation varied according to age, financial status, and ethnicity (Wrexham Public Service Board 2022, p. 40).



Image 18: Self Esteem at Focus Wales 2022 (Source: Tim Rooney)

In 2022 Wrexham was shortlisted for the title of UK Capital of Culture 2025 which, in a way, epitomises the journey of change which the town has been following in terms of building confidence and reclaiming and redefining its identity as a place (another aspect which will be

discussed in the analysis section). Its vision for the bid involved ‘using culture as a catalyst for improving health and well-being, local knowledge and pride, and improved educational outcomes’ (Wrexham City of Culture 2025 2022). Despite not winning, it could be argued that having the conviction to be counted in this way and in this context demonstrated the growth in collective ambition from a cultural perspective. In addition, in September 2022 Wrexham became a city after winning the status through a competition which was part of the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee celebrations (UK Government 2022). It has now become the seventh city in Wales.

6.5 The Case Study – Tŷ Pawb in Wrexham

Tŷ Pawb (which is Welsh for Everybody’s House) opened in 2018 and is a £4.3m project funded by Wrexham County Council, the Arts Council of Wales, and the Welsh Government. It was designed as a cultural community centre, arts hub and market and is located in the centre of Wrexham town on the site of the old People’s Market. A matter that should be highlighted, as was also the case with the Pentre Awel project in Llanelli, is the use of the Welsh language in relation to naming developmental projects. It’s not an issue that will be explored in detail here but certainly one that ought to be flagged up and perhaps elaborated upon in future research. It would certainly be interesting to understand the linguistic and cultural dynamics of these choices and how they could be seen to play a role in influencing perceptions towards change.

There are many important cultural aspects of Tŷ Pawb’s inception that will be expanded upon in the analysis section, however this section will focus predominantly on presenting the project from a practical point of view by explaining how and why it came to be. In the first instance, the Council Deputy Leader said that there was a total of ‘three indoor markets in Wrexham’, adding that not all of which were performing well and that as a result a report was commissioned to look into the matter. The report, which was published in 2013 by retail consultants Quarterbridge, concluded that the town could only support two of its three markets and that the People’s Market would be suitable for other uses (Astbury 2018). In another study published by Ash Sakula Architects, the People’s Market was also identified as

one of five possible new locations for Oriel Wrexam (which was at that point looking for a new base), and in a town masterplan by AECOM, it was again identified as a key building that could be used to create a better connection between the centre and edge of the town (Astbury 2018).



Image 19: Opening night of Tŷ Pawb 2018 (Source: Tŷ Pawb)

Another influential factor that came to the fore during that time, according to the Council Deputy Leader, was that Wrexham's 'existing art gallery (Oriel Wrexam - which was at that time located on the Chester Street side of the People's Market) was not particularly well patronised' and needed to be developed both conceptually and as a location and destination. Before its move to Chester Street in 2015, Oriel Wrexam had been housed alongside the town's central library on Rhosddu Road for almost 40 years (Astbury 2018). It had exhibited work from some leading figures within the arts world including Mona Hatoum, Joseph Beuys, Shani Rhys James, and Rose Wylie but in 2010 the gallery lost its revenue funded status from the Arts Council of Wales which had a significant impact on its capacity and output (Hutchinson 2015).

The Council Deputy Leader felt that these two factors – the under-performing markets and the under-resourced art gallery - came together 'at the same time to enable (Tŷ Pawb) to happen.' Given that Local Authorities across Wales and the UK had been hit by significant cuts

in funding over a number of years; multidimensional and multidirectional approaches to addressing issues of well-being (as also demonstrated in Llanelli) had become ever more popular. In Wrexham it involved putting the new premises for the town's art gallery inside the market space in the hope that they might help one another by attracting different people for different reasons (Moore 2018). In addition, it was felt that the strategic location of the building itself - between the town centre and edge-of-town attractions - which, alongside the market and car park, would offer the opportunity to attract more people to the arts (Astbury 2018).



Image 20: The People's Market & car park c. 2016 (Source: Wrexham Council)

However, by bringing these two cultural assets together for the first time, it would not only pose architectural challenges, but also significant challenges from a conceptual point of view. In light of this, the Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb had developed 'strong views on how the arts and market functions of the centre would need to work together as a community.' She used the 'Useful Museum' model, as championed by Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, as a key reference point (Astbury 2018). By doing so, she was able to focus not only on developing

the practice of art within Wrexham, but also on its functional qualities by curating a programme of events and workshops that would help in the task of building community cohesion. As a result of this approach and as a reflection of the positive impact it had on the town, in 2022 Tŷ Pawb was one of five organisations shortlisted for the Museum of the Year award.

Tŷ Pawb is one of Wrexham's tallest buildings and its height was actively used as a design feature by the architects Featherstone Young to signal its presence (Astbury 2018). The idea of 'baggy space' or flexible spaces was used as a key concept within the design, and the arrangement of the market stalls were designed to reflect the spatial qualities of Wrexham's old markets and arcades (Astbury 2018). As well as housing a car park, the building also includes a large temperature-controlled gallery space that can host travelling exhibitions and a more flexible second gallery that is able to host other events such as performances or lectures. The building was awarded the Gold Medal for Architecture at the National Eisteddfod and won two awards at the Architects Journal awards in 2019.

Regarding the operational structure of this venture, the Council Deputy Lead explained that he had looked at a number of concepts that would enable it to become self-sufficient and sustainable including '(setting it up as) a standalone company, a public interest company, (and) various (other) charitable options.' However, as he was unable 'to get (any of those structures) to work at the time, (he) decided, for a period of three years, (to hold Tŷ Pawb) within the council's portfolio.' Tŷ Pawb's Chair of the Advisory Board also recognised the real challenge the project would face in terms of ensuring sustainability, especially in light of the changing landscape post-Covid. He said that 'one of the things (that the Advisory Board) was charged with was developing what they thought would be the best way of managing and running Tŷ Pawb going forward.'

In terms of activity, since opening in April 2018, Tŷ Pawb has presented more than 21 exhibitions attracting 40,213 visitors; over 160 live music events, film screenings and plays with the number of attendees exceeding 12,650; delivered 417 creative workshops that were attended by 6,254 people and over 220 family friendly activities (Ty Pawb 2019). This community-focused cultural activity has established Tŷ Pawb as a national leader for

engagement work and as testament to this has received numerous visits from galleries and local authorities across the UK (Ty Pawb 2019).



Image 21: Tŷ Pawb's useful arts space (Source: Wrexham Council)

Tŷ Pawb reported its commitment to the values of the WFGA and has worked to embed the 5 well-being goals and the 7 ways of working into its programme strategy and delivery (Ty Pawb 2020). For example, in addressing the well-being goal of achieving a Prosperous Wales, Tŷ Pawb established the Designer Maker Project that supported local people to develop practical skills for employment, with one participant moving to become a staff member at Tŷ Pawb (Ty Pawb 2020). When looking to achieve a Resilient Wales, it established the Seedlings Children's Garden Club to introduce young people to growing, garden ecosystems and outdoor creativity whilst the Older People and Living Later Life Days provided Information stalls for a range of health and social services relevant to the needs of older people in order to address the ambition of a Healthier Wales (Ty Pawb 2020).

Addressing the well-being goal of a More Equal Wales, Tŷ Pawb arranged the Sharing Stories pop-up exhibition which included work by pupils from a local school that looked at their multicultural experiences, and provided free art materials to families using Food Bank Services, to Syrian refugee families as well as free tickets for online events to enable access for those facing economic hardship as a way of addressing the goal of achieving a Wales of Cohesive Communities (Ty Pawb 2020). The well-being goal of a Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language was addressed in a number of ways including hosting shows and events as part of the Focus Wales international music showcase event, whilst the goal of a Globally Responsible Wales saw Tŷ Pawb host Print International which was established to give international print-makers the opportunity to show their work in Wales alongside Welsh and Wales-based artists (Ty Pawb 2020).

7 EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF AGENCY IN THE CASE OF TŶ PAWB

7.1 Boundaries – The First Dimension of Agency

Introduction

The analysis is divided into three parts which constitute the three dimensions of agency, as outlined in the methodology chapter. Their aim is to explain how agency operates and how it is influenced by place and vice versa. The first section looks at the first dimension of agency which is boundaries. The literature review framed the concept of boundaries as spatial representations of our intellectual understanding of place at any given time i.e. that spatial boundaries reflect dominant views and ideas of how places and people should be organised. In practice, this would mean that as all places are different, our experiences of change will also vary from place to place as would our approach to change.

The following section studies this theory in practice and considers how an agent's boundaries are reflected in their capacity and access to power and resources, which in turn impacts on the process of change. Within this dimension, the data presented three distinct strands. The first looks at the influence that culture has on people's view of and approach to change, the second considers how the context of a place influences people's capacity to act, and the third looks at how culture and capacity frame opportunities for change.

The Culture of Change – How culture influences the way people view and approach change

This first strand of this section looks at the way in which the culture of a place, as defined in the literature review, influences the way people view and approach change. There are a number of aspects of culture that could be considered within this study but, guided by the data collected, focus is placed on how the mass decline of heavy industry impacted upon and is reflected in cultural activity and expression in the town - namely football, music and art. This in turn helps to frame the cultural context around the TŶ Pawb development and partially explains the thinking behind and reaction towards the project.

In the first instance, it was particularly insightful to hear about the experiences of those who lived through the dramatic changes seen in Wrexham during the decline of heavy industry and to see how it impacted upon their life in the town. For example, the Football Correspondent moved to the old industrial village of Ruabon, located on the outskirts of Wrexham, during the late 1970s, which was 'at a point when Britain was falling into the grip of a severe recession.' He had moved from Liverpool, a place that was being 'ravaged by recession at the time... and as it happened (a similar) process was going to impact heavily on where (they) were moving to... When (he) arrived, things were starting to close, (he felt it going) through Wrexham like a virus.'

The former MP of Wrexham arrived in the town shortly after the miner's strike, and also recalled the devastating impact that the closures of large-scale employers in the area such as Brymbo Steelworks had on the place. The Programme Director of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) recognised that 'industry suffered greatly in Wrexham' which resulted in 'a lot of social tension' as the Football Correspondent recalled. Wrexham had a number of marker points on the map' including the steelworks, coal mines and breweries, but 'by '85 all of that had gone. The only thing that was left was the football club. When (he) moved to Wrexham the football club was at its absolute peak,' but he explained that it had been 'in decline since then' (until very recently, so to speak). 'The average attendance in '79 decreased from 15,000 to approximately 1500-1800 in '82/83 – (which he felt) mirrored the decline of the industry in the town.'

Although a fan of music from a very early age, the Football Correspondent didn't recall there being a strong music scene in Wrexham as he was growing up. He said that there were no venues in the town, meaning that Wrexham 'was never on the concert circuit' and as a result 'there was nowhere for bands (local or otherwise) to play.' Later during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Music Festival Organiser remembers more 'places putting on live music.' The town had also acquired 'a 500-capacity touring venue called Central Station (which was in his opinion) an excuse (for many) to drop anchor and stay in Wrexham for a number of years.' He recalled there being 'lots of young people (wanting) to be in bands, to make records, or work in the music industry' and that now 'there was an opportunity to be playing shows, (and

for) promoters to be putting on shows' there was a growing culture and capacity to maintain a sense of momentum in the scene.

The Arts Council of Wales (ACW) Leader for Tŷ Pawb also reflected upon the town's strong music scene and, along with the Head of School for the Creative Arts at Glyndŵr University, felt that over the last ten years or so the visual arts scene had also 'been developing and growing.' According to the Wrexham Councillor, the growth in this sort of activity had made the town 'feel livelier than other towns of the same size' and somewhere which the Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb felt had 'become a very viable place to (be based) as an artist.' 'Looking (at Wrexham) on a local basis', the Music Festival Organiser felt that the town had 'regenerated so much as a destination' and that this was 'as a consequence of arts projects like Tŷ Pawb, community run places like Un Deg Un (a project which will be discussed in more detail later), and others within the area.'

The growth in Wrexham's music and arts scenes created a culture in which developments such as Tŷ Pawb were made possible. With more people involved and interested in such activities, it added a certain sense of sustainability to the project. However, despite this significant change and growth in the arts and cultural scenes of the town, the Former MP for Wrexham said that 'creative people often (had) to (travel or) move away from North East Wales in order to get any work.' For example, a Wrexham-based Film Maker said he knew of several freelance cameramen who lived in Wrexham but were having to travel a great deal in order to make a living. He did however recognise the benefits of living or working in larger cities and, having had experience of this himself said that he found it to be 'quite inspiring being able to meet more like-minded people.' He said that it wasn't that he thought the people were 'any different... just (that they had been afforded the opportunity to) grow up in an environment (where) doing something like working in film or television (wasn't) impossible, it (was) a real thing.'

Reflecting on this specific experience of living in a large urban area and comparing it to how one might experience the same culture in a smaller urban setting, it's quite striking how, for example, working in television seemed like just another, quite ordinary line of work. Whereas perhaps in a smaller place, such as Wrexham, the Wrexham-based Film Maker suggested that 'you (may) know people who work for the Council, or on the industrial estate' thereby making

working in television ‘seem much more like a dream or something (you’d) have to go away to do.’ Therefore, one needs to consider why some individuals and organisations don’t move away to find opportunities but instead decide to go about trying to change the culture and create new opportunities in their own town, and why they do this in Wrexham. Frankly, the answer frequently given, by the Music Festival Organiser in our interview and more recently in the press by the new owners of Wrexham Football Club – Hollywood stars Rob McElhenney and Ryan Reynolds - is ‘why not Wrexham’, which in itself seems reflective of an increased sense of confidence in the town’s capacity.

With reference to Tŷ Pawb in particular, despite a growing interest in and engagement with the arts and cultural sector over a number of years, such a project could never come to light without the support and influence of the local Council. The Founder of an Art Co-working & Exhibition Space in Wrexham reflected upon his early years working in the arts and culture sector during the mid-2000s, a time when he felt ‘the Council were less interested in what was going on in the arts community... (and observed that) from 2011 onwards, (it appeared to take) a more open approach to the arts.’

There may be several reasons for this, but one in particular seems most probable. ‘For decades,’ the Wrexham Councillor explained ‘Wrexham Football Club (had been bringing) thousands of people into the town on match days as (were) large-scale concerts (in their grounds) during the summer... (proving to the council on many occasions) how important food and entertainment (was) and the impact it could have on the economy’ of the town. As a result of increasing prominence of the arts and culture sectors in the town, the Wrexham Councillor felt that ‘the council (was) finally waking up to the idea of this as a selling point.’

However, as noted several times throughout the literature review, there are also concerns about how the increasing emphasis on this definition of culture as the driver of change has influenced the prevalence of place-based identity in economic development policy. This approach, which involves branding or re-branding a place based on the shared interests of particular social groups, is taken in order to promote and sell it to new capital interest (Hudson 2019). The reason that this is particularly relevant in this case is that such an approach has the capacity to generate asymmetrical power relations which empower some actors over others (Pemberton 2016) thereby further emphasising the varying levels of influence and resources

available to them (Hudson 2019). This may therefore partially explain why certain sections of the community may have been opposed to the development of Tŷ Pawb (which will be discussed later in this section) – meaning that they may not have felt reflected or represented in the project.

Whilst this does provide a small insight into the industrial and cultural context of Wrexham, it has not yet (apart from a single point made in the previous chapter) discussed how these factors have influenced and impacted upon the development of Tŷ Pawb. Much like many other old industrial urban areas, the Football Correspondent explained that ‘Wrexham effectively had to reinvent itself as something completely different from the last 40 years because the stuff that everyone was doing (particularly in relation to employment had) disappeared pretty rapidly.’ ‘Wrexham used to always present itself as a big heavy industry place’ the Arts Freelancer explains, ‘where you came and did manual labour (and) that’s what it was proud of’, and so given this, a significant ‘challenge (was) that Wrexham (didn’t) have a long-standing reputation for being an arts place.’

It was therefore no surprise, according to the Council Deputy Leader, that ‘people had difficulty in seeing how (Tŷ Pawb) would fit into a town like Wrexham.’ They had also heard ‘one of the councillors (saying) that Wrexham was a fish and chips town, and (that) this was not what people wanted.’ Whilst a growing music and arts scene had generated enough cultural momentum to prove that a development such as Tŷ Pawb could potentially be maintained, the Council Deputy Leader said that they had still faced strong opposition to the project. They said that people felt it was ‘a huge waste of public money’, a point that emphasised the challenge of ‘communicating to the people of Wrexham that the concept was something that would benefit the whole community in a number of ways.’ As outlined earlier, without a long-standing reputation for being an arts place, there was a constant barrier of ‘needing to develop the public’s understanding of what you’re doing alongside doing it’, as the Arts Freelancer pointed out. The Founder of an Art Co-working & Exhibition Space felt that the ‘infrastructure (hadn’t previously) been in place to allow people to get involved (in the arts)... (something they felt may) be a barrier.’

Another aspect of Tŷ Pawb which proved to be controversial was its location which had previously been occupied by the People’s Market. The ACW Leader for Tŷ Pawb said that the

council recognised that the market was under-used, but that utilising the building's original structure would prove to be significantly challenging not only from an architectural point of view, but also 'because markets are hugely emotional in a market town like Wrexham, (and so) culling it, so to speak, (wouldn't be) an option.' In addition, and perhaps due to a lack of efficient communication, he said that 'some of the people in the market felt as if they were being forced out (although) all were told that they could come back after the work had been done.' However, it could be suggested here, as has been done previously, that this may have been a change that some felt neither reflected or represented them or was as they felt Wrexham was or should be.

As the Football Correspondent previously mentioned, 'Wrexham had a number of marker points on the map' and the markets of the town are without doubt one of those – as is the football club – that just about survived the decline of previous decades. However, it would be fair to suggest that a development such as Tŷ Pawb, and in fact any other which may impact upon the traditional workings of the market, could be seen as a threat to what was and is a significant part of the town's heritage. With that in mind, it is therefore no surprise that 'some people didn't seem to want things to change (and) weren't recognising that what was there wasn't really working' as the ACW Leader for Tŷ Pawb pointed out. Therefore, despite claims by many - including the ACW Leader for Tŷ Pawb - that the project was 'trying to do something positive and (that it was felt that) Wrexham deserved better', some may have felt that this unfamiliar narrative (of arts and culture being a driver of change) and unfamiliar approach (i.e. merging the arts with the traditional historic market format) was too far a leap for Wrexham to take.

Although, as the ACW Leader for Tŷ Pawb pointed out, there was '(initial) opposition from people in the town' to the development, the Council Deputy Leader felt that 'by and large, people (had by now) accepted that the concept (was) achieving a lot of what it said it would achieve.' A specific aspect that 'won over the councillors' according to the Council Deputy Leader was 'the fact that (Tŷ Pawb had) done a lot of free family events on Saturdays and during the school holidays. This was an important social innovation because it helped to embed the arts into the culture of the town and helped to overcome the view that the arts weren't for everyone. The feedback that the councillors (had received) as a result (was)

exceptionally positive - (they felt that it) brought people full circle to appreciating what Tŷ Pawb (could) offer.' The Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb said that these events had 'become an invaluable resource for families and (that families were their) most significant audience... and biggest advocates.'

The Capacity to Act - How the context of a place influences people's capacity to act

This second section looks at how the context of a place influences people's capacity to act in order to generate change. Guided by the data collected during the interviewing process, it focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of Wrexham's economy and infrastructure which will frame the wider context relating to Tŷ Pawb. This will then help explain why and how the project was developed and also provide insights into certain place-based factors which have helped facilitate and hinder the process of change.

Looking broadly at the economic context of the town, Wrexham's former MP said that it was 'very mixed in terms of its economic performance.' He said that 'unemployment figures for Wrexham over the last 20 years (were) relatively low for the most part and that there (were) a lot of jobs in the (town's) economy.' As is also the case with Llanelli, the former MP said that Wrexham 'had the background of manufacturing (and) a workforce (which was) seen as skilled and responsive.' He said that it had 'a lot to offer to those who (were) highly skilled... and (that it wasn't) difficult to get people to move (and that he felt it to be) quite an attractive place to live... (located) close to beautiful countryside.'

The Founder of a Coworking Space said that 'in terms of (Wrexham's) economy, the industrial estate located on the outskirts of the town (was) a massive powerhouse for jobs and opportunities.' The Head of Economic Development and Regeneration at Wrexham Council said that they had 'targeted works in (their) industrial estate to ensure that (they had) the appropriate accommodation, road networks and support systems' in place in order to attract businesses. The Chair of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board felt that Wrexham was a town with a lot of potential. He spoke of how it had 'transitioned from this largely extraction and industrial manufacturing into much cleaner, much more technically based manufacturing.'

The Programme Director of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) spoke of the 'foundation of history, knowledge and skills in the energy industry (that had been) built up (in the wider region) over the last 15 and more years.' To place this in context, the NWEAB is another growth driven City Deal, similar to the Swansea Bay City Deal of which Pentre Awel is a part, between the partnering Local Authorities, the Welsh Government and the UK Government. Although there are no projects based in the town, Wrexham's Glyndŵr University is the strategic leader for a £30m development located in the small city of St Asaph, which is approximately 40 miles from Wrexham.

When the Former MP arrived in Wrexham in 1986, he said that 'there was already a substantial redevelopment of the town centre underway.' He felt that 'there were problematic aspects to it in that it didn't take place as quickly as it should have done' and that although 'an awful lot of money (had) been spent on redevelopment,' he was concerned that 'there (had) been no cohesive plan over that period.' He felt it to be 'quite striking (that) when (he) stood down, the town centre issue was probably the main issue related to the town that concerned people.' It's therefore important to emphasise the point that improving the economic and social dynamics of the town centre was a key factor in driving the development of Tŷ Pawb.

The previous section spoke of a growing culture and capacity within Wrexham to maintain a sense of momentum in the arts and cultural sectors. It also discussed how this kind of momentum could also reflect and influence economic development. When the interview with the Chair of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board was conducted, Hollywood stars Rob McElhenney and Ryan Reynolds had just taken over as Co-Chairmen of Wrexham Football Club that very week. Beyond a business and football perspective, it's interesting to reflect upon why Wrexham was chosen for this investment. McElhenney had mentioned several times in passing that the town and people of Wrexham reminded him a great deal of his hometown of Philadelphia, and that this may be partly rooted in his experience as an avid fan of NFL team the Philadelphia Eagles. It could even be suggested that having a deep understanding of the dynamics of sports fan culture and knowing how deeply rooted it is in place from a cultural perspective may have played a significant part in influencing his decision to invest in Wrexham.

Looking back on conversations with the Football Correspondent about how the decline of the football team reflected the decline of industry, it could also be said that this most recent investment in the town's culture also reflected the town's growing economic capacity. In fact, the Council Deputy Leader said that 'there (was a) significant amount of interest and investment in Wrexham' which, once again, shows momentum to be a key factor in change and instigator thereof.

Having considered the role of the arts and cultural sectors in influencing the wider economics of Wrexham, it's also important to look at the factors which have facilitated and hindered this process. The Founder of Art Co-working & Exhibition Space Un Deg Un cited securing and maintaining access to funding as the greatest barrier to his building the project. He said that 'the problem with (this), especially from an ACW perspective' which he understood to be very important, was that funders 'want to know exactly what you're going to spend (the money) on before you spend it. They want you to be able to predict three and twelve months into the future' which he found very difficult. Therefore, although he understood the reasoning behind this approach by ACW, he felt that the structures in place didn't really allow room for creativity or for projects such as theirs to develop in a more organic way.

At the beginning of his journey, a number of factors had influenced his direction of travel. Driven by a vision of integrating the arts community of Wrexham, he had already begun building a network of organisations, businesses, and individuals. Therefore, on embarking upon the Un Deg Un project, doors which may initially have been closed were already open to him – i.e. a means of gaining rapid access to small pots of funding from the ACW. He had made some contacts within Glyndŵr University's School for the Creative Arts and was therefore able to collaborate in an activity which brought 'their graduate show out of the art school for the first time ever – something they'd been really keen to do.'

Indeed, it would be fair to say that the Un Deg Un project in particular has laid much of the groundwork for the building of a sense of community, collaboration and camaraderie within the arts and cultural communities in Wrexham, and that such factors have contributed significantly to the growing sense of vibrancy and vitality within the town. Activity of this kind has also helped Wrexham to rebuild and reclaim its identity and confidence and make projects such as Tŷ Pawb seem like a natural progression. The Wrexham Councillor recognised

that in order to encourage change, it was important for a place to focus upon its 'strengths and build on them in terms of culture, entertainment and sports, and (so) create the kind of economy that (was needed).'

Other agents which have played a key role in increasing arts and cultural activity and visibility in Wrexham are related to Glyndŵr University - particularly agents within the School of Creative Arts. The Head of School at the School of Creative Arts said that 'there was already a well-established art school in Wrexham (when he arrived in 2000, and that), it had a good reputation (and) a range of creative courses, but it didn't have a fine art course' and so they 'were employed, along with another member of staff, to set up that programme.' Additionally, in 2006 Glyndŵr University (then known as North East Wales Institute) became fully accredited by the University of Wales, meaning that it was able to deliver and validate its own degrees as previously degrees had to be validated by other institutions. Therefore, this slow yet certain rise in the town's confidence and status was also reflected in the educational sector of Wrexham.

The Music Festival Organiser recalled moving to Wrexham 'because Yale College (now Coleg Cambria) had some music-based courses' which he felt were a 'big pull'. He said that it had resulted in a 'whole bunch of people (moving to) Wrexham that otherwise wouldn't have been there... (including) people from other parts of Wales and across the border... so it (became) a real hive of music talent.' Later, he 'went (back) to university as a mature student in Wrexham... (where he had) the opportunity to explore (ideas relating to) the future of the music industry as part of (his) dissertation.' This in turn encouraged and empowered him and his colleagues to create Focus Wales – which is an international music showcasing festival. He had experienced and recognised that 'the environment in Wales didn't have the infrastructure (and) wasn't quite set up as well as it could be' and concluded that one way to address these issues was to 'just have a go' at doing it himself.

'On a really practical level', he said that 'one of the things (he had struggled) with (in Wrexham was that) the infrastructure – venues and bars often (weren't) adequately equipped so it (meant that he had) to spend a lot more money to be able to showcase bands properly.' Having travelled to other showcasing festivals in towns and cities around the world, he was increasingly frustrated to see that other places had grant schemes for which venues could

apply in order to address such issues. Whilst the founders of Focus Wales have done much to enable Wrexham to host such events, the Arts Freelancer pointed out that there was 'a critical mass of how big an arts event (could) become' in the town. He said that 'Focus Wales fills every hotel and Airbnb in Wrexham and more or less hits every venue's capacity' meaning that 'the infrastructure of the town sets a limit on how big the event (could) become.'

According to the Arts Freelancer, this also has an impact in as much as it 'puts (events) in a certain bracket' in terms of the 'sponsorship revenue (they're) likely to bring in, (which) then dictates what (their) growth potential might be.' He cited another event – i.e. Wales Comicon – which had been established in Wrexham but was subsequently relocated as it had grown too large for the town. This move had been necessary as 'Wrexham could no longer handle the volume of people coming in - the train services, the size of the biggest town centre venues, the car parking - they couldn't cope with the volume of traffic.' Wrexham's Former MP also said that 'many of the problems on the edge of the town (were) related to congestion (and a) lack of public transport', an infrastructural issue which he felt the Welsh Government should play an important role in addressing.

The Wrexham Councillor felt that 'Wrexham as a county (should) be seen as a city in terms of population.' He pointed out that 'there (were many) post-industrial towns within 5 miles of Wrexham – (and that) in Cardiff they'd be considered the suburbs – (and therefore) a network of transport (should be created) that (would) allow people to easily come to the centre to work or enjoy.' With further regard to Wrexham's capacity for hosting large-scale events, the Arts Freelancer said that Focus Wales and Wales Comicon had 'stimulated a big debate' on whether they should 'accept that the most the town could hold (at any one time was) 10,000 to 15,000 people or look at innovative ways of increasing the capacity of the town.' If we accept this, events such as Focus Wales - that were established in Wrexham in order to address specific sector-related issues in the town – would therefore need to actively decide whether to stay in Wrexham and work through a solution or relocate entirely.

The Framing of Opportunity – How the culture and capacity of a place frames opportunity

The final section of this chapter looks at how the culture and capacity of a place – as outlined in the previous sections – frames opportunities for agents. Guided by the data collected during the interviewing process, it focuses on establishing why and when agents recognise opportunities for change. An example of this became clear during an interview with the Founder of a Co-working Space in Wrexham. He recalled a time when he ‘went out for a friend’s birthday party,’ and said that at ‘every bar that (they) went in to, (they) could hear people say, “Wrexham is such a shit hole”.’ He added that ‘the reason why everyone thinks it’s a shit hole is because they keep calling it that, and unless they would do something about it then it will always be that way.’ Such a perception of place suggests helplessness when it comes to the process of change, implying that there is either ‘no way for the community to take action’, or that change is something to be observed and accepted rather than instigated.

It was on hearing this that the concept of opportunity (within the confines of this research) and the factors which frame it came to the fore. The exact issue is not whether Wrexham is as these individuals claim or to the contrary, but rather that they are resigned to change as a process beyond their reach and control. Change is also seen as one large event as opposed to a number of smaller, more manageable processes rendering the very notion of instigating meaningful change as remote and far-fetched. Such a stance has a huge impact on how the culture and the capacity of a place frames change and opportunity, and this of course affects different people in different ways.

An agent of change may therefore be seen as someone who can recognise opportunity and feels able to influence change. For example, the Founder of a Co-working Space felt that when people reflect on certain issues in the town, ‘there’s a sense that *the council should do something about this*’, and that the governing authorities are the only ones who know how to change things. In reality however, he recognised that, ‘it’s the people who have the power, but they just don’t realise.’ Therefore, from this agent’s point of view, one could suggest that the aim of change is to create opportunities that help others ‘to find the agency they had all along.’

By way of another example, when the Arts Freelancer returned to Wrexham after a period away studying for a Degree at Durham University, he was 'struck by the changes that had been made to the high street' following the recession. He recalled the successful Empty Shop project in Durham that had focused on 'sub-letting (empty premises) to creatives to regenerate the high street' and felt that this sort of activity could help change the fortunes of Wrexham's high street. Upon returning, he also became aware of a similar activity 'going on at the university where people from the art and illustration departments were using market stalls as studios.' However, he said that the university 'weren't doing (it) with regeneration of the town in mind, (but were just using the markets) as interesting places to sit and work.'

He then began viewing this venture by the art and illustration departments as a steppingstone towards building the kind of network of activity that may have a positive impact on the town. As a result, he and 'a small group of other people campaigned to get use of unoccupied retail premises in the town and bring artists and performers into them.' He trialled it for a year, 'testing concepts and playing', which enabled him to meet 'lots of people at the university' and many others within the arts community within Wrexham and beyond. They 'started to support one another in furthering the opportunities for more creative things to happen in the town centre', and have been 'cooperating like that, ever since.' Therefore, by connecting these experiences with an observation of the changes seen in Wrexham, and utilizing the agent's drive for building collective capacity, a potential opportunity for change is created. This emphasises a key point regarding the role of external knowledge in influencing change and demonstrates the impact that agents can have when sharing and tailoring ideas and practices from elsewhere.

The previous section discussed the experience of the Music Festival Organiser and his journey towards building capacity for change. However, it is worth considering the actual point at which an agent decides or recognises that he is building capacity which has the potential to influence change? As the Founder of a Co-working Space had suggested; if people had agency all along, why didn't they know this? In the case of Focus Wales, although they had 'planted the seed and discussed (the idea) a lot' over a long period of time, they felt that 'the only thing that held (them) back was confidence....' It was their view that this made them question whether it was '(their) place to do it' at all. After almost a decade of experiencing the shortfalls

of the music industry in Wrexham and ‘moaning that something like Focus Wales didn’t exist’ and that no one else was going to make the changes that they wished to see, they began planning their first edition of the festival in 2010.

Prior to establishing Un Deg Un, the Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space had been working for a number of years within the arts community in Wrexham leading various projects and initiatives. Through that work he ‘could already see the groups (and networks) forming’ in Wrexham and just felt that the sector ‘needed a bit of a push to bring things together.’ He felt that ‘the opportunity was waiting, but (that) there wasn’t really anybody else in the position to be able to do it in the way that (they were) able to... to take the risk (and) to make it happen.’ Un Deg Un ‘provided for the first time a base for the arts scene in Wrexham... (and) a focus for the artistic talent.’

From this agent’s point of view, one might infer that the aim of change here was to connect the artistic community and share knowledge and resources in order to build collective capacity. On reflecting upon his ability to drive change where others failed, there seemed to be several factors at play the most notable of which were the drive and experience of the agent in question. By bringing likeminded people together he was able to have a direct influence on the capacity of the arts community to affect change in their town. As a result of this activity, the Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb said that ‘it felt like the momentum was building; (more) graduates were staying, and people were moving (to Wrexham) because of what was happening.’ Another incentive to stay or move to Wrexham would no doubt be associated with lower living costs compared to that of those in larger urban areas such as Manchester or Liverpool.

The Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb felt that Un Deg Un ‘was a real step change as it meant (that there were) affordable studio spaces and accessible opportunities to exhibit.’ The Head of School of Creative Arts said that ‘a lot of (their) ex-students had studio spaces there’, and that much of the activity that was taking place at the time ‘made artists feel like there (were) possibilities for them and ways to make a living from their practise.’ The Music Festival Organiser also saw the opportunities that this new arts community presented and felt that Un Deg Un was a space that he too could use, thereby bringing more of the creative community together.

The steady increase in artistic activity and the merging of creative expression created more opportunities and capacity for change. In the case of Tŷ Pawb, the context in which this development was to take place was already emerging. Not only was the arts community growing closer and building networks, but the Local Authority (LA) was also researching how to counter the poor performance and under-utilisation of the People's Market and the lack of premises for the LA's art gallery – then known as Oriel Wrexham. As the Council Deputy Leader pointed out, it's not as if 'somebody sat down in Cardiff and drew a plan for Wrexham... that (would) solve the market problem (and) the art gallery problem - it didn't happen in a way like that... It all sort of pulled together at the right time.'

By building networks and nurturing a capacity for making change, agents began to learn from each other and understand how to cooperate in order to maximise their opportunities. The Arts Freelancer and Head of School of Creative Arts both cited the town's small scale as being a key asset when attempting to influence and drive change. According to the Arts Freelancer, 'the art community (was) quite tight knit and it (was) relatively easy to get direct access to people (in authority)... it (didn't) take too long to get a sit-down meeting with the person who (could) say yes or no.' They felt that 'if (they) lived in Cardiff or London, it might take years' to gain access to key agents. The Head of School of Creative Arts said that there was 'something about the size of the place, the relationship (people had) with each other - the council, the university, and the arts organisations' – that made 'nurturing those relationships' seem very manageable.

The Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space said that his father was a businessman in Wrexham who 'was quite well-known in the town which (in turn) helped (him) to make connections... Wherever (his Father) went, he would be surrounded by people who knew him and would get involved in slightly mad projects.' He said that he 'always saw that as a bit of a blueprint.' Therefore because of the influence of a family member, and his own experience of having worked within the Local Authority, he found the Local Authority to be 'quite a receptive audience' that was 'easy to work with.' Unlike the Music Festival Organiser, who had no first-hand history of approaching and accessing agents, the Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space had absolute confidence in his capacity and ability to instigate and influence change in Wrexham. This is not to dismiss nor undermine the work of either

agent, just to emphasise the additional steps that agents without contacts are required to take.

Therefore, there are a number of avenues to follow regarding this research when reflecting directly upon the agents involved in changing Wrexham. Firstly, there is Glyndŵr University and more specifically, the School of Creative Arts. The Arts Freelancer felt that 'the art school itself (was) a major physical presence in the town centre' as well as a 'major source of artists who (were) populating projects.' Another clear agent would be the Local Authority. The ACW Leader for Tŷ Pawb said that the Council Deputy Leader was particularly influential with regard to this project. In addition, the ACW Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb referred to the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration's 'drive and determination' as crucial to driving the project and ensuring that they 'finished it on time and to budget.' Another key agent, according to the Arts Freelancer was the Town Centre Manager, who was 'one of the first people (he had) met when (he) started looking for a way to bring art into the town.'

The Wrexham-based Film Maker cited the Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space as a key agent of change. His was a name continuously mentioned during interviews as someone who had played a central role in helping to build an arts community in Wrexham. The Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space cited the former Director of Oriol Wrexham as a key agent in exploring activity that engaged more actively with the public (something that had not really been explored prior to his appointment) as well as expanding the scope of the arts community in the town. The ACW Leader for Tŷ Pawb said that the Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb, who had previously worked alongside the former Director of Oriol Wrexham, had played a pivotal role in driving 'the community side of things' within the organisation.

One might liken the journey of these agents to that of a large ship changing course with the former Director of Oriol Wrexham as the agent who had initiated the change, as it had been he who had recognised the necessity of changing the way in which art both in practice and as a concept is perceived. The Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space had specified the direction and driven those required changes and the arts community had fuelled the engine. Had there not been the vision that change was required, the motivation to drive it and the stamina to see it through, Tŷ Pawb (in its current form) may never have existed.

These agents have each played a part in rebuilding and establishing new ‘marker points on the map’ of Wrexham and driving the agenda for change. Different agents have had different capacities; some were in a position of authority or had experience of or exposure to other agents, whilst others built their networks and capacity in order to influence the kind of change, they felt was needed. In the case of Tŷ Pawb, the context in which it developed was heavily dependent on and influenced by the artistic community’s own journey towards change.

7.2 Perceptions – The Second Dimension of Agency

Introduction

This section looks at the second dimension of agency. The literature review presented perceptions as being related to our experiences and discussed their impact on our reactions and approaches to change. The following section considers the extent to which an agent’s experience impacts on his approach to change and looks at how these approaches evolve over time. It also considers how his approach plays a role in changing the perceptions of others. Within this dimension, the data presented three distinct strands. The first looks at the perception of change as an opportunity, the second looks at the perception of change as a challenge, and the third considers the perception of change as a threat.

Change as an Opportunity – How confidence promotes and facilitates opportunity

Much of this thesis has focused on trying to understand why and how places differ and the impact that this has on the pace and direction of change. Whilst this is incredibly important, it is also important to recognise the many similarities between the numerous factors that constitute places. Upon moving to Wrexham in 2001, the Head of School for the Creative Arts at Glyndŵr University said that ‘it was always one of those places that (he would) never go to, but (that) when (he) went, (he had) discovered that it was very familiar.’ He hailed from ‘Stalybridge in Greater Manchester, which is an old industrial town, home of the union

movement... (a place where there are) lots of dark satanic mills (and) old Victorian cotton mills. So when (he) came to Wrexham, (he was) quite surprised to see how similar it was to the towns of northwest England.'

These similarities will of course be partly related to physical and visual factors such as architecture – as mentioned above, but overall, it could be said that it is the sense of place, the way one feels being there, and the way that people interact with each other that conjures up feelings of familiarity. The Head of School described Wrexham as having 'a roughness to the light', words that somehow evoke a delicate sense of balance between the past and the future. So how much time needs to pass in order for one to gain a sense of perspective on the history of a place? Has it something to do with losing and regaining certain connections with a specific place, perhaps discovering something new about its past that somehow feels relevant at that precise moment?

After they had shared an old photograph of the Art School (located on Regent Street) on social media, the Head of School said that they were pleasantly 'surprised at how many Likes it got' but were more taken aback by 'the comments that people shared – (things such as) I love this place, or it's home to me, or it changed my life.' There is often the temptation to feel that things never change, that places remain static and become stale, especially when one hasn't been afforded the opportunity to gain a sense of perspective be it through the passing of time or distance from the place in question. However, the above example demonstrates how a simple thing such as an old photograph can conjure up feelings about a place that one didn't know one even had. The Head of School said that 'if the only thing you know is your own patch and you don't have the confidence, you're going to self-denigrate', and this idea of confidence as a driver of change and instigator of opportunity is crucial to this section of the chapter.

In terms of trying to measure – in very broad and basic terms - the overall confidence levels of Wrexham town in its own identity, one need only look at the changing fate of the local football club over the last 40-50 years. The Football correspondent from Wrexham recalled 'a time then where you would be ridiculed for saying that you were a Wrexham supporter. Nobody in the (nearby) village (in which they lived) would go to watch Wrexham, (they were one in a group of) two or three that used to go and were regarded as being strange creatures

because everyone (else) was a Liverpool, Man U or Everton fan... (Yet) football was in the DNA of that area... it developed in that part of Wales... before most places in the world.' As previously mentioned, Wrexham AFC was founded in 1864, it is the third oldest professional football club in the world and the oldest in Wales (Wrexham AFC 2022).

However, the confidence in and sense of ownership of this history is only now gathering steam. The Head of Economic Development and Regeneration at Wrexham Council said that they were 'working with Welsh Government to develop a football museum in Wrexham' something they felt was 'quite a significant regeneration project.' And of course, fairly recently, the football club itself had acquired new owners – i.e. two Hollywood stars Rob McElhenney and Ryan Reynolds - and was, at the time of writing in 2022, on the verge of returning to League Two from the National League for the first time in almost 15 years. Unfortunately, it had narrowly missed out to Grimsby Town in the play-off finals, however it was an entirely different story in 2023 when, in dramatic fashion, they won the league title. But it is fair to say that the confidence of the football team and its supporters is higher than it has been in decades. Yet it cannot be said that this lack of confidence and belief in Wrexham was necessarily all self-inflicted or self-imposed: there were many external factors and forces at work.

For example, as the Football correspondent pointed out, 'Sharp sponsoring the Manchester United shirt coincided with them starting up in Wrexham (Industrial Estate, and although) Brother (who sponsored Manchester City and who were also based in Wrexham Industrial Estate) had advertising boards in Wrexham (they) never had any involvement in the sponsorship of Wrexham at all. In fact, none of the multinationals that have been in Wrexham have ever been near the football club in terms of sponsorship deals.' So, whilst the town in which these companies were located had a thriving football club, it was more important for them to sponsor the larger, more well-known football clubs located further down the road. Although one might not be able to argue against this approach in wider economic terms, on reflection it could be seen to be somewhat of a vote against Wrexham in terms of confidence – not only from a footballing perspective, but also from the perspective of the town itself.

Yet this notion of large multinational companies sponsoring some of the biggest football clubs in the world merely reflects the dominant idea of our times that bigger equals better – that

scale trumps all. This indeed reflects the story of many smaller urban areas and old industrial towns like Wrexham. They feel forgotten and left behind compared with the larger urban areas because most of the time, in terms of policy and global market trends, they simply are – which of course would do very little to boost anyone’s confidence. Therefore, the story of Wrexham has been one of a journey towards rebuilding the confidence it once had and changing on its own terms and according to its own vision, and this is where the idea of arts and culture as a driver of such change comes into the conversation. Indeed, in order for a person to recognise or create opportunity, he must first feel that he has some agency and influence, and when confidence is low, there will surely be very little agency.

The Music Festival Organiser in Wrexham recalled his own experience as a young musician from Wrexham saying that ‘a key component in the journey of (his) band was (playing at the) Manchester in the City Festival which is where (he) got picked up (by a record label). This single experience, beyond Wrexham, not only gave his band the opportunity to tour the world, it also gave him the confidence to believe that he could make an impact on the music industry. It was also the seed that generated the idea of creating what would later become the FOCUS Wales international music showcasing festival in Wrexham: a move that would directly challenge the aforementioned notion of scale being the dominant factor required for success.

And whilst he was often asked why such an event should take place in Wrexham – perhaps as opposed to larger Welsh cities such as Cardiff, he persevered in his quest to create international opportunities for local bands and musicians. He found that as he began to ‘merit a bit of support (initially from the Arts Council of Wales and later the Welsh Government) to develop, (he found himself) able to access more support’, and so the festival grew ‘in an organic way, slowly gathering the trust of fans and the wider industry.’ He attributed much of his success to ‘making sure (that he had) enough people in that space that (he) trusted who (were) only going to voice an opinion based on wanting to make a situation better... (as well as) opening up the communication channels with other people in the same boat.’

The Founder of an Art Co-working & Exhibition Space in Wrexham said that he had ‘always been involved in the arts – directing plays and putting on events and gigs in school. (He said that he) did a similar thing in university – getting involved with a tight-knit eccentric group (of

people) who were working on the fringes of things that were exciting and interesting. From a personal perspective, (he felt that it was always) about wanting to be a part of a community of creative people.’ Jane Jacobs often spoke of that idea of diversity as being the driving force for vitality, creativity, and cohesion in places – be it diversity of people, ideas or buildings. The Founder of an Art Co-working & Exhibition Space sensed this diversity in Wrexham and said that ‘exciting things (were) happening but (that it wasn’t) being pulled together.’ There was a sense that ‘a lot of people tended to do things in silos’ whilst he himself preferred to ‘bring people together’.

He became involved in the arts and music communities and began collaborating with a number of different individuals and organisations in the town - including Oriel Wrexham as well as the Council itself – on various projects in order to engage the wider community in the arts. He had collaborated with a local Arts Freelancer, who himself ‘ran a project (mentioned previously) that brought the arts community into (one of the town’s) markets... empty stalls were taken up by artists (placing them in) a prime space in Wrexham.’ This also played on the idea of bringing people out of their silos and added a new dynamic to a traditional market space. The Wrexham Resident and Film Maker felt that being active within his field and community was an important aspect of collaboration, and said that ‘when you’re non-stop doing stuff, you end up meeting people along the way.’

The Arts freelancer was of the opinion that the arts and cultural sectors had played a leading role in helping to rebuild the town’s confidence. He said that ‘what’s been interesting in Wrexham is it hasn’t been a top-down thing’ and emphasised that ‘there hadn’t been a local government decision that the arts (were) the future. In Wrexham’ they felt that change had been led by ‘a growing group of people who lived in the town and who (were) committed to making (things) happen - and bringing the decision makers along with them.’ Whilst ‘a lot of the decision makers (had) been very supportive’ he said that the direction of change had been led by a number of people within the artistic community. One could indeed argue that this was one of the most distinctive aspects of agency within this case study – i.e. that the initiative stemmed not from any level of government but from civil society actors who were learning to act in a concerted manner and mobilising political support in the process.

Of course, whilst these agents of change may have driven the direction of change to a significant degree, their commitment to finding ways of working and collaborating with the relevant governing authorities has been a key aspect of their success. It may well be that the traditional dynamics within some departments of these governing authorities also evolved because of or even despite of this new way of working. The Town Centre Manager for Wrexham Council recognised that ‘things (had) changed dramatically over the last four to five years... (and said that there was now) ‘a better relationship between the private and public sector’ noting that the council had ‘taken steps to ensure this’. She said that ‘prior to this, the private sector would be consulted (on related matters) but (that) the public sector would make the decision’ but she felt that this dynamic had changed a fair amount. Whilst there may be room on another occasion to discuss the merit of further involvement from the private sector in public sector-led work, one thing that can certainly be said is that the spirit of collaboration within the arts community, seems to have seeped more broadly into the town’s way of working, which can only be a positive thing.

This notion of collaboration, of being able to approach potential partners with the confidence and knowledge that working together would be to everyone’s benefit is most certainly something that was clear to see within the artistic community. The Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space said that he took on four empty units in Wrexham for arts-based activity and was able to ‘help the landlords by working with their prospective tenants to bring them in to Wrexham... (He) provided direct help to the tenants, showing them around the town, talking about economic growth and what was going on socially.’ He felt that ‘it was really important for them to have that local view.’ The Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space said that according to the landlord, ‘they would usually send an agent from Manchester who (didn’t) really know Wrexham, (but had since recognised) the value of having someone who was attuned to the town on a local level.’

The health of the town centre in both social and economic terms is also a reoccurring theme throughout this case study. In fact, the Arts Council for Wales (ACW) Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb said of the development that because it was ‘central and Eagle’s Meadow (a large shopping complex that opened in 2008) was a little bit set aside - footfall tended to go around there.’ The idea of Tŷ Pawb ‘was to circulate people through the town a bit better’. The Chair

of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board recalled that 'Tŷ Pawb was established in a part of Wrexham (Chester Street) that had been quite rundown, (but had since) been revitalised.' He also noted that 'Techniquet (which is a science and discovery centre now known as Xplore) had moved from the (Wrexham Glyndwr University) campus onto Chester Street... opposite Tŷ Pawb' and that they were planning to collaborate in the future.

The growing culture of collaboration in Wrexham may have been driven in part by the town's small scale – knowing that there just weren't enough people to sustain any isolated development or enterprise and understanding that the only way they could thrive was by collaborating. The Arts Freelancer commented on the matter saying that 'everyone is involved in everyone else's projects. He said that 'there (was) quite a strong sense of community which (he thought was) the main reason why Wrexham (was) able to punch above its weight.' He felt that there wasn't 'great competition going on between the major cultural bodies and (various) projects' and said that in fact, it was 'on the contrary, (and that people were) usually dedicating a lot of time and money to each other's work.'

This spirit of collaboration generates a need for people to understand each other. When collaboration is based on a mutual aim or vision, this understanding is far clearer and less complex. However, when the aim and vision is new or not understood, the idea of collaborating appears far less beneficial to potential partners. This, possibly, was part of the challenge for Tŷ Pawb – i.e. how could it become and present itself as a space that would encourage, build and create a collective and collaborative environment that was reflective of this emerging spirit in Wrexham? The ACW Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb recognised that the approach taken by the new Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb would be extremely beneficial to the development. She was 'interested in the *Art Útil* movement (which professes that art should always be) something useful', and so her overall vision was for Tŷ Pawb to become 'Wales' useful institution'. The ACW Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb said that the Creative Director was 'keen to develop exhibitions that (had) relevance to the local community... (that, rather than presenting) art for art's sake, (were presenting) arts with a community drive' which she felt was 'a key shift in Wrexham.'

One of the ways in which this manifested was by creating play areas within the building. The Chair of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board said that 'Wrexham (was) a leader in the adventure

playground world – (which involved) creating play areas out of old materials (like) wood (and) metal.’ The Council Deputy Leader also spoke of this ‘children’s programme exhibition (that) was produced by local children and local playgroups’, and the Chair of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board said that over 10,000 people had visited that particular exhibition. He felt that it ‘was the start of something good, because it said to people (that Tŷ Pawb was) not just an arts centre, but (also) a play centre. It (was) somewhere where families (could) come to, (where) they (could) be together safely. From that moment on’ he felt that the development had ‘moved forward.’

Change as a Challenge – How low confidence levels presents change as a challenge

A change of any kind is challenging. For an individual it’s a struggle but for a collective or a community, the struggle is even greater. The way in which people perceive themselves, the place in which they live and their standing within it all play a part in shaping when, if and how places change. The Former MP for Wrexham stated that ‘that piece of work – in terms of how (they wanted) to present Wrexham to the outside world - (had) never been done’, something they felt was ‘hugely important’. One of the main reasons for establishing a brand (for want of a better word) for Wrexham would be to draw more people and investment into the town. The Head of Economic Development and Regeneration for Wrexham Council felt that ‘Wrexham (should) be an attractive place for students to want to come to’ and of course the way in which the town was presented would play a key role in influencing any student’s decision to move there.

The Wrexham Councillor felt that one of the main problems with Wrexham in the past was that it had always been compared to Chester. He said that ‘many people from Wrexham (would) choose to go out to socialise in Chester because there (was more) choice.’ This idea of comparing oneself to another, of feeling ‘less than’ goes back to an idea mentioned in the previous section, concerning confidence levels. If confidence has been lacking in Wrexham, one might firstly ask the reason for this. Whilst there may well be an endless list of contributing factors, industrial decline would certainly come out on top. As the Football Correspondent said, ‘if you go right back in time and look at the (ironworks) in Bersham (which

were) manufacturing cannons for the French Revolution, (it was felt that) Wrexham had a sort of footnote in history.’ By now, however, everything related to that history has ‘gone’.

The Football Correspondent recalled that ‘when the heavy industry went, Wrexham had two or three horrendous years, but then (the governing authorities) gradually started to lure people in ... The two big names that came in at the time were Brother and Sharp (as previously mentioned) which were major Japanese companies.’ Whilst these companies most certainly had a significant economic impact on the town, it could be suggested (as argued in the previous section regarding the football club) that they may not have really invested in the place itself. This being the case, can economic investment alone ever really change how a place feels about itself and boost confidence and agency? Surely, this would ultimately need to come from the people themselves.

It could also be suggested that these low levels of confidence also aligned with the low levels of collaboration and cooperation seen within the town. The Former MP for Wrexham recognised that one of the main challenges of the past was that ‘the relationship between the university and the businesses in the area (was very weak).’ He said that ‘historically, the businesses that used universities for R&D used universities away from northeast Wales - firstly because there wasn’t one (Glyndŵr University only became a fully accredited institution in 2006) and secondly because (it was felt that) they didn’t have the academics that could merit their attention (at the time).’ When asked whether the university had played a prominent role as an agent of change in Wrexham over recent years, the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration said that in the past they had tried ‘to keep everything on campus... and kept themselves quite isolated... which (they felt had not been) helpful for the town.’ She did however add that by now, the university was ‘influencing change and (was working far more) closely with (the council than it had in the past).’

Whilst there may well be a lot of work to do in this regard i.e. – in terms of building the spirit of collective thinking and collaborative working between town and gown - there does appear to have been some progress, especially at school level with regard to the work of The School of Creative Arts – as mentioned in the previous section. The Head of Economic Development and Regeneration said that should the Campus 2025 strategy (an £80m investment by the university to enhance the learning environment and local region) be delivered as it has been

outlined, 'the arts school (located) just on the periphery of the town... (would become even) more integrated into the town centre... (which) would bring a better connection' between the students and the local population and more broadly between the university and the town itself.

This change in the culture of collaboration, as mentioned in the previous section, was also reflected in the relationship between the council and local businesses. The Town Centre Manager said that they (the council and local businesses) were, at the time of the interview, 'in the process of putting in a BID (Business Improvement District) together which four or five years ago, businesses (wouldn't) want to do as they (would have felt such work to be) the Council's responsibility (whereas) now they (saw) the benefits it could bring. She recognised that this was a 'shift in their mindset (and that she could see that) businesses were really wanting Wrexham to do well.'

So what exactly makes collaborating or working together difficult or seem difficult? The Music Festival Organiser said that he could 'think of a couple of examples (of other organisations that kept) hitting challenges' and put it down to their 'inability to open up'. He said that he himself had 'always sought advice and consultancy from experienced people... by asking questions and trying to be polite, not (being) too forceful but insisting (that he) got the answers so that (he) could make what (he wanted) to make happen.' For him it was about 'constantly looking for a solution and trying to create an answer for the problem' and also surrendering 'to the fact that sometimes things are going to change, be out of (your) control and (that you would need to learn to) trust the people around you.'

He also recognised that for some, not reaching out for advice was related to issues of confidence, 'like school children (being) scared of putting their hand up, (feeling) stupid if (they) didn't know the answer.' When he was 'starting out (and applying) for grants for the first time, (he felt as though he were) begging (which made him feel) uncomfortable and nervous', however he soon recognised that this was all part of the process of driving change. He 'asked everyone for advice and for their opinions and learnt that if something didn't quite work out (he) made sure (that he) understood' the reason for this. It could therefore be said that, for him, it wasn't necessarily just about achieving a certain goal, but was also about understanding the process of change, accepting and rising to the challenges, and learning

from mistakes along the way. From an agency perspective, it becomes clearer that real change can only happen when people are open, willing, and able to learn, are not too afraid of making mistakes and recognise that making mistakes is a part of the learning process.

The main reason for discussing the wider activity of the arts community in Wrexham is to paint a more detailed picture of the context and culture in which Tŷ Pawb was designed and delivered. The Arts Freelancer felt that the growth in the arts scene had helped change perceptions of the role of art in change. They said that ‘things like Tŷ Pawb (were) a testament to that, because... it was only nine (or so) years ago that... the only art presence in town (apart from) the college arts school and the university arts school... was Oriel Wrexham’, and now ‘it had a major international music festival and quite a lot of public art activity.’ He said that many of those in ‘senior positions within the local authority (back then, were) still in those positions now, so they (had) been on that journey’ with the arts community. For them, it was a sign that the Council had been ‘willing to take a risk on the arts’ and that art was ‘creeping into the way of thinking’ of those at that level.

However, whilst the local authority and arts community may have been on that journey together, the wider community of Wrexham - it seems - were not all on board with this new approach (at least not initially). The ACW Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb recognised that many people were very sceptical about incorporating a gallery within the market space, a space that was deeply tied to the identity of Wrexham as a market town. The Dean of Research for the School for the Creative Arts at Glyndŵr University felt that much of the opposition towards or concerns about Tŷ Pawb was related to people not wanting to ‘lose that link with the past.’ The Wrexham Councillor was aware that ‘the council (had) a bad name for knocking down old buildings.’ He said that Tŷ Pawb stood ‘on the site of the old vegetable market (which) was a spectacular listed building. (The Council had) knocked down the interior and kept the façade for around 10 years (but after) the façade fell into a state of disrepair it had to be pulled down’ before being replaced by what would later become the People’s Market. He pointed out that this ‘was the starting point for Tŷ Pawb... (and that) the ill-feeling (had) transferred from there.’

By digging a little deeper into the history of that particular site – it becomes far easier to understand the context and climate of opposition – meaning that although it may often

appear that way, people don't necessarily oppose things without reason. In this case, part of their opposition came from a place of experience. It also becomes clearer that a sense of trust between the community and council (something the Music Festival Organiser considered to be integral to the facilitation of change) had been lacking during the early stages of Tŷ Pawb's development and therefore any proposed change would almost certainly have been met with scepticism. The ACW Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb felt that although those leading the development have worked continually to include the wider community in their programme of activity, she also recognised that that not everyone could be pleased.

Another challenge that the Chair of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board recognised was one mentioned in the previous section relating to the breaking down of siloes. He said that they were 'discovering there (were) plenty of siloes around' and felt this to be 'typical of industrial towns.' He felt that this was 'beginning to break down (however) and (that they were) learning more about them which (was) a big improvement on what (they had) done in the past.' He said they had endeavoured to dispel the notion that 'Tŷ Pawb was a (just a) place that people (went) to (and was instead working) towards (a vision of) Tŷ Pawb (as) a place that also goes out into the community.'

This approach has materialised in various ways. E.g. during lockdown they worked with social services to distribute 'art packs to disadvantaged and marginalised families - completely free of charge' and also launched an 'art at home digital platform' which he said had 'been transformational in reaching out to different communities.' This approach does indeed move away from the traditional idea of an arts institution only feeding the interests and ambitions of the arts community and instead echoes the Creative Director's ambition of Tŷ Pawb becoming a useful institution that brings the benefits of art out into the community.

Change as a Threat – How a lack of confidence generates mistrust and threatens change

As with any kind of change, it's always the unknown that seems the most intimidating. The past and present, no matter how difficult they may or may not be, hold some level of comfort because they are familiar. Therefore, it is this perception of change that we as people find the most difficult. The Chair of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board said that Wrexham was 'very

traditional in its thinking.’ He felt that ‘if you (tried) to do something that (was) too outlandish or too different from what (people were) comfortable with, then you (would) get an initial negative reaction’ but that ‘in time’ they would ‘become much more positive (as they recognised that) progress’ was being made. In his opinion, it was ‘exactly the same with the People’s Market, (and he recalled that) people were very against it when it first opened.’ He said that it was a widely accepted view within the town that the People’s Market wasn’t a particularly ‘attractive building... but (said that) as soon (as there was) any indication that it was going to be transformed from a market into something else... all hell let loose.’

Whilst it may well be accurate to describe Wrexham as ‘traditional in its thinking’ or that there was a certain level of reluctance towards change within the town, it is also important to recognise that the changes that have taken place on this site in the past were, by and large, not supported by the community – at least not initially. With this in mind, it isn’t difficult to see why any other proposed change to this site, no matter how viable or progressive would also be seen as a threat in the first instance. In fact, this experience of change may have also played a part in influencing perceptions towards other proposed changes in the town and even towards those implementing the changes, i.e. towards the Council for example.

Another interesting development in relation to the town centre was Eagle’s Meadow, as previously mentioned. The Football Correspondent felt that it was developed to ‘compete with out-of-town shopping centres (such as) Cheshire Oaks (located over the border in England) which was drawing people in from all over North Wales’ but said that it was ‘built in a really odd place’ on the edge of town. The Head of School also described visiting the shopping centre as ‘a fairly odd experience, because it displaced a centre to a slightly off-centre place.’ When it was built, the Councillor said that ‘Boots and M&S moved (there) from the centre... sucking a lot of the energy from the town’, and according to the Football Correspondent ‘effectively driving the death knell of the town centre.’ The Head of School said, ‘a lot of people (thought it was) a shame that they did that, (as he felt that the money could have been better spent on regenerating) the centre instead of recreating a centre’. The Football Correspondent felt that as a result, there had been ‘a fight back’ within the town that involved the arts community doing a lot of work to reclaim and revitalise empty retail units within the town.

The idea of change as a threat, actually stems from a perception that the change in question will either not provide a better outcome than the current situation or worse still, that it will have a negative impact. It is important however to consider that perceptions, and the way in which people perceive change, are at least partly rooted in experience and therefore rather than dismissing them outright, one should endeavour to understand the reasoning behind them. For example, the Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb recalled the 'difficult time (they had) in the local press and online forums' during the early stages of development that were mainly based on the 'idea of public money being spent on the arts during a time of austerity', which is a fairly generic reaction to culture-driven investment – and one that was also demonstrated in the case of the Guggenheim in Bilbao. In addition, 'reports made public' according to the Town Centre Manager 'said that Tŷ Pawb would not be self-financing for 10 years which aggravated traders.' They saw that this development would not only put them 'out of business' but also being realised at a cost to 'the taxpayer'. Although this may not represent the full picture, it outlines relatively clearly some of the key points of opposition.

The Dean of Research also recalled that 'when Tŷ Pawb was developed, (there were) all sorts of public consultations', in which the university 'were very much involved'. She sensed early on that 'there was (an) anti-art opinion' within the town, and as the Head of School remembers, that people felt that they 'didn't need art... or culture'. The Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb also felt that 'there was this perception of the Arts as the big bad wolf coming in to stamp on the market.' Of course, it wasn't helped by the fact that the name initially used for the development was 'The Arts Hub' thereby 'projecting the idea that there would no longer be a market there' which was in fact totally unfounded. According to the Town Centre Manager, opposers felt that 'Wrexham was a market town (and was) not about the arts, and (that the Council) should be supporting the markets not closing them.'

In contrast, the Arts Freelancer didn't necessarily feel that the public backlash was directly 'because of the arts, but' rather because of other unresolved issues such as 'the grass (not) being cut on a school field, (the) bins (not) being collected as often' as was required', or as the Founder of a Coworking Space said; people being unable to 'get a parking space at the hospital'. The Arts Freelancer felt that people could 'link (all of this) with an art gallery being built because they (saw) it all as (being related to) the council' or actions taken by them. This

echoes a point raised earlier relating to how the experience of change influences perceptions not only towards other changes but also towards those implementing them – i.e. the Council.

The Town Centre Manager recognised that the Tŷ Pawb development ‘could’ve been managed differently’. She felt that there ‘was a lack of communication between the Council and the market traders’ and cited a specific example where ‘the council had said that they would inform the market traders of their decision about Tŷ Pawb’s new site within six weeks (whereas it had in fact taken) six months.’ Whilst the Council may have merely underestimated the workload involved in securing the site, the traders along with others may have viewed this statement as a lie, or as a way of misleading them thereby further entrenching the dynamics of distrust.

Returning to the idea of art as a driver of change being perceived as a threat – another fairly obvious observation, made by the Arts Freelancer, was that people may not ‘necessarily see why having art in the town (would) benefit them if they’re not a traditional art fan.’ As the Founder of a Coworking Space pointed out, if ‘the narrative they’re getting (or feeling) is that (art) hasn’t got anything to do with them (then they are likely to feel) culturally struck off.’ The ACW Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb recognised that Oriel Wrexham – the Council’s previous art offer in the town – ‘had been quite a sterile place... more of a walk-through gallery than anything else. (Therefore, the disappointment) in that offer (would mean that it was difficult to) visualise what a contemporary (art) offer could be.’ Therefore, as the ACW Leader for Tŷ Pawb pointed out, the general notion was ‘why would you want to spend that much money on something that was one square room’ when there were other, more pressing issues that needed to be resolved?

However, perceptions can change and as the Arts Freelancer said, ‘you could walk in there (and) see the community function (that Tŷ Pawb is) playing and how it is serving a regeneration purpose. But (he recognised that) it could take years for the public to really become aware of that.’ The Arts Freelancer felt that there was ‘a lot of education needed around what the arts (were)’ or could be and sensed that a lack of it could be ‘a real barrier’ to change. As the Founder of a Coworking Space said, ‘a lot of how people see themselves in the world is limited to what they’re exposed to’ and much of that is influenced by the media. He made an interesting reference to the importance of place in American TV programmes.

He said that these programmes ‘have a brand that is built on the culture and lives of people’ in those particular places and added that ‘when you think of Wrexham’ there wasn’t ‘some romantic excitement that comes to mind... because there aren’t stories (like that) written about’ it, or perhaps more accurately, there are none which reach the mainstream media. Of course, the irony of this statement now is that there is currently a documentary series about Wrexham AFC’s story being aired on Disney+ that is doing just that i.e. – presenting the culture of Wrexham town to the world.

The relentless portrayal of large metropolitan cities on our screens, places such as London, New York, Paris, or Berlin has in the past reinforced the idea ‘that has been drummed into us all around potential... that you’re wasting your life if you don’t get out of somewhere like Wrexham.’ This feeling, as relayed by the Founder of a Coworking Space, is one shared by many places around the world, however it is also one that Wrexham appears to be challenging. With many moving out of these larger urban areas in search of a better quality of life, Wrexham town and those with a similar array of features to offer are becoming increasingly appealing. As the Head of School emphasised, ‘more and more students that go through the arts school stay in Wrexham and are now working in Tŷ Pawb or for arts organisations locally, so that’s (helped) shape (and change) perceptions’ with regard to the arts in Wrexham.

7.3 Values – The Third Dimension of Agency

Introduction

This section looks at the third dimension of agency which is values and considers the way in which these shape and drive the motivation for change. The literature review discussed the role of economics in shaping much of our thinking regarding change and has concluded that actions of agents have hitherto focused predominantly upon developing new economic paths as a means of improving well-being rather than focusing directly upon improving well-being in order to drive change. The following section studies these ideas in practice by considering the agents’ motivations towards directing change and the extent to which they are driven or

guided by economic measures. These are contextualised within the case study of Tŷ Pawb in Wrexham. Within this dimension, the data presented three strands. The first looks at the motivation for change from an economic perspective, the second considers the role of arts and culture in motivating change, and the third looks at the motivation for change from a community perspective.

Economic Motivations – Achieving well-being by improving economic outputs

Before focusing on the economic motivations of agents in Wrexham, it is important to consider the economic context in which they are operating. There are numerous aspects of Wrexham's economic story that could be discussed in this section (as were outlined in the brief economic story of Wrexham); however, guided by the data collected during the interviewing process it will focus on certain key aspects. The first considers the economic health of the town centre and focuses specifically on vacant retail units. In fact, these units form a central part of this story in that their negative impact on the town inspired much of the action that is discussed throughout this chapter. This case study is particularly interesting from an agency point of view as it not only outlines who the agents were and what they did, but also presents their journeys towards becoming agents. It demonstrates how they recognised the weaknesses, identified paths and built their own capacity in order to influence change. This is an important distinction to make because the literature tends to neglect this process of becoming an agent and assumes that they simply appear on the scene fully formed.

With regard to the vacant retail units, a large part of the problem in the town was related to absent landlords. Wrexham Council's Head of Economic Development and Regeneration said that when the Council tried on many occasions to reach out to these individuals in order to address the issue, the landlords were either impossible to contact or displayed a total lack of interest in letting the properties. However, whilst some had been unresponsive, the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration did say that 'other owners of properties (were) really keen to invest in Wrexham (and were) particularly driven and committed, (and had) been working with' the Council to improve matters.

One may assume from their lack of input or interest in Wrexham itself that absentee landlords have little or no interest in the exact location of their properties or the place itself. This also has bearing on the presence and disappearance of chain stores, for despite any economic value they may have brought to the town in the past, absentee landlords and chain stores are (generally) not 'of Wrexham', were not built there, are not immersed, and do not reflect the place. Indeed, Rob and Ryan, the new Chairmen of Wrexham AFC, may have also been viewed in this way, yet although they are not 'of the place', they have made a conscious effort to embed themselves within it. However, the activity and agency that their absence and disappearance has generated does have an effect. So, whilst they may not be present, they do indeed play a role in the story of change in the town.

Despite this, the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration emphasised that 'the independent sector (was) still there, still committed and still working with' the Council to improve the town. The Town Centre Manager referred to the Town Centre Forum which she said was a public-facing meeting for businesses to raise any issues or discuss any topics with the Council. She said that 'the chair of the (forum was) incredibly influential' and could direct the culture of the group and shape the dynamics between the businesses and the Council. It was suggested that if they were to 'have a chair that (was) anti-council, all of the businesses (would most likely also be) anti-council, (but) if (they had) a chair that (was) really positive and (keen to engage then) relationships (would) develop well.' As this forum was particularly place-specific, it was therefore no surprise that, according to the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration, there was 'very little involvement from the chain (stores)' but that the owners of 'the local coffee shop, or the local jewellers or butchers (were very much involved and were) growing in their desire and will (to make) Wrexham survive.'

Whilst a lot of effort had been made by the Council in the past to attract larger chain stores into the town, the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration said that 'going forward... (they) as a Council would look to support the growth of the independent sector (which they felt would be) key to the survival of Wrexham.' This was in her opinion something that could 'complement the growth in the arts and cultural sector' with specific reference to market stall holders within Tŷ Pawb. Their aim was to 'support the artists and cultural sector...

to go through that entrepreneurial model (in order) to become businesses' which she felt was 'the only way (Wrexham) could become resilient to economic change in the future.'

There is a common belief that art and business do not, cannot, or should not coexist, and it could certainly be said that there is indeed merit in this way of thinking - in that art is a form of expression free from the confines of commerce. However, creativity is not and should not be considered an attribute that is exclusive to artists. Creativity is not just about expression, but also about changing ways of working, trying new approaches, experimenting with radical ideas and pushing boundaries. All the better if this happens to coincide with the arts and cultural sector. The Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space said that the 'regeneration of the town centre was a major driver for (him) with (his) project.' He said that it was about 'bringing people into the town centre to see what great things (were) happening' and understood that by doing this he would increase the footfall which meant that 'money (would) follow.' When he was operating, he noticed that things were picking up in the town and felt that although 'the arts (were) perhaps not the main driver of the economy' he was certain 'that it was one of (them).' This suggests that as well as helping to rebuild a sense of identity and confidence, the arts can also play a role in effecting change.

The Music Festival Organiser also considered how he could help to 'regenerate the town by opening up empty retail spaces and (using) them temporarily' for music-related activity whilst they weren't being rented. He said that he felt lucky that 'there were (other) people around who shared (his) aspiration for the area' by helping him turn 'two empty spaces into (music) venues.' Of course, he recognised that 'at some point the lifecycle of the community project (would) run its course' when the units were eventually turned back into shops. Whilst this process was 'a little bittersweet (for him, he felt that) in the short term (he was at least) making the best of a (bad) situation and turning what (he saw as) sad empty buildings into something really good' and positive for the town.

At the time of the interview, he was in the process of opening a new venue in a vacant retail space on the site of a former Peacocks store called Paenod (which is Welsh for Peacocks). His aim was to 'clean it up and put a nice sign upfront (in order to) draw attention to it again as a potential rentable space.' With regard to measuring the impact that these agents had on the town, the Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space said that 'when (he) first moved

into Un Deg Un, (he) counted within a two/three-hundred-meter radius - 40 empty premises. And when (he) finished (his) five-year tenure, that number was down to (around) 15.' As the Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition pointed out, there may well have been other factors driving the change in the town's economy, however he felt that the input of the arts sector should not be underestimated.

From an agency perspective, one may suppose that the main reason for driving change was based around the shared objective of wanting to improve the fortunes of the town centre. The Music Festival Organiser recognised that there were many people within the arts and cultural scene in Wrexham who were trying to 'find solutions by working (together)' and emphasised the importance of building relationships in that process. He said that 'what hit home quite early on (was discovering that there were) lots of other people who were fed up with the status quo and who wanted change for the area (and that) ultimately, what (they wanted was) for the town to prosper.' The Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space also reiterated this point about relationships saying that 'the landlords that (they) worked with were really supportive of (them) the whole time (they) were there, and (that they had) established a really good (rapport) with them.'

Reflecting on the subject of arts and culture as a driver of change, the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration said that 'from an economics base, arts was always delivered as a nice thing for the council to do and (that) the measures they used (were) more qualitative-touchy-feely.' She had thought of various ways in which to impress upon 'the councillors how important these sectors (were) to Wrexham's economy (and so began to) measure the (economic) outputs of the museum in the town centre (as well as) the arts and creative industries sector.' She felt that by 'putting an economic spin to it, (the) councillors could see how it contributed to the overall offer of Wrexham.' The Head of Economic Development also felt that 'the development of the cultural and creative sector in Wrexham (had) been key to the town centre regeneration which' she said 'was a central part of the (Welsh Government-backed) Vibrant and Viable Places funding that they received in 2013.'

The Arts Council for Wales (ACW) Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb recognised that 'different local authorities (had) different attitudes towards the arts and it seemed that Wrexham at (that) point (understood that they could) use it as a trigger for regeneration. The potential of

the cultural sector for driving change was also recognised by the Former MP for Wrexham. The Business Support Officer concluded that in her experience, everyone '(benefitted) if there (was) a stronger creative economy' because it encouraged people to support each other and work together. Reflecting upon discussions with some of Wrexham's agents of change, it was clear that the nurturing nature of the collective and collaborative working environment that they built helped to drive change within and beyond this sector.

So where does Tŷ Pawb fit into this story? The Arts Council for Wales (ACW) Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb said that 'the (Council) knew they had to do something with the town centre (to bridge) the day and night-time economies (and) recognised that Wrexham had a vibrant and self-made arts scene' that could play a part in this. The Council Deputy Leader said that 'Wrexham closed at five or six o'clock and (that) there was a late-night drinking culture with the nightclubs and bars' but nothing 'in that intervening period'. Therefore 'one of the things that (they) wanted Tŷ Pawb to do was to contribute to the early evening and night-time and economies' as well as – in the Founder of Art Co-working & Exhibition Space's words – contribute to the town's growing 'activity and culture-led environment'.

According to the Chair of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board, the Council was also looking 'to upgrade the area around that development and make it much more user friendly' in order to create 'a safer environment' as there had been a lot of 'issues around antisocial behaviour'. They wanted Wrexham to be a place 'where families felt safe to go out of an evening (and) early evening' and emphasised that Tŷ Pawb was very much a part of this vision. The Head of Economic Development and Regeneration said that since opening, Tŷ Pawb 'was having a (significant) effect on footfall in the town centre and... was getting national interest (as a result of hosting) high-level exhibitions (such as) Grayson Perry, and international interest (through the) Focus Wales' international music showcasing festival. It was something that the Council Deputy Leader also felt would 'put Wrexham on the map from a tourism point of view.'

Therefore, it is clear that the objectives of many of the agents of change within Wrexham aligned with those of the Council – that is, to rebuild and regenerate the town centre. Whilst the Council may have taken a while to recognise the role of the arts and cultural sector in this

process and adapt to this new way of thinking, there were enough people like the Town Centre Manager who were open to and supportive of this approach to facilitating the work of agents on the ground (such as the Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space). It could be said that there was a timely coming together of people with the same understanding of the role of the arts and cultural sector as a vehicle for change.

Artistic & Cultural Motivations – Achieving well-being by improving access to cultural activity

As with the economic context, there are of course numerous aspects of Wrexham's culture that could be discussed in this section but as it is guided by conversations with interviewees, it focuses on how the markets, music, art and football have helped to shape the town's character and drive change. The Football Correspondent recalled that one of the main events in Wrexham's weekly calendar 'was the Beast Market (that occurred every) Monday.' They said that it would be 'heaving with people (with) hundreds of stalls' and would have been 'a significant event in the weekly life of Wrexham because everyone came in (to the town; they) drank in the cafes (during the day then went) to the pubs (in the evening).' Such an event seemed to highlight the value placed on having a communal space to gather. According to the Football Correspondent, 'it would have been a major player in terms of the economy of the town centre... (and) was very much in the town's timetable... (that is, until) it wasn't.' He said that this was yet 'another aspect that made the town what it was' and that the loss of 'its market town status, (had had a) significant' effect upon Wrexham.

The disappearance of such a large-scale common event would not only have had an impact upon the town's economy but also on the social dynamics of the town itself. With fewer events such as a market to unite not only retailers but also the shoppers, there were fewer and fewer reasons to visit the town. Whilst of course most of the agents were driven primarily by the urge to change the economic health of Wrexham town, many were guided by arts and cultural-led approaches that focused on social activities. The Music Festival Organiser recognised that as people 'were putting on shows themselves and making stuff happen... the music community (became) really vibrant (and) full of solutions' to address some of the town's problems.

This vibrancy could be seen as contributing factor to the growing sense of confidence within Wrexham (as indicated earlier), i.e. the confidence to believe that the town has more to offer and that this could be built around a collective and collaborative vision for improving the economic health and social dynamics of the town. Certainly, confidence and conviction would indeed have been required because, as mentioned several times in this analysis chapter about Wrexham, and as the Music Festival Organiser indicated, 'doing Focus Wales in Wrexham... turned a few heads... Every national radio or media interview would (ask) why Wrexham?' And their response would always be 'why not Wrexham?'. Although 'people (had) tried to persuade (them in the past) to go to Cardiff, or even to other cities like Swansea... for (them) the idea of uprooting the event from (Wrexham didn't) sit right.' One of the reasons for this is simply that Focus Wales exists because of Wrexham - it is of Wrexham and could not have happened in the same way elsewhere.

In a way, the battle to change the culture of expectation in Wrexham was not only directed towards those within the town but also those beyond it. He said that 'there might be some people who still believe that (the music festival) should be in Cardiff' but in his opinion, 'Cardiff (already had many) great events (and didn't) necessarily need any more.' He made a comparison with the SXSW Music Festival held each year in Austin, Texas. He felt that it was significant that it 'didn't happen in New York or LA' and that although 'Austin (was successful) now, it (was important to note that it) wasn't when (the festival) began.' They felt that Austin had 'developed as a city and destination (largely) because of that festival's success.'

There are many reasons why this is an interesting comparison to make, one of which being that it shows quite clearly how broad this agent's horizon actually is and how high his ambition: it shows that he was motivated by the successes he had seen elsewhere. Evidently the Music Festival Organiser and their team no longer wish to compare themselves to local rival towns such as Chester or other cities in Wales or the UK such as Cardiff or London but choose instead to look further afield at places that inspired them, places that have paved new paths for themselves. He said that 'all the events that inspired (him had happened not) in main cities, (but rather) in places (easy to reach and) get around', and that this was 'not possible in the larger destinations.'

The town's football club, as with all football clubs, has a unique history and an extremely committed set of supporters that has not only helped to shape the town's culture, but also continues to reflect it. The Football Correspondent said that a particularly 'seismic event in Wrexham's industrial past was the Gresford colliery disaster, which was one of the worst mining disasters in the UK' killing 266 people in 1934. This was 'a part of Wrexham's industrial past and (was something that they felt) still (resonated) with the people of Wrexham. (He said that) the football club always (made) a big show of recognising that anniversary each year' which reflected the connection between this specific event, industry, the town, and the football club. According to the Football Correspondent, 'a lot of the men were supposed to be (working) when (the colliery) exploded but had changed their shifts so that they could watch the Wrexham Vs Tranmere' game. This factor further embedded the close ties that already existed between the football club and heavy industry and demonstrated why the event had 'such an intrinsic relationship to the club.'

With further regard to the football club both shaping and reflecting the town's culture and fortunes, the Football Correspondent felt that 'manager Brian Flynn's arrival (in 1989) probably mirrored the upturn in the town. The industrial park was becoming more established and there were a load of multinational companies that (had chosen) Wrexham to be their base.' In his opinion, this was 'when the recession in Wrexham probably ended'. He said that Pryce Griffiths - 'the chairman (at that time) - was a local businessman (who had) ambition for the club.' He had appointed Flynn who then 'got the club promoted..., there was a bit more money in the economy and Pryce reflected that with some investment in the club.'

Following a 'number of years of relative success', he said that 'bad people took over the club' which resulted in it being 'put into administration. The club (was then) relegated to the fourth division, (however the fans) organised well (and) effectively chased (the owners) out of town. It was then taken over by another pair... (who they said proved to be) no better, so the battle went on. (The fans once again) chased the owners out and the only offer on the table was the supporter's trust... so the fans took control (of the club). And (the fans were) the only thing that kept (the) football club going throughout this period.'

It seems relevant at this point to reflect on this collective and collaborative approach to change, or rather to resisting a certain kind of change in this case, and to consider this within

the wider culture of the town. Would it be too bold to suggest that this collective spirit of self-organisation and determination was something built into the culture of Wrexham, something developed during the reign of heavy industry through the unions perhaps? 'People will still say that the only thing this town has going for it is the football club (which is) why' the Football Correspondent felt that the fans continued 'to give it loyal backing because (it is seen) as a vehicle to further the name of Wrexham.' Now 'suddenly two guys have popped up from Hollywood to create something new', (i.e. the new owners Rob McElhenney and Ryan Reynolds) to build on the change that was instigated by the fans. It could certainly be suggested that the continued and unwavering commitment and loyalty of a core group of supporters to ensure that their club survived played a significant role in changing the fortunes not only of the football club, but of the town itself.

For as long as they have existed, football and the arts have always influenced and reflected culture. However, one could argue that in the past, football culture and the arts may have been seen as separate entities or activities within a place. For example - as the Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb said - 'Wrexham was a mining town (that traditionally) didn't really have a lot to do with the arts.' Football culture and industry were intrinsically linked and artistic culture (as it is recognised today) had not traditionally played such a key role in this story. However, as heavy industry continued to decline, art began to have an increasing role and presence within the town. One of the key agents involved in the early stages of this process was the director of Oriel Wrexham – the predecessor of Tŷ Pawb. The Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb described the arrival of this agent as being 'quite significant in terms of things starting to change and take off', and according to the Town Centre Manager the 'arts began to have more of a presence when (he) arrived.'

Another agent who was very active at this point was the Arts Freelancer who said that he had always been 'interested in (and motivated by) how the arts (could be used) as a vehicle for engagement and for positive change' – which also aligns with Tŷ Pawb's own ethos of creating a creative, collaborative, and engaging space (within and beyond its walls) for useful art. The ACW Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb said that the Arts Council 'were (trying to help) develop a holistic environment for the arts in Wrexham' and were looking to build on the work of Un Deg Un, who were 'driving forward the arts in Wrexham'. The Arts Council of Wales and the

ACW Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb in particular, viewed Un Deg Un as a space where artists could 'develop a track record' and Tŷ Pawb as a forum with whom they might exhibit or cooperate 'over time'. In that sense, Tŷ Pawb could perhaps be seen as the missing piece in Wrexham's artistic pipeline, and as the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration stated, an opportunity to build 'on a community that was already there'.

Community-driven Motivations – Achieving well-being by improving community cohesion

The aim of this section is to reflect on the motivations of agents that are centred around the community and to consider how these have impacted upon their actions and the direction of change. As was previously mentioned, there was a drive on the part of the Creative Director to ensure that Tŷ Pawb developed not only as an arts centre and gallery, but also as a 'useful institution', that would benefit whole communities, as well as those already engaged in the arts. The ACW Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb felt that as a 'community asset, (it had) worked really well' to-date. She referred to a previously mentioned event that saw Tŷ Pawb turn 'gallery 1 into an adventure playground'.

For this specific 'play/work exhibition (held) in 2019... (the Creative Director) arranged a conference around (the theme of play) with artistic practitioners, community engagement agents and international play partners.' The ACW Project Coordinator also felt that this event was 'an important step in (the) development' of Tŷ Pawb and its journey towards becoming a useful institution and asset for the wider community of Wrexham. This idea of emphasising the importance of arranging activities for children also resonated with what the Chair of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board had said. He felt that it was important that Tŷ Pawb became 'a place where families went' and referred to a video published by a local family on Facebook 'about what Tŷ Pawb (meant) to them' and how it had helped their family. He recalled how it had brought 'tears to (his) eyes and (that it spoke) volumes about what Tŷ Pawb (was) and what it (could) become for families.' This again highlights the importance of how and why Tŷ Pawb has embedded itself in the everyday life of the town by showing itself to be a useful community facility rather than one that feels exclusive and inaccessible.

Another interesting aspect of this case study was the proximity of the economic ambitions of some of the agents for the town itself to their own economic ambitions. The Music Festival Organiser said that 'what (they were) trying to provide and what (they) believed (they were) doing (was) providing a public service.' He said that they delivered the festival 'on a not-for-profit basis... because (he thought) the arts community (needed) an event like this... (in order to provide) opportunities for new artists.' Their financial model was also interesting as the festival was run 'as a partnership (meaning that he alongside his cofounder) personally (took) the (financial) risk unlike (most) other festivals.' He essentially felt that Focus Wales was 'not a commercial venture'.

As aforementioned, there was a specific aim on the part of the arts and cultural scene of Wrexham to improve the town, but why was this and what was its motivation? We spoke in the previous section of an awareness within the arts and cultural community of the positive impact and influence their activity might have on a place which in turn might empower them to do something about their surroundings. The history of a place is also important and has a role to play in influencing change, especially positive aspects of history such as the markets or football for example. The Wrexham Resident said that he had 'always loved (Wrexham) a lot', as did the Town Centre Manager, and one could therefore understand perfectly well why they were keen to see it improve.

The Resident added that what struck them when reflecting on their affection for the place was that there were 'a number of people (living) on the outskirts (of Wrexham who didn't) go to town (as) regularly' as they did. He said that many of these people would 'rather go shopping in Chester' and felt that they probably didn't see the town in the same way as the Wrexham Resident did which was now 'full of people doing things.' This chimes with a key element that the Football Correspondent felt was missing in the town after the Beast Market and other large-scale common events disappeared i.e. – that there was very little, or certainly less activity in the town to attract people. One might therefore argue that this notion of people 'doing things', of being active and proactive within the town has done a great deal to change and challenge the void that was left by the demise of these common events. It could be said that this had added to the sense of community within the town, or at least within the town centre.

It could also be said that these kinds of events (such as the Focus Wales music festival) are crucial to the shaping and influencing not only of other activities that may occur but also the overall image of the town. The Arts Freelancer felt that it was difficult 'to talk about a town's personality because towns (are such) diverse places, but (he thought that Wrexham was) becoming more confident (from a) cultural' point of view. He also noted that the arts were not the only kind of activity that was doing a lot to change things. He said that 'there (was) great work going on in sport doing a similar thing (to the arts)... (i.e.) creating another way for people' to express themselves. He argued that sometimes self-expression (might) 'manifest itself as gangs of kids warring with each other' but that opportunities within the arts and sports have created alternative and positive channels for self-expression. He did not think that 'all of a sudden people (had) become artistic, (but rather that there were) more ways (and outlets for people) to express themselves' through an artistic medium.

This therefore draws attention towards the wider benefits of places such as Tŷ Pawb, and the impact that increasing access to the arts can have on communities. As has been outlined numerous times throughout this chapter, it is evident that the journey of the arts and cultural sector in Wrexham has not only been concerned with improving the economic health of the town but also about showing the impact creative activity can have on the social and cultural dynamics of the town. This outcome therefore encourages one to look at economic development through a social and cultural lens, consider how the dynamics of a place have changed post-industry and ascertain what is happening or what might happen there in order to counter any negative changes that may occur.

The aim of improving communication, collaboration and avoiding silos have been prominent themes throughout this case study and the successful outcomes that have come from this way of working has emphasised the importance and impact of improving the social and cultural dynamics of a place. The Music Festival Organiser felt for instance, that 'people certainly weren't communicating anywhere near (as much as) they (were) now (and that) Wales has become far more of a music community than it ever was before.' As a result of having 'an open door, (he found that) there were lots of people around (him) who had the same sort of philosophy.' He said that if 'you put people in a room and they realised (that they were) motivated by the same things, (then they would find) an excuse to work together.'

Therefore, it could be said that by creating an open and collaborative culture a great deal may be done to encourage and influence positive change.

Another example of this was the Focus Wales Film Festival which was a later addition to the music festival. The Wrexham Resident (also a film maker) said that prior to this, Wrexham 'didn't have a film festival'. He felt that although this was partly due 'to the fact that very few films were being made in the area', it was also because there was no 'opportunity to show them off'. He felt that by 'getting the support of organisations like Film Cymru, BAFTA (and) BFI (there was) an opportunity to turn Focus Wales Film Festival into one of the top film festivals in Wales, and maybe even better.' After all, and as he pointed out; 'what (had been) done with the music side (of things has been) phenomenal for Wrexham so (they felt that if they could) create even a quarter of that culture for film, then (they'd) be doing incredibly.'

He stated that he did not aspire or intend for Wrexham 'to become Salford... or some version of Cardiff and build big studios', but merely wanted to 'improve people's opportunities (i.e. people) who (were) interested in working in the creative industries (and) who (were) from the area.' Again, it's important to emphasise that this notion of success has not been about trying to emulate the path of other places close to home but is concerned rather with being inspired by other places further afield, building a version of success based on the skills and characteristics of Wrexham and creating opportunities for those who live there. One could suggest that this in itself demonstrates the positive impact that confidence can have on the way in which agents operate in a place, by seamlessly turning motivation into ideas and ideas into action.

The Head of School for the Creative Arts at Glyndŵr University was of the opinion that a greater number of arts students staying in Wrexham had 'changed the dynamics' of the town. According to the Arts Freelancer, there were 'more opportunities for (people in Wrexham) as professional artists' and 'the knock-on effect' of this was a 'stronger artists' community'. With regard to Tŷ Pawb, the aim was to build on this dynamic and, according to the Council Deputy Leader, to 'open up arts to a much broader cross section of the community... (by) going out into communities across Wrexham and (bringing) those communities (in).' He said that the name itself - Tŷ Pawb (which is the Welsh for Everybody's House) – demonstrated this ambition.

The Head of School felt that 'the whole ethos of (Tŷ Pawb) being a useful (institution)... grew (from the period when they were operating) offsite (and engaging with) the local community.' This is a core element which he feels Tŷ Pawb has 'stuck to in terms of their programming and outreach activities'. He said that 'the idea of (working) offsite was to breach the walls... to take arts to people rather than the expectation of them coming to it' which he felt has 'helped art do its job better in Wrexham.' Tŷ Pawb's Creative Director felt that 'in some ways it was great not having a building because (they) weren't trying to pull people to a certain place (but rather having to) go out to where they (were), which again would have had a certain amount of influence on the town's dynamics.

Therefore, there appeared to be a greater understanding or at least a greater awareness of the role that the arts could play in changing a place. The Chair of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board said that he had learnt that 'if an exhibition connects to the local community, people (would) be receptive.' He referred to the 'Grayson Perry exhibition that (had) links to the Celanese factory locally.' They were 'able to bring in former workers of the Celanese factory to share their story with students from Coleg Cambria who then created a dance routine and performance (to represent) the way that the factory worked' which he felt 'was transformational' in the development of Tŷ Pawb.

7.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter was divided into three parts which reflected the three dimensions of agency and focused on understanding and explaining the dynamics of agency in Wrexham in the case of Tŷ Pawb. Upon analysing the process of change in Wrexham, it became apparent that it too had been shaped significantly by the dynamics of industrial growth and decline. However, focussed was placed more on understanding how the mass decline of heavy industry had impacted upon and was reflected in cultural activity and expression in the town which in turn helped to frame the cultural context around the Tŷ Pawb development. As emphasised throughout both analysis chapters, experiences of change are reflected in the way in which people perceived the process of change. In the case of Tŷ Pawb, a sense of trust between the community and council had been lacking during the early stages of the development and

therefore the proposed changes were met with scepticism thereby suggesting that past experiences of change may not have been positive.

The location of the proposed changes and who exactly they were aimed at was, as with the case in Llanelli, a key point of interest. There was a clear value placed on having a communal space to gather therefore the disappearance of large-scale common events such as the Beast Market not only had an impact upon the town's economy but also on the social dynamics of the town itself. In light of this, improving the economic and social dynamics of the town centre was a key factor in driving the development of Tŷ Pawb for all agents involved. Although Wrexham was a mining town that traditionally didn't really have a lot to do with the arts, over the last decade the sector has been developing and growing and which has helped Wrexham to regenerate – partly as a consequence of projects like Tŷ Pawb.

This case study has been interesting as it not only outlined who the agents were and what they did, but also presented their journeys towards becoming agents which differed significantly from the case in Llanelli. In addition, this notion of building agency also coincided with the journey of building a sense of ownership over the town's history and future which was of course driven to a significant extent by the arts and cultural sectors. It was interesting to note, as was apparent in both case studies, that low levels of confidence also aligned with the low levels of collaboration and cooperation seen within the towns. Another important factor to highlight about Tŷ Pawb is that they focussed their energies from the outset on being a useful institution and asset for the wider community of Wrexham and to develop exhibitions that had relevance locally. This idea and approach was grounded in the Art Útil movement of challenging the notion of art for art's sake and making it a process that would have real effect in society as part of everyday life. This was a method that would aim to challenge ways of working in order to create a more inclusive form of change.

8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has sought to challenge the unequal distribution of power and resources between people and places by focusing on the role of places in influencing human agency (and vice versa). This was done by identifying and analysing the actions of agents with varying levels of influence in two former industrial towns in Wales and seeking to understand how their approaches to change were reflected in the political, economic, and cultural context of the places in question. This was done by using the framework designed for this research, which was also a necessary tool when answering the research questions.

Different sources and patterns of agency in these non-metropolitan places were identified using this framework. By analysing the dynamics of agency, it was possible to explain how even the most radical interpretations of change were still seen to be firmly rooted in place. The framework also helped to bring new insight into the role that agents of change play in reshaping the dynamics between people and place and was once again particularly helpful when addressing the research questions.

The two case studies presented radically different approaches whilst highlighting the key role of agency in shaping the direction of change – one that was dependent on the power and influence of existing agents in institutional settings (e.g. from within Local Authorities or Universities) and another that was driven by the process of building agency by individuals operating within specific sectors (e.g. from within the arts and cultural scenes). Whilst the first approach presented the process of building agency as a potential outcome of change, the latter presented it as an intrinsic part of the process. Yet in both cases, their effectiveness was deeply reliant on developing and maintaining an open and collaborative approach to change as a means to ensure sustainable outcomes.

From a thematic point of view, both case study projects were driven by the overall aim of improving well-being within their respective towns whilst taking very different approaches. They were located within a specific political context that saw new ideas around place-based development beginning to emerge thus creating a new landscape for change in Wales and were driven to a large extent by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

(WFGA). These different approaches however, also demonstrated the way in which development in Wales was gradually evolving from a predominately neoliberal approach that viewed well-being as the indirect by-product of economic success, to a more holistic approach that viewed well-being not only as an intrinsically significant goal but also as the vehicle to deliver that change.

The first three sections of this chapter focus on linking the three dimensions of agency (as identified in the case studies) with the relevant literature in order to re-establish where this research is located. It also highlights areas within the literature to which that the research has contributed and identifies further areas of interest. This in turn provides the foundations on which to build the answers to the following research questions which are answered in the final section:

- **To what extent are levels of human agency determined by the political, economic, and cultural context of a place?**
 - i) **Who are the agents of change responsible for recognising new opportunities and driving the agenda for change?**
 - ii) **How are they connected through extra- or intra-regional networks?**
 - iii) **How prominent is the new well-being paradigm in the development of new opportunities in old industrial towns in Wales?**

8.2 Pushing Boundaries

A prominent theme to emerge within this first realm of agency related to the role of places in the process of change. Massey explained that places were often defined by their historical and temporal realities (Massey 2005), i.e. the impact of past and ongoing changes on the lived reality of places, and so one could confidently state that both case study towns have been and continue to be significantly impacted by the historical process of industrial (and economic) growth and decline. This was also a point expressed by Huggins et al. who viewed the industrial revolution as a watershed in socio-economic history (2021).

However, Amin et al. outlined an added complexity when discussing places highlighting changes in the way in which they were being conceptualised. They stated that nowadays from an intellectual stance, places were more commonly imagined in a relational sense as products of networks and relations, whereas in the past territorial conceptions of place would have been dominant (Amin et al. 2003). Yet when reflecting upon the findings from the case studies, combining these conceptualisations to create a hybrid approach of viewing places felt like the most appropriate approach as it would consider local as well as non-local forces and factors and therefore reflect the dynamics of change more accurately.

Addressing this issue in practice, the spatial focus of this research were the towns of Llanelli and Wrexham but interestingly, from a territorial perspective, neither town had any clear boundaries. Whilst it was possible, following some enquiries, to form make-shift boundaries consisting of wards located in and around their centres, it didn't seem appropriate given the comparative nature of this research and the fact that these boundaries, were less commonly recognised. As most datasets are published in line with modern political boundaries, i.e. constituencies made up of wards, the vast majority of quantitative data presented throughout this thesis relates to the constituencies of Llanelli and Wrexham, unless otherwise stated.

However, the location of boundaries relating to qualitative data were slightly less clear given that peoples' perceptions of place (an issue that will be discussed in the next section of the conclusion) varied significantly. Moreover, this research also considered debates around relational conceptualisations of places – namely the City Region – and the impact that they had on changes seen in Llanelli. This notion of boundaries in the context of agency could only be described as extremely layered and complex and it would therefore be fair to suggest that when agents were discussing and implementing changes in their respective towns, they may not always have had the same boundaries in mind.

For example, in the Llanelli case study, the boundaries were mostly twofold. There was the territorial aspect of Pentre Awel which related to its geographic location in the town and constituency of Llanelli, and then the relational aspect – meaning the intellectual context within which this project was located - which in this case was the City Region. In addition to this however, the relational aspect also doubled as a new administrative boundary which

added yet another layer and level of governance to Llanelli thereby presenting a good example of the hybrid approach in which the relational and territorial conceptualisation of a place interacts.

This alone represents the complex nature of places today which helps to amplify, especially from an agent's perspective, the importance of understanding the local dynamics of places and how they relate to and influence the process of change. Tomaney emphasised that the local should be the 'moral starting point and locus of ecological concern' (Tomaney 2012, p. 658). His emphasis on parochialism and on the importance of understanding local dynamics was not a call to neglect the wider frameworks that influence the dynamics of places but rather to emphasise the importance of understanding changes that happen on a human scale.

In the case of Wrexham, the arts and cultural communities found different ways to navigate change on a scale and in a manner that suited them. The spatial aspect of their actions revolved predominately around neglected spaces in the centre of Wrexham, but the impact of their activities spread beyond the arts community into the wider economic health of the town by helping to influence the overall direction of change. In that sense, arts and culture could be described as the vehicle for change. The motivations of these agents were twofold – they were in need of affordable spaces to conduct their cultural activities and were concerned about the deteriorating health of the high street and as a result were able to play a part in redefining the role of the town centre as a space for bringing people together – something that helped to set the tone for future changes – including Tŷ Pawb.

This specific example emphasised the contextual nature of changes that happen in places, a point which links to issues raised by Tomaney around the definitions of local and regional development. He stated that implementing broad brush approaches to change that did not adequately take into account the specifics of the place in question did not work (Tomaney 2017), and one could elaborate on this by saying that the better an agent's understanding of the place in question, the more appropriate the approach to change. However, in the case of Wrexham, some of the agents with deep contextual knowledge of the town also had experience of change in other places – something which only added to the creative dynamics of the process.

With regard to the theme of other towns and cities influencing the process of change in Llanelli and Wrexham, the locational context of both towns was also an important aspect. Nowadays with so much focus on agglomeration and urbanisation, there is still a concept that being a large urban area or being located very near to one helps generate the ideal conditions for delivering growth-driven development. However, it was interesting to note that for projects of significance developed during periods of war in the first half of the last century, being located away from larger urban areas would have been an absolute priority for obvious reasons. For example, the strategic location of the Automotive Manufacturing Company in Llanelli - away from the city lights - allowed it to develop and grow as it did but by now of course, spatial priorities have radically changed. This represents a clear example of how peripherality can morph from being seen as an asset into a liability (or vice versa) depending on the context.

This point resonated with Grabher's position regarding the way in which our fixation with the quintessential qualities of urban places has distorted our views on creativity in the periphery (Grabher 2018). One of the main arguments, which runs counter to prevailing perspectives in economic geography (Grabher 2018), is the possibility that agents may have actively chosen the peripheral position as part of their creative practice (Patriotta and Hirsch 2016) or other more practical reasons such as lower living costs. This latter point was also outlined in the Foundational Economy's critique of GDP as a metric of development which highlighted that the top cities and regions on this metric also had the highest costs of living (Williams et al. 2018). This meant that self-identified levels of well-being in those places were sometimes lower than in the poorer or more affordable places, thereby highlighting the simple truth that prosperity doesn't necessarily equate to happiness. This is a view that reflected the actions of many agents within the arts and cultural communities of Wrexham, seeing peripherality as an asset rather than a liability.

This links back to ideas developed early in the research process which consider boundaries and their relationship with agency which was inspired in part by other ideas relating to the link between intellectual and spatial boundaries. It emphasised that changes in how we organise people in place could be seen to reflect our concept of progress and change at any specific point in time. For example, the way in which cities are routinely 'eulogized as

harbingers of progress and emancipation, (and) as the locus of innovation and creativity' (Grabher 2018, p. 1785) continues to impact on approaches to change in smaller urban areas and peripheral places. Thus upon reflecting on the changes led by agents both in Wrexham and Llanelli, it could be suggested that this notion of peripherality, and of those areas remaining on the receiving end of economic trends (Rodriguez-Pose and Fitjar 2013), was being increasingly challenged.

As has been established, this notion of challenging peripheral perceptions of change and creativity was something that both case studies demonstrated, and whilst their approaches, be in relation to scale or direction, were very different, their emphasis on improving well-being (in all of its varying forms) was very similar. They both however managed to find new and different vehicles of change - i.e. different ways of achieving well-being that would in turn, hopefully, impact upon the overall economic well-being of those particular towns, while still having to work predominately within an economic framework. In Llanelli the vehicle for change was health and in Wrexham arts and culture. In that sense, these projects reflect the ambition and need to broaden conceptualisations of well-being to include those beyond economic measures.

Sen presented well-being as an indication of how well a person could function (Sen 1985), and so by linking this notion of functioning to the concept of agency, it could be suggested that those able to function well have agency to effect change in their lives i.e. a greater capacity for achieving well-being. To cite an example; the arts community in Wrexham felt that they could not adequately function as artists and so were held back from achieving their visions of success due to a lack of opportunities and spaces that could create opportunities. By building their collective agency they were not only able to increase their own functionality, but also inadvertently influence wider approaches to change within the town (as previously mentioned) with Tŷ Pawb being one particular outcome.

One could also link this idea of ability to function to that of capacity, which is one of the key parts of agency within this realm of boundaries. By recognising that capacity is required to influence change, agents become aware of their own need to build it. Whilst part of this relates to the idea of building capacity with and alongside other new agents – which in turn helps build collective agency and ultimately more influence - it also relates to the building or

facilitating of channels of communication with established agents, which is another key part of agency within this realm. Commanding the support and influence of established agents is an aspect of change that is crucial for building a new narrative for progress and may be seen as a way of creating a better sense of connection between communities and governing authorities.

Another theme to emerge within this realm is related to the culture of change and how the impact of industrialisation (and more specifically deindustrialisation) has contributed to a strong negative perception of the process. Huggins et al. emphasised that culture mattered for regional economic development and that it played a key part in influencing path creation and dependency (2021). They argued that community culture consisted of dominant mindsets that influenced the ways and means by which individuals and groups within communities interacted and shaped their environment (Huggins et al. 2021).

For example, there was recognition, as demonstrated specifically by the Founder of a Co-working Space in Wrexham, that change is often perceived as a process beyond the reach and influence of the average person. He felt there to be a sense of helplessness regarding the process of change in the town, i.e. that change is seen as something to be observed and accepted (rather than instigated or directed) with the governing authorities deemed the only ones who actually know how to change things. Whilst the capacity of agents is an important factor in driving change, it could be suggested that the key to sustaining change was dependent on a dynamic community culture.

The MS for Llanelli observed a strong sense of resignation within the town that the changes that had and were continuing to happen (for example factory closures and developments built to address them) were completely out of people's control and that they had in effect no agency in the matter. In that sense, one could say that to be an agent of change was to be in a position to not only recognise an opportunity but also to have the capacity to influence change. However, the difficulty with this is that, broadly speaking, the experience of the people to whom the MS refers has taught them that they have no agency to influence change, and if one has never (actively) exercised agency, how would one know how to do so? Therefore, it may be suggested that the aim of change itself, at least in the first instance, is to

create opportunities that help people to recognise and build their own agency, as was the case in Wrexham.

So how does someone without the capacity or agency begin to recognise an opportunity and why would they wish to do anything about it? The Arts Freelancer had returned to Wrexham after studying for a Degree at Durham University and felt that the Empty Shop project that they had witnessed working successfully in Durham - which focused on sub-letting empty premises to creatives in order to regenerate the high street - was something that might also work in Wrexham. This example highlights the role of external knowledge in influencing the process of change and suggests that people can be inspired by and see the value of applying the practices of other places in spaces that they know and understand. In addition, this idea of experiencing different kinds of changes in different places may be seen as a means of expanding one's view of what may or may not be possible thereby challenging cognitive lock-in and ultimately path-dependence.

This theme relating to the impact of industrialisation on the culture of change was also linked to the built environment. It was concluded that one of the reasons why the narrative of change and development has been so deeply tied to the past is because this is the case with the built environment. For example, the site of the Pentre Awel development once housed the Llanelli Copperworks and The South Wales Iron and Tin Plate Works, and communities grew around them which provided the local population with ample employment opportunities. Later, however, as industries declined, Tyisha became one of the most deprived wards in the UK, and this industrial site that was once the beating heart of local communities became a barren wasteland. It has not only left a trail of social, economic, and environmental misery in its wake, but its physical disappearance has become a visual representation of decline which only serves to reinforce the feelings of neglect that the MS for Llanelli said were palpable in the town.

Another theme to emerge within this realm related to the geography of change, i.e. how the scale and location of the place in question impacted on the pace and direction of change. For example, the Founder of a Coworking Space in Wrexham pointed out that because of its relatively small size, it was easier for agents to reach stakeholders and those in power which allowed them to make things happen a lot quicker. This therefore suggests a clear correlation

between the size and scale of the place in question and the actual (or perceived) ease with which those in authority may be accessed, and this could impact significantly upon the levels of agency and access to agents in places with similar geographic qualities. This is an important finding because it challenges the authority of scale (and its various qualities) on the temporal aspect of change. Whilst being small scale can be seen as a liability in new economic geography terms, it is also a potential asset in political ecology terms as it affords access to power and established agents.

Themes related to the temporal aspect of change were also particularly interesting, and one example highlighted within this research emphasised the mechanics of change and the idea that change should be seen as a continuous process rather than an isolated event. It was established that Pentre Awel and Tŷ Pawb were not events that had happened in isolation but that they represented a certain point on a journey towards change that reflected the efforts not only of those directly involved, but of all the others who had influenced the direction of change in the past.

The Strategic Programme Manager, for example, referred to an old development project set up during the 1980s between the old borough and the Welsh Development Agency that involved cleaning old industrial land and establishing land reclamation schemes, drainage, and roads. From that perspective, Pentre Awel could be seen as an outcome of earlier interventions, a project that may not otherwise have happened which suggests that on the whole, change is a relatively slow process that almost always has some level of path-dependence. It also emphasises the role of place as well as history in dictating and directing agents towards a certain kind of change and this underpins the views of Emirbayer and Mische regarding the temporal dynamics of agency as something that 'both reproduces and transforms structures in response to the problems posed by changing historical situations' (1998, p. 970).

8.3 Challenging Perceptions

As Jane Davidson pointed out, in order to 'change perception, you have to change the system – and to change the system you have to change perception' (Davidson 2020, p. 21) and it was in recognising the dynamic of this relationship between perception and change that this dimension of agency was analysed. It was established that perception in this context related to ideas relating to how or why people viewed certain things in certain ways and emphasised how dominant approaches to change influenced perceptions towards the process and thereby their actions (or inaction). These dominant approaches were said to be guided by dominant narratives that developed over time which Massey stated were mobilised in political discourse (Massey 2005).

The feminist angle was also considered when challenging mainstream narratives. In truth and in practice, this was more about challenging my own perceptions as a female researcher and developing a clearer understanding of the gendered politics of carrying out research in the field (Hall 2020). As a result, this whole process has played a key role in addressing one of the main issues at hand – i.e. inequality. Therefore, if, as suggested, it's possible to influence political discourse, it's also possible to challenge the dominance of any narrative, meaning that different approaches to change can be developed within this context. This idea of challenging a dominant narrative would be highly dependent on the capacity of agents to firstly recognise a need for change and secondly shape the approach. Therefore, one could argue that without agency there can be little change. However, as was highlighted in the Wrexham case study, some approaches can also be shaped by the process of building capacity, something which has a significant impact on how a place is perceived.

Tomaney outlined a key factor that directly influenced perceptions of places that related to the way in which development was discussed and defined, particularly in terms of how developed places were thought to be (Tomaney 2017). The renaissance of the city-region as the ideal spatial concept capable of engendering economic development (Beel et al. 2018) resulted in public policy actively encouraging smaller regions to emulate *successful* regions (Williams et al. 2018). However as Amin et al. (2003) highlighted, places are made up of people and different people in different places create different circumstances and whilst

strengthening their economic foundations is important in principle, the approach to this should not be uniform.

The practice of trying to recreate the dynamics of large urban places in smaller places that bear little political, economic, or cultural resemblance to them will do very little to tackle inequality between and within regions. In fact, Amin et al. outlined that approaches by the Governments of the UK to tackling regional problems actually increased regional inequality (Amin et al. 2003) and Morgan added that treating unequal regions equally would not secure territorial justice between the nations and regions of the United Kingdom (Morgan 2006). Yet the city-region concept continues to influence change resulting in *less developed* areas of Wales, such as Llanelli (as part of the Swansea Bay City Deal), competing against more developed areas, such as Cardiff (as part of the Cardiff Capital Region) for talent and resources.

Whilst people are gradually becoming aware of the weaknesses of such approaches to change, the stark reality is that if these so-called city-regions do not form in order to try to compete for resources, then they close the door on a possible funding stream. The Economic Development Manager for Carmarthenshire Council was of the opinion that Pentre Awel was a project that they as a Local Authority could have designed, managed and delivered alone had the appropriate level of resources been available to them. On the one hand one may argue that without the incentive of large-scale investments such as those presented within a City Deal, such large-scale and radical approaches to change could never be designed. On the other hand, however, if change is to be considered as part of a process rather than an isolated event, then it could be said that this particular vision of health as a vehicle for change was developed over a number of years, and that the role of the investment was simply to make it a reality.

Another issue with such approaches to change is that if they are perceived as being mainly large-scale projects, ideas or concepts, the ability to make them relevant or relatable on a human scale becomes extremely challenging. Moreover, the notion that anyone could influence or partake in the process becomes very limited meaning that it can have a negative impact on actual and perceived levels of agency. Also connected with this is the way in which language influences how change is perceived. Tomaney felt that the language of change was

often too far removed from people in places and that social scientists often struggled to challenge this narrative (2012). Part of this relates closely to the way in which the process is communicated both within and beyond the academic world.

In the case of Pentre Awel, a significant amount of the engagement with the local community relating to the project was guided by a team member from the area in question who had a deep contextual understanding of place. As a result, she was able to maintain a continual conversation with the community in places and spaces that were familiar to her and communicate in a language that she knew would be understood. This emphasised the importance of having an endogenous overview and input into how change was communicated. It could also be said that successful communication was a way of rooting or embedding developments in a place. If we work with communities to develop change rather than impose it upon them, people will become empowered and not feel oppressed by the process and this in turn will help build capacity and ultimately agency.

The team involved in delivering Pentre Awel recognised that their community events were opportunities for local residents to have an input into the process as opposed to just being organised to deliver information. It was an approach that they felt would give people a sense of ownership in the development and help to minimise perceptions of change as a threat. Swansea Bay City Deal's Programme Director felt that if the community was made to feel part of the solution, then it would be much easier to implement change effectively, whereas if change was imposed upon it people would be far more likely to perceive it in a negative light.

In the case of Tŷ Pawb, engaging with the community was considered a central aspect of their work from the start. The Chair of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board said that he had tried to avoid the idea of it merely being a place that people visited and ensure that it also ventured out into the community. This more collaborative way of implementing change may not only serve to improve community relations, but also build and establish confidence in the process and agents themselves. A lack of confidence in agents and in any changes that they might develop could be seen to reflect low levels of communication and engagement over a number of years.

Low overall levels of confidence in agents were also associated with the low levels of collaboration and cooperation at every level. The Former MP for Wrexham felt that one of

the main challenges in the past was that the relationship between the local university and businesses in the area had been very weak and that historically and for a variety of reasons, businesses would use universities away from northeast Wales for R&D purposes. It was established that the development of this dynamic over the years had helped instil in people a sense of confidence in their collective capacity to influence change. Therefore, by taking a more collaborative approach to building the capacity for change, focusing resources and aligning ambitions, the idea of directing change becomes more achievable.

Given this, it would be fair to say that the way in which people perceive change and therefore react to it, is partly rooted in their experiences of and interactions with the process. For example, the Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb felt that the difficult time the project had experienced during the early stages of development was partly based on the idea that public money shouldn't be spent on the arts during a time of austerity. There were also a few occasions when negative reactions to change were described as coming from people who were very traditional in their thinking.

The Dean of Research for the School for the Creative Arts at Glyndŵr University had felt that much of the opposition directed towards Tŷ Pawb was related to people not wanting to lose that link with the past – the idea that what was once a working-class industrial town was becoming something else entirely and that people felt that they had no say or authority over the matter. It's interesting to note that there were similar reactions by the citizens of Bilbao to the news that the City was planning to invest a significant amount in building the new Guggenheim Museum as opposed to supporting the ailing steel and shipbuilding industries.

These changes in Wrexham however were predominately driven by agents from the town who wished to create opportunities for themselves and their community, through either arts and culture or football. This is arguably the most distinctive aspect of agency in the Wrexham case study i.e. that the direction of change stemmed not from any level of government but from civil society actors learning to act in an effective way and mobilise political support in the process. However this perceived threat of change relates closely to the growing prevalence of place-based identity in economic development policy (Florida 2012). This practice of branding a place in order to promote and sell it to new capital interest involves

processes of re-presentation and re-formation of identity centred around the shared interests of particular social groups (Hudson 2019).

Therefore, it could certainly be suggested that those initially opposing the development of Tŷ Pawb not only felt that it did not represent their view of what Wrexham was or should be but also that it wasn't meant for them. So the issue with changes driven or guided by place-based identity is that it generates asymmetrical power relations that inevitably empowers some actors over others (Pemberton 2016). In this case, those opposing these particular changes did not feel empowered by them which further emphasised the varying levels of influence and resources available to them (Hudson 2019).

8.4 Re-evaluating Values

The final aspect of agency aimed to establish the link between our values and our motivations – i.e. to what extent do our values influence our views and actions relating to change? With economics being widely recognised as the international language of progress, it is worth considering how these economic approaches to change have impacted on the way in which human activity is valued. The literature review discusses the role of economics in shaping many of our ideas relating to change and progress and concludes that the actions of agents have been predominately focused on developing new economic paths as a means of improving well-being rather than focusing directly on improving well-being in order to drive change.

To date, the role of agents of change have mostly been considered within a neo-Schumpeterian tradition (Morisson and Mayer 2021) meaning that their activity has predominately been viewed from an economic perspective. Grillitsch and Sotarauta's Trinity of Change theory also supports this thinking arguing that actions taken by agents are directed towards creating economic and institutional change in order to develop new growth paths (Grillitsch and Sotarauta 2018). However, given the impact that such approaches to change have had on places (e.g. the fate of town centres), agents have become increasingly motivated by different ways of working.

As is muted throughout this thesis, and as Llanelli's Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager recognises, far too much focus has been placed in the past on economic development as the only means of improving well-being and very little on the important role of the community in fostering and sustaining change. Of course, in principle, spaces that rely on economic activity to sustain their value will continue to function as designed only as long as the people who occupy them can afford to engage with them in this way. Once this is no longer possible, the meaning of those spaces and their value to everyday life changes.

The impact of edge and out of town destinations was cited as another key challenge for town centres (Calafati et al. 2021). The dramatic rise of these retail spaces, which was initially beneficial to town centres as retail chains occupied spaces in both locations, eventually put town centres at a disadvantage resulting in empty high streets and a town centre crisis (Calafati et al. 2021). The Founder of the Art Co-working & Exhibition Space felt that the regeneration of Wrexham town centre was a major driver for their project saying that it was about bringing people into the space whilst recognising that by doing so, footfall would increase meaning that money would eventually follow.

It was therefore clear that the journey of change for these sectors in Wrexham had not only been about improving the economic health of the town but also demonstrated the positive impact that cultural activity could have on the social dynamics of the town. This outcome encouraged one to look at economic development through an alternative lens, to consider other vehicles for change – such as the arts - that could more accurately and effectively address weaknesses in the capacity of the places in question. It also highlighted an appetite for a more holistic and embedded form of place development where change is done 'in' the place rather than 'for' the place. But in order to make changes that are effective and sustainable, there needs to be a change in the culture of operation (Davidson 2020) and this is something that requires the investment of time – which could prove challenging because it is an approach that does not yield the quick wins that are often needed for investors.

However, whilst the growth in the arts and cultural sectors in Wrexham highlighted different approaches to change, their economic impact explains only part of the story. In fact, the literature suggested that as well as having economic value, the role of spaces in fostering social interaction and social inclusion was also central (Hall 2002). The Football

Correspondent referred to the impact that the disappearance of common events such as the Beast Market had on the town centre, not only in economic terms but also in terms of how the social dynamism within that space had changed. Therefore, with fewer events to unite retailers and shoppers, there were fewer reasons to visit the town.

Therefore, a key motivation for the agents of change involved (directly or indirectly) in Tŷ Pawb in Wrexham was a desire to increase social interactions and thereby improve social dynamics within the town. This inevitably involved redefining particular spaces which had previously been dominated by economic activity as areas that encourage culture-based communal activity. There appeared to be a distinct awareness within these communities of the wider impact that their activity could have on a place, and this encouraged them to drive such changes. This also echoes the aforementioned view of the Football Correspondent who saw the importance of hosting common events in the town centre, which could be seen as a way of reclaiming these spaces as well as reframing their value from a community and cultural point of view.

The Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb, for example was keen to ensure that it would benefit whole communities and not only those who were already engaged in the arts. The Council Deputy Leader felt that this could be done by going out into the community as well as bringing the community in, and by focusing on making Tŷ Pawb a place frequented by families. It was about breaking down the walls that spaces driven economic activity had created and rebuilding them in a more inclusive way and doing so by making change a relevant process reflective of the needs of Wrexham's wider communities, something that could only be understood by agents with contextual knowledge of a place.

A sociological interpretation of agency was presented as a habitual, imaginary and realised process of engagement – one that was informed by the past, driven by the future and contextualised in the present (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). It was argued that effective and sustainable development could only be realised when policy proposals and development initiatives were attuned to the cultural momentum of a place – meaning that those driving the changes needed to have contextual knowledge of the place in question. However, having contextual knowledge of a place needn't only relate to understanding issues that are negatively impacting on places, but also those which are having a positive impact. Therefore

the actions of agents (whether actively or not) may be partly driven by existing drivers of well-being already present in the town e.g. social infrastructure and public services (Calafati et al. 2019).

However, as well as the significant decline in the social and cultural dynamics of town centres, there were other issues that motivated agents to drive change. A lack of community cohesion and social inclusion is symptomatic of a number of other issues. Regarding the case study in Llanelli, the Carmarthenshire Councillor noted that child poverty, long-term illness and unemployment were some of the main concerns in the area as well as increasing problems with drugs and alcohol. Whilst addressing these issues from an economic perspective – e.g. creating employment opportunities – may help improve individual well-being in the short term, agents recognised that very little could be done to improve the collective well-being of people and their communities in the long-term by simply doing this.

The Former Swansea University Employee for example, reflected on specific health-related legacies of industry in the region and felt that such complex issues could only be addressed with long-term strategies and large-scale interventions, which is what motivated them to drive the Pentre Awel project. Whilst it would be difficult to eliminate all economic motivation from development projects, it was clear that there were other motivations that were equally prominent in guiding the direction of change in both Llanelli and Wrexham i.e.– health and well-being in the case of Pentre Awel and arts and culture in the case of Tŷ Pawb. In this research, these other motivations have been referred to as vehicles for change – i.e. the way in which agents are channelling their vision for change.

In Wales, the introduction of the WFGA has been extremely influential of late in guiding the principles for change and development. Whilst Pentre Awel sits firmly within an economic development framework, it is also playing a role in helping to redefine the process of change by bringing the notion of health and well-being to the front and centre of development initiatives. This means that increased well-being is not only seen as an outcome of change but also as a driver of change which has had a radical impact on the development of culture and landscape in Wales at all levels.

In Wrexham, the Music Festival Organiser had been inspired by the impact of the SXSW Music Showcasing Festival on the city of Austin, Texas and realised that music could also be a vehicle for change. With reference to the sociological interpretation of agency mentioned above, this approach to agency demonstrated an added dimension. The agent's contextual knowledge of Wrexham coupled with his experience of successful changes seen elsewhere encouraged him to build his collective agency thus affording him the capacity to influence change.

The Wrexham case study is particularly interesting from an agency point of view in that it not only notes who the agents are and what they were doing but also shows how they came to be agents in the first place. It demonstrates how they initially recognised weaknesses, identified paths, and then built their own capacity for the purpose of influencing change. As previously mentioned, agency is often presented within a neo-Schumpeterian tradition and agents as fully formed entities capable of driving and implementing change. However, it is imperative that this notion of building agency is given more attention within the literature - not only for academic reasons but also because it is able to generate a more inclusive and sustainable approach to change.

This research has helped to highlight the role of place in influencing the action or inaction of people (and vice versa) as a way of explaining the process of change and has done so by outlining how the dominance of economics as the language of progress has helped to shape and define spaces. Therefore, it could be said that changes in place will always involve the redefinition of spaces, but that successful and sustainable change is heavily dependent on the input and influence of agents with contextual knowledge – i.e. an understanding of people's experience of change.

8.5 Addressing the Research Questions

- **To what extent are levels of human agency determined by the political, economic, and cultural context of a place?**

This is the question that has guided the research throughout i.e. – the quest to understand the role of places (as conceptualised above) in influencing the action or inaction of people (and vice versa) as a way of explaining the process of change. As such, it became clear very early on in the process that many assumptions had become embedded in the narrative of agency over time and that these needed to be challenged. Much of this narrative for example, relies on accepted notions that agency simply existed in some quarters and not others. In a practical sense, this meant that development was more geared towards recreating the perceived dynamics of successful change in places that seemingly lacked them as opposed to focusing more on understanding why such changes weren't organically happening there in the first place.

Therefore, by observing the place-based factors that determined whether or not agency was present or could be built, it became increasingly clear that low levels of agency in a place could be described as a symptom of territorial injustice and therefore an outcome of poor economic development policies over many decades. It was for this reason, and guided by the literature, that the conceptualisation of place from a political, economic, and cultural perspective was conceived. In order to be in a position to address the issue of low levels of agency in a place more directly, it was important to understand which aspects of place were influencing agency and in what manner.

As well as providing an analytical framework, this conceptualisation also encouraged one to delve deeper into the unique practices of different places in managing the process of change. As a result, it became clear that this research should not only focus on how and why (and indeed why not) agency as a concept operated but that it should, on a much more granular level, consider the factors that lead some people to become agents of change while others are seemingly unable or unwilling to do so. This was particularly important as a means of directly addressing issues of inequality – for if we are able to understand who are becoming

agents and how, where and why they are doing this, it is easier to concentrate resources in the most appropriate areas.

The broader impact of not addressing this issue has meant that if only certain people have had the capacity to influence change, then only certain agendas will have been addressed. Such an unequal approach to change will have only added to the already high levels of inequality present in society. The more direct impact of this for those without agency would be that change was seen as a process that happened to them and their community as opposed to one that happened with them. In that sense, one could say that this way of viewing agency challenges the dominant narrative (which recreates the uneven dynamics of change) by looking at ways in which agency can be actively built and facilitated. This would allow the dynamics to generate themselves in a more fitting and appropriate manner.

This approach was particularly apparent in the Wrexham case study which saw people navigating the process of change by developing a collaborative environment and culture within which to build a collective sense of agency. In that way, the power to influence and instigate change was shared more equally between the agents in that community and this meant that change could be seen as a more democratic, equal, and empowering process i.e. – more ‘bottom-up’ than ‘top-down’. This also facilitates a dynamic between agents and governing authorities that is far more meaningful and productive.

To conclude, whilst levels of human agency are significantly influenced by the political, economic, and cultural context of a place, these are not the only determining factors. It may therefore be suggested that these endogenous factors play a significant role in shaping the context of change whilst exogenous factors help influence the direction of change. This is to say that agents who have experienced different kinds of changes in different places have a greater awareness and understanding of how the process can be shaped and influenced, however the most suitable and sustainable kind of change is driven by agents who (in addition to this experience) also have a deep understanding and appreciation of the place in question.

i) Who are the agents of change responsible for recognising new opportunities and driving the agenda for change?

The conceptualisation of agency devised for this research allowed the researcher to generate a far less abstract and faceless understanding of the role of people in influencing the process of change in places. It focused more on learning how and to what extent certain place-based factors influenced the action of people (e.g. access to resources) and how their experience of change (e.g. as an observer or participator) shaped their perceptions of and approaches to change. Moreover, it also considered place-based factors that directly encouraged inaction (e.g. low levels of communications between communities and governing authorities) meaning that building agency could be seen as a way of addressing certain aspects of inequality.

This framework also helped to identify two main categories of agents in this research. The first considered the role of established agents in influencing change, and the second, the role of people in places actively building agency in order to influence change. These particular distinctions of agency were reflected in the case studies, and this helped to explain how and why things happened where and when they did, and more specifically, who the agents driving those changes were. It was crucial to identify the agents (and more importantly, their roles or positions) in order to fully understand how their levels of agency were reflected in their political, economic and cultural experiences of place, and of course how they navigated this.

The first category - established agents - is far easier to explain because their activity generally exists within the context of a fairly rigid and established organisational or institutional structure. For example, Pentre Awel in Llanelli is a large-scale project that was driven by well-established agents within large-scale and influential organisations which included, among others, Swansea University, the Local Authority and the Local Health Board. Agents in such positions of authority are more often than not tied to or heavily influenced by policies that aim to increase economic growth and improve well-being. Pentre Awel, for example, had to be designed within a specific political and economic framework (the City Deal) and address issues such as ill-health and unemployment.

However, framing issues that are experienced so acutely on a human scale in a way that is so broad and abstract creates a sense of disconnect between the agents implementing the

change and those experiencing it. Despite this, the new landscape of development, driven to a large extent by the WFGA, has generated a new dynamic for change in Wales that aims to address this sense of disconnect. Whilst agents continue to work within pre-existing political and economic frameworks, this new landscape has provided them with an opportunity to challenge the predominately neoliberal approaches to change (that view of well-being as the indirect by-product of economic success) and to consider more holistic approaches that view well-being as an intrinsically significant goal thereby bringing to the fore the impact of change on a human scale.

The second category was represented in the case study of Tŷ Pawb in Wrexham. This was a relatively small-scale project driven predominantly by agents within the Local Authority, but one that was firmly rooted in the momentum of change which was guided by local self-made agents within the town. Whilst Tŷ Pawb could possibly have been drawn up and delivered without the influence and growing presence of the arts and cultural community, the increase in collective agency that it has generated has made the concept of an arts-led community hub appear as a rational and natural approach to change in the town. In a way, it was an opportunity for the governing authorities to capitalise on this growing momentum.

The agents involved in driving this collaborative approach to change were predominately individuals with experience of working within the arts sectors both in a creative and curatorial capacity. Their drive was inspired by two elements – firstly the recognition of a lack of opportunity and spaces within the town for creating and displaying their work and secondly, the influence of other places and approaches they may have taken to address similar issues. Whilst these agents were self-made, they also had a clear understanding of the need to establish and maintain a certain level of trust and cooperation with established agents in order to build upon their capacity to influence change.

It may also be worth briefly noting at this stage why focus has been placed predominately on the community dimensions of agency as opposed to organisations that may have traditionally been perceived as institutional agents of change – e.g. trades unions, the labour party, NGOs etc. There are a few reasons for this the first being that those interviewed generally did not refer to them (apart from two interviewees in Llanelli who cited the continued influence of trade unions on a particular workforce). When they were mentioned, their role was described

as being more geared towards holding back the tide of change that was threatening their industries as opposed to driving new approaches to change. However it would be far too simplistic to categorise this behaviour as being intrinsically and directly linked to lock-in - which in essence emphasises continuity and stability rather than change (Martin 2009) – because it isn't change per se that is being opposed, but rather a particular kind of change.

One might question the reason for this. Could it be related to the decline of trade union power and influence in areas that were once Labour heartlands (note that the constituency of Wrexham voted for its first Conservative MP in 2019) or perhaps that their influence within the projects cited was minimal? Either way, it is surprising that in such places traditional institutions were barely mentioned. This suggests that they may have been marginalised in the processes of social and economic change at the local level, where community actors have assumed a larger role. However, in both cases some traditional agents have played an important role, especially the Local Authority. In Llanelli there were also new agents of change e.g. Hywel Dda University Health Board. Although Health Boards are not normally seen as agents of change, they are becoming more visible through the lens of anchor institutions. This is certainly an interesting aspect of agency that could provide the basis for further research into how the dynamics of more traditional agents of change compare with those of newer agents and whether there might there be something that could be learnt from each approach.

ii) How are they connected through extra- or intra-regional networks?

The first case study in Llanelli represented a more established view of networks wherein agents in positions of influence and authority came together to influence change. These included agents from institutions within Llanelli and the wider region including the university and local health board as well as extra-regional bodies including the Welsh and UK Governments. It was as a result of this mix of internal knowledge and external support that a project in this location and on this scale was able to be designed. Moreover, the political and economic context in which this project is operating – namely the city deal – is particularly interesting due to its role in facilitating the agency of networks external not only to Llanelli but also to Wales (namely the UK Government) in areas of policy that they do not have

authority over. This therefore emphasises the complex nature of agency and the networks of agents when delivering change on this scale in Wales.

The agents involved worked together to develop a vision for change on a scale that had never been seen before in the town. Therefore, agents had to look beyond their usual ways of working by pushing the boundaries and the scope of their agency in order to ensure that the project might work as effectively as possible. However, there were certain aspects of the networks that were not established, and these proved to be the most successful and innovative. They involved large intra-regional organisations such as the local authority and the local health board (each with their own networks) coming together to pursue the same vision for change. Given their varied ways of working and of managing change, this could only be done if the outcome was thought to be worth the investment – and of course, it was.

Whilst their aim may have been to successfully implement change, another invaluable outcome of this process was that they will have had the opportunity to learn from and challenge each other, something that is most likely quite rare at this level. It may in turn have given them the confidence to continue looking beyond their perceived boundaries and to consider that different interpretations, scales, and visions for change are possible. In effect, it means that the limits of change may have shifted quite radically. Another benefit is the recognition and realisation that local agents have greater capacity to influence change if they develop their networks closer to home.

The second case study in Wrexham represented a less established view of networks wherein agents came together in the pursuit of agency. Therefore, the broader change in this context was driven by people who built their networks (predominately intra-regional) in order to increase their capacity to influence change locally. This change stemmed not from any governing authority but from civil society actors learning to act effectively. There are two interesting aspects to this, the first being the openness of those driving change to external ideas and investment. This is particularly interesting, most notably because it highlights the importance of having exposure to different ways of doing things; of seeing people navigating the same kind of challenges in different places, and of witnessing the impact that their collective action can have on the process of change.

One could therefore argue that although exposure to extra-regional networks were an important factor in driving the direction of change in the town, these particular networks had very little direct involvement in the changes themselves. Of course, with regards to the development of Tŷ Pawb itself on a practical level, it is true that the Welsh Government played a significant financial role, as did the Arts Council of Wales who also provided guidance and advice. However, the direction of change was developed and driven by local people who recognised that in order to influence change, they would need to work more collaboratively.

The second aspect is an embedded sense of confidence in town's identity and the value of that identity. These have together generated the conditions whereby meaningful networks and a collective vision for change may develop so that projects such as Tŷ Pawb can be realised. Tŷ Pawb have continued on this journey of developing networks by broadening their ideas about the role of the arts. This notion of building agency also relates to the work Tŷ Pawb is doing to engage with the community. By pro-actively going out into the community rather than merely trying to attract people to its cultural spaces, Tŷ Pawb is not only building networks, it is also building agency. As a result, barriers between communities and organisations, and even those in positions of authority are broken down so that trust can be nurtured. The outcome is a greater level of dialogue and understanding, an aligning of visions and change which is done with people rather than to them.

iii) How prominent is the new well-being paradigm in the development of new opportunities in old industrial towns in Wales?

In order to answer this question, one needs to address the broader political context of change in Wales. Firstly, it's important to reiterate that this growing emphasis on well-being is not simply another standard policy initiative or a mere tick box exercise focused on short term approaches to change. The truth of the matter is that (at least in terms of ambition) it is far broader and much deeper. Wales's journey of promoting well-being as sustainable development dates back to the original Government of Wales Act 1998 (Wallace 2019, p. 73) which ensured that the National Assembly for Wales was duty-bound to promote sustainable development in all that it did (National Assembly for Wales 2004, p. 1). This of course led to

the introduction of the progressive piece of legislation that has been mentioned throughout i.e. - Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – which requires public bodies to ‘carry out sustainable development’ in order to help improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales (National Assembly for Wales 2015, pp. 1-3).

This helps explain the broader political context of change in Wales, however, the aim of this research is to understand how this framing of well-being impacts upon development at local level. The first project was Pentre Awel in Llanelli, and it was a case that demonstrated how this new paradigm could be directly reflected in development. It was prominent in several ways, one being that despite the more traditional economic framework within which the project had been designed, well-being had been placed at the front and centre of every aspect. This demonstrates the way that this new paradigm was challenging the dominance of old economic narratives (which focus upon increasing growth as a means of achieving well-being) by presenting well-being as a vehicle for achieving improved well-being i.e.– a means and an end.

The case of Tŷ Pawb in Wrexham presents a slightly different interpretation of this new well-being paradigm but none the less, one which reflects its growing impact on society in a more cultural rather than political and economic sense. Those leading the project were particularly keen to promote art as something useful that could serve as a vehicle for improving well-being and community cohesion. As well as being a preference in terms of approach to arts practice, it was also reflective of a far broader shift in the way that art was being valued. No longer was it solely seen as a craft to develop or a skill to master; it was now being seen as a tool that could be used to improve the well-being of people and communities – something which was also true of sports. Of course, the project will also have needed to implement the requirements set out by the WFGA, however, it seemed that the new well-being paradigm was already prominent within the culture of change. This meant that the cultural context in which the project was delivered had already begun adapting to this change.

This harks back to findings in the literature review relating to the concept of change within a cultural framework and how it has influenced agency. A sociological interpretation of agency was understood as a process that was informed by the past, driven by the future and contextualised in the present (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) therefore an agent with

contextual knowledge and experience of a place was thought to be better placed to influence or implement change. One might suggest that both established and new agents were acting (whether consciously or not) to implement a more sustainable approach to change which, as previously suggested, can only truly be realised when the waves of change (e.g. policy proposals/development plans) are attuned to the cultural momentum of a place thus affording them a greater opportunity of becoming embedded within systems and structures.

8.6 Final Thoughts and Reflections

This thesis has argued that in order to achieve suitable and sustainable change in places, established agents must ensure that as well as having an understanding of the mechanics of change on a broader structural scale, they must also ensure that they have a clear understanding of the process and impact of change on a local, and more human scale. It has also argued that whilst under certain circumstances some people are able to build and establish a network of agency in order to implement change, more should be done at local level, by improving communication (both in terms of consistency and the language used) to ensure that change is done with people rather than to them. It was established that as a result, people would be far less threatened by the process of change as well as the agents who design and implement it which would in turn generate a more dynamic and democratic environment where agency could be built and established.

I've argued on a broader level that we should continue challenging the dominant economic way of measuring change and the value of people and all that they do. Not only is this important as a means of addressing structural issues of inequality, it is also absolutely necessary because of the growing impact of this consumer society on the environment. Whilst this is a particularly difficult challenge to overcome due to the global nature of the market economy, significant incremental changes such as those brought on by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 demonstrate that it is possible for this narrative to be challenged in a meaningful and impactful way. However, it is imperative that we do not lose sight of the impact that change has on the ground, particularly on those in society who are afforded little or no opportunity to build their own agency and affect their own change.

So what does this all mean going forward and what are the future implications for this field of research? One thing that I've tried to emphasise throughout is the importance of building agency, especially in places and with people where change has more often than not happened to them as opposed to with them. This is certainly an area of research which could be explored further, perhaps for example by examining the manner in which Local Authorities approach, structure, and conduct consultation and how they communicate with communities on a broader level. In order to build agency, communities must feel empowered, and one way to address this would be by actively listening to and learning from their experiences of change. Therefore, by communicating and collaborating more effectively, Local Authorities can begin to introduce more meaningful changes that not only address structural weaknesses but also resonate with the communities on a human level.

Another area which certainly requires more work is based around the changing nature and role of traditional agents, e.g. Trade Unions, the Labour Party etc. in the process of change. Whilst this research has lightly touched upon this issue, it opens-up the possibilities for further investigation. Moreover, given the dominance of these agents in old industrial regions in the past, it would be interesting to gain a deeper understanding of this change in dynamic and to also ascertain whether new networks could be built between these more established agents and those who are seeking to build agency in order to build capacity. In order to be effective, these networks would need to blend civic engagement with state institutions at all levels of the multilevel polity so that the energy and knowledge of civil society informs the actions of public institutions. These are some of the issues which have been mooted and to my mind, warrant further investigation in the future.

9 REFERENCES

- Amin, A., Massey, D. and Thrift, N. 2003. Regions, democracy and the geography of power. *Soundings (London, England)* 25(25), pp. 57-70. doi: 10.3898/136266203820467536
- ARUP. 2016. *Carmarthenshire County Council. Llanelli Wellness and Life Science Village - Geotechnical and Geo-environmental Desk Study.*
- Astbury, J. 2018. *Something for everybody: Ty Pawb art gallery by Featherstone Young.* AJ. Available at: <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/something-for-everybody-ty-pawb-art-gallery-by-featherstone-young> [Accessed: 28 September].
- Avdikos, V. and Chardas, A. 2016. European Union Cohesion Policy Post 2014: More (Place-Based and Conditional) Growth – Less Redistribution and Cohesion. *Territory, Politics, Governance* 4(1), pp. 97-117. doi: 10.1080/21622671.2014.992460
- Barry, S. 2019. Police reveal project at centre of criminal inquiry into Swansea University complaint. *Wales Online.* Available at: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/police-reveal-project-centre-swansea-16679624> [Accessed: 23 September 2021].
- BBC. 2016. *EU Referendum Local Results.* BBC News: Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results/local/w [Accessed: 24 August].
- BBC News. 2014. *Wrexham's indoor markets in £3m transformation plan.* Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-north-east-wales-26837685> [Accessed: 3 October].
- Beel, D., Jones, M. and Rees Jones, I. 2018. Elite city-deals for economic growth? Problematizing the complexities of devolution, city-region building, and the (re)positioning of civil society. *Space and Polity* 22(3), pp. 307-327. doi: 10.1080/13562576.2018.1532788
- Beer, A., Ayres, S., Clower, T., Faller, F., Sancino, A. and Sotarauta, M. 2019. Place leadership and regional economic development: a framework for cross-regional analysis. *Regional Studies* 53(2), pp. 171-182. doi: 10.1080/00343404.2018.1447662
- Bennett, E. and Batty, E. 2018. *The value of small: In-depth research into the distinctive contribution, value and experiences of small and medium-sized charities in Wrexham.* Available at: <https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/value-of-small-wrexham.pdf> [Accessed: 1 May 2019].
- Bogue, C. 1970. *The Evolution of Values - Studies in Sociology.* 1970 ed. New York: Augustus M Kelley.
- Brenner, N. 2004. *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brundtland, G. H. 1987. *Our Common Future*.

Bryman, A. 2008. *Social Research Methods*. Third Edition ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bunting, M. 2020. *Labours of Love - The Crisis of Care*. London: Granta Books.

Button, D. 2019. The UK should stop obsessing over GDP. Wellbeing is more telling. *The Guardian* 10 June 2019. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/10/uk-obsessing-gdp-wellbeing-new-zealand> [Accessed: 14 June 2019].

Calafati, L., Ebrey, J., Froud, J., Haslam, C., Johal, S. and Williams, K. 2019. *How an ordinary place works: understanding Morriston*. Economy, T.F.

Calafati, L., Froud, J., Haslam, C., Johal, S. and Williams, K. 2021. *Small Towns, Big Issues: aligning business models, organisation, imagination*. Research, F.E.

Carmarthenshire County Council. 2018a. *Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan 2018-2033 - Issues Vision and Objectives*. Available at: <https://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/media/1216706/ivo-topicpaper-dec2018.pdf> [Accessed: 24 May 2019].

Carmarthenshire County Council. 2018b. *Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan 2018-2033 - Role and Function*. Available at: <https://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/media/1217026/role-and-function-paper-december-2018-version-for-web.pdf> [Accessed: 24 May 2019].

Carmarthenshire County Council. 2019. *Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2019-2029*.

Carmarthenshire County Council. 2022. *Pentre Awel Community Benefits Information Sheet*.

Carney, M. 2021. *Values(s) - Building a Better World for All*. London: William Collins.

Carter, K. 1993. The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education. *Educational Researcher* 1(22), pp. 5-12.

Cooper, D. and Lichtenstein, R. 2020. *What is Place Writing?* Manchester: Centre for Place Writing.

Currid, E. 2007. *The Warhol Economy - How Fashion, Art, and Music drive New York City*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Davidson, J. 2020. *#futuregen Lessons from a Small Country*. London: Chelsea Green Publishing.

Davies, L., Reynolds, R., Jones, C., Nichols, C., Lloyd, L., Burford, S. and Thomas, M. 2020. *Llanelli Wellness and Life Science Village Health Impact Assessment - Executive Summary*. Llanelli:

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. eds. 2000. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Second Edition ed. California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Emirbayer, M. and Mische, A. 1998. What is Agency? *The American Journal of Sociology* 103(5), pp. 962-1023.

Escobar, A. 2001. Culture sits in places: reflections on globalism and subaltern strategies of localization. *Political geography* 20(2), pp. 139-174. doi: 10.1016/S0962-6298(00)00064-0

Evenhuis, E. 2017. Institutional change in cities and regions: a path dependency approach. *Cambridge Journal Of Regions, Economy And Society* 10(3), pp. 509-526. doi: 10.1093/cjres/rsx014

Florida, R. 2012. *The Rise of the Creative Class (Revisited)*. New York: Basic Books.

Flyvberg, B. ed. 2011. *Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Focus Wales. 2022. *About*. Available at: <https://www.focuswales.com/about/> [Accessed: 5 September].

Football Association of Wales. 2019. *Who Are FAW?* Available at: <https://www.faw.cymru/en/about-faw/who-are-faw/> [Accessed: 30 April].

Gardiner, B., Martin, R. and Tyler, P. 2010. Does spatial agglomeration increase national growth? some evidence from Europe. *Journal of Economic Geography* 11(6), pp. 979-1006. doi: 10.1093/jeg/lbq047

Gibson-Graham, J. K. 1994. 'Stuffed if I know!': Reflections on post-modern feminist social research. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 1(2), pp. 205-224. doi: 10.1080/09663699408721210

Gibson-Graham, J. K. 2014. Rethinking the Economy with Thick Description and Weak Theory. *Current Anthropology* 55(S9), pp. S147-S153. doi: 10.1086/676646

Giddens, A. 1984. *The Constitution of Society - Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. United States: University of California Press.

Gower, J. 2009. Llanelli. Bridgend: Seren.

Grabher, G. 2018. Marginality as strategy: Leveraging peripherality for creativity. *Environment and Planning A* 50(8), pp. 1785-1794.

Gregory, D., Johnston, R., Pratt, G., Watts, M. and Whatmore, S. 2009. *The Dictionary of Human Geography*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

Grillitsch, M. and Sotarauta, M. 2018. *Regional Growth Paths: From Structure to Agency and Back*.

Grillitsch, M. and Sotarauta, M. 2020. Trinity of change agency, regional development paths and opportunity spaces. *Progress in Human Geography* 0(0), p. 0309132519853870. doi: 10.1177/0309132519853870

Gruffudd, R. 1976. *Trên y Chwyldro*. Talybont: Y Lolfa.

Hall, M. J. 2002. *The impact of environmental improvements on town centre regeneration: A case study of Llanelli, South Wales*. University of Wales Swansea.

Hall, S. M. 2020. The personal is political: Feminist geographies of/in austerity. *Geoforum* 110, pp. 242-251. doi: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.04.010

Hanisch, C. 1970. The Personal is Political. In: Firestone, S. and Koedt, A. eds. *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*. New York.

Hodgson, G. M. 2009. Agency, Institutions, and Darwinism in Evolutionary Economic Geography. *Economic geography* 85(2), pp. 167-173. doi: 10.1111/j.1944-8287.2009.01020.x

Hudson, R. 2019. Place and Uneven Development. In: Kalandides, A.E., T. and Kothari, U. eds. *Handbook on Place*. London: Routledge.

Huggins, R., Stuetzer, M., Obschonka, M. and Thompson, P. 2021. Historical industrialisation, path dependence and contemporary culture: the lasting imprint of economic heritage on local communities. *Journal of economic geography* 21(6), pp. 841-867. doi: 10.1093/jeg/lbab010

Huggins, R. and Thompson, P. 2015. Culture and Place-Based Development: A Socio-Economic Analysis. *Regional studies* 49(1), pp. 130-159. doi: 10.1080/00343404.2014.889817

Huggins, R. and Thompson, P. 2019. The behavioural foundations of urban and regional development: culture, psychology and agency. *Journal of Economic Geography* 19(1), pp. 121-146. doi: 10.1093/jeg/lbx040

Hutchinson, J. 2015. *Oriel Wreccsam: gallery leaves Rhosddu Road venue after 42 years*. Available at: <https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/oriel-wreccsam-gallery-leaves-rhosddu-road-venue-after-42-years/> [Accessed: 28 September].

Jackson, T. 2017. *Prosperity Without Growth - Foundations for the Economy of Tomorrow*. Second ed. Oxon: Routledge.

- Jackson, T. 2021. *Post Growth. Life After Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jacobs, J. 1992. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Jenkins, K., Narayanaswamy, L. and Sweetman, C. 2019. Introduction: Feminist values in research. *Gender & Development: Feminist Values in Research* 27(3), pp. 415-425. doi: 10.1080/13552074.2019.1682311
- Kahneman, D. 2012. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. London: Penguin Random House.
- Kitchen, L. 2011. A Regional Response to a Global Issue: the Eco-economy and Sustainable Development in Rural Wales. In: Milbourne, P. ed. *Rural Wales in the twenty-first century : society, economy and environment*. Cardiff: Cardiff : University of Wales Press.
- Klinenberg, E. 2018. *Palaces for the People - How to build a more equal and united society*. London: The Bodley Head.
- Kuhn, T. S. 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Second Edition, Enlarged ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Leick, B. and Lang, T. 2018. Re-thinking non-core regions: planning strategies and practices beyond growth. *European Planning Studies* 26(2), pp. 213-228. doi: 10.1080/09654313.2017.1363398
- Lewis, C. S. 1960. *Studies in Words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Love, S. 2019. The Radical Plan to Save the Planet by Working Less. *Vice* 30 May 2019. Available at: https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/bj9yjq/the-radical-plan-to-save-the-planet-by-working-less [Accessed: 14 June 2019].
- MacKinnon, D. and Cumbers, A. 2011. Putting “the political” back into the region: power, agency and a reconstituted regional political economy. In: Pike, A., Rodríguez-Pose, A. and Tomaney, J. eds. *Handbook of Local and Regional Development*. London: Routledge, pp. 249-258.
- MacKinnon, D., Dawley, S., Pike, A. and Cumbers, A. 2019. Rethinking Path Creation: A Geographical Political Economy Approach. *Economic geography* 95(2), pp. 113-135. doi: 10.1080/00130095.2018.1498294
- Martin, R. 2009. *Rethinking Regional Path Dependence: Beyond Lock-in to Evolution*.
- Martin, R. 2015. Rebalancing the Spatial Economy: The Challenge for Regional Theory. 3(3), pp. 235-272.
- Marçal, K. 2018. *Who Cooked Adam Smith's Dinner?* London: Granta Publications.

Massey, D. 2005. *For Space*. London: SAGE.

McCann, S. 2016. A lot more could be done to save Welsh steel jobs by buying British within EU rules. *Wales Online*. Available at: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/business/business-news/lot-more-could-done-save-11268394>

McDowell, L. 1997. *Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc.

McDowell, L. ed. 2019. *Celebrating the contributions of Linda McDowell and Ron Martin: Linda McDowell. RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2019*. London,

McIntosh, M. J. and Morse, J. M. 2015. Situating and Constructing Diversity in Semi-Structured Interviews. *Global qualitative nursing research 2*, pp. 12 pages-12 pages.

Moore, R. 2018. Tŷ Pawb review – an art gallery that truly is everybody’s house. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/sep/01/ty-pawb-review-art-gallery-everybodys-house-wrexham-market> [Accessed: 28 September 2022].

Morgan, K. 2006. Devolution and Development: Territorial Justice and the North-South Divide. *Publius 36*(1), pp. 189-206. doi: 10.1093/publius/pjj003

Morgan, K. 2012. Values for Money. *Agenda* (Spring),

Morgan, K. 2021a. After the Pandemic: Experimental Governance and the Foundational Economy. *Symphony Emerging Issues in Management* (March 2021), doi: DOI: 10.4468/2021.1.05morgan

Morgan, K. 2021b. *Can radical federalism save the UK?* Red Pepper. Available at: <https://www.redpepper.org.uk/can-radical-federalism-save-the-uk/> [Accessed: 2 November 2021].

Morisson, A. and Mayer, H. 2021. An agent of change against all odds? The case of Ledger in Vierzon, France. *Local Economy 5*(36), pp. 430-447. doi: 10.1177/026909422111052014

Mosalski, R. 2019. How every Welsh constituency voted in the EU referendum. *Wales Onilne* 19 November 2019. Available at: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/wales-constituencies-general-election-2019-17250904> [Accessed: 11 August 2022].

Murphy, M. 2017. *The Economization of Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Myrdal, G. 1969. *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd.

National Assembly for Wales. 2004. Learning to Work Differently.

National Assembly for Wales. 2015. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Wales: National Assembly for Wales.

National Trust. 2022. *Elihu Yale*. Available at: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/erddig/features/elihu-yale-> [Accessed].

Nesterova. 2021. Small firms as agents of sustainable change. *Futures* 127, pp. 1-12. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2021.102705>

Netherwood, A., Flynn, A. and Lang, M. 2017. *Well-being Assessments in Wales: Overview Report*. Cardiff:

NOMIS. 2021. *Labour Market Profile - Carmarthenshire*. Available at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157392/printable.aspx> [Accessed: 11 August].

NOMIS. 2022. *Labour Market Profile - Wrexham*. Available at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157388/report.aspx?town=wrexham#tabempunemp> [Accessed].

NWEAB. 2020. Terms of Reference - Working Together for North Wales.

OECD. 2022. *Gross domestic product (GDP)*. Available at: <https://data.oecd.org/gdp/gross-domestic-product-gdp.htm> [Accessed: 4 November].

Paasi, A. 2002. Regional Transformation in the European Context: Notes on Regions, Boundaries and Identity. *Space & polity* 6(2), pp. 197-201. doi: 10.1080/1356257022000003626

Patriotta, G. and Hirsch, P. 2016. Mainstreaming innovation in art worlds: Cooperative links, conventions and amphibious artists. *Organization Studies* 37(6), pp. 867-887.

Pemberton, S. 2016. Statecraft, scalecraft and local government reorganisation in Wales. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 34(7), pp. 1306-1323. doi: 10.1177/0263774x15610581

Picketty, T. 2015. *The Economics of Inequality*. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Pike, A., Rodriguez-Pose, A. and Tomaney, J. 2007. What kind of local and regional development and for whom? *Regional Studies* 41(9), pp. 1253-1269. doi: 10.1080/00343400701543355

Piketty, T. 2020. *Capital and Ideology*. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Pilling, D. 2018. *The Growth Delusion*. London: Bloomsbury.

Rachman, G. 2018. Urban-rural splits have become the great global divider. *Financial Times* 30 July 2018. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/e05cde76-93d6-11e8-b747-fb1e803ee64e>

Raworth, K. 2017. *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*. London: Random House.

Rodriguez-Pose, A. and Fitjar, R. 2013. Buzz, archipelago economies and the future of intermediate and peripheral areas in a spiky world. *European Planning Studies* 21(3), pp. 355-372.

Sayer, A. 2011. *Why Things Matter to People: Social Science, Values and Ethical Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sayer, A. 2015. *Why We Can't Afford The Rich*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Schramm, W. 1973. *Notes in case studies of instructional media projects*. Washington DC: Information Center on Institutional Technology.

Sen, A. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sen, A., Sen. 1985. Well-being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984. *The Journal of Philosophy* 82(4), pp. 169-221. doi: 10.2307/2026184

Shearmur, R. 2011. Innovation, Regions and Proximity: From Neo-Regionalism to Spatial Analysis. *Regional studies* 45(9), pp. 1225-1243. doi: 10.1080/00343404.2010.484416

Silverman, D. 1993. *Interpreting qualitative data*. London: Sage.

St Giles' Parish Church. 2022. *A Brief Guide to St Giles' Parish Church Wrexham*. Available at: <https://stgilesparishchurchwrexham.org.uk/index.php/history> [Accessed: 31 August].

Statistics Wales. 2020. *Regional economic & labour market profiles – July 2020*.

Stiglitz, J. E. 2010. Preface. *Mis-measuring our Lives – Why GDP Doesn't Add Up*. New York: The New Press.

Stiglitz, J. E., Fitoussi, J. P. and Durand, M. 2019. *Measuring what Counts - The Global Movement for Well-being*. New York: The New Press.

Streeck, W. and Thelen, K. 2005. Introduction : Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies. *Beyond Continuity : Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies, 1-39 (2005)*,

Swansea Bay City Deal. 2021. *Carmarthenshire County Council appoints contractor to start delivering Llanelli's Pentre Awel scheme*. Available at: <https://www.swanseabaycitydeal.wales/news/carmarthenshire-county-council-appoints-contractor-to-start-delivering-llanelli-s-pentre-awel-scheme/> [Accessed: 11 August].

Tamber, P. S. and Kelly, B. B. 2017. *Fostering Agency to Improve Health*. Commons, C.

The Welsh Affairs Committee. 2000. European Structural Funds.

Tomaney, J. 2012. Parochialism - a defence. *Progress in Human Geography* 5(37), pp. 658-672. doi: 10.1177/0309132512471235

Tomaney, J. 2017. Region and place III: Well-being. *Progress in human geography* 41(1), pp. 99-107. doi: 10.1177/0309132515601775

Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants. 2011. *Wales – the first industrial nation*. Cadw. Available at: https://cadw.gov.wales/docs/cadw/publications/First_Industrial_Nation.pdf [Accessed: 20 May 2019].

Ty Pawb. 2019. Selected Highlights from the First 18 Months of Tŷ Pawb.

Ty Pawb. 2020. The Future Generations Act, Arte Util & Ty Pawb

UK Government. 2013. *City Deals*. Available at: [Accessed: 24 October].

UK Government. 2022. *Wrexham becomes Wales's seventh city*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/wrexham-becomes-wales-seventh-city#:~:text=Wrexham%20became%20a%20city%20on,status%20from%201%20September%202022>. [Accessed: 5 September].

Unite the Union. 2019. *Lack of manufacturing strategy blamed for jobs losses at Llanelli car parts plant*. Available at: <https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2019/april/lack-of-manufacturing-strategy-blamed-for-jobs-losses-at-llanelli-car-parts-plant/> [Accessed: 20 May].

United Nations General Assembly. 2015. 70/1: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations,.

Vohs, K., Mead, N. and Goode, M. 2006. The Psychological Consequences of Money. *Science* 314(5802), pp. 1154-1111-1156.

Wallace, J. 2019. *Wellbeing and Devolution. Reframing the Role of Government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*. Cham: Palgrave Pivot.

Waters, L. 2019. *Bwrw Ymlaen Towards and Economic Strategy for the Llanelli Constituency*. Wales, N.A.f. Available at: <https://www.leeforallanelli.wales/wp-content/uploads/economicstrategy-1.pdf> [Accessed: 20 May 2019].

Wellbeing Economy Alliance. 2020. *Our vision for a movement to bring about economic system change: Bold, Vital - and Entirely Possible*.

Wikipedia. 2019. *Wrexham (UK Parliament constituency)*. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wrexham_\(UK_Parliament_constituency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wrexham_(UK_Parliament_constituency)) [Accessed: 23 August].

Wikipedia. 2021a. *Llanelli (UK Parliament constituency)*. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llanelli_\(UK_Parliament_constituency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llanelli_(UK_Parliament_constituency)) [Accessed: 11 August].

Wikipedia. 2021b. *North Wales (Senedd electoral region)*. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Wales_\(Senedd_electoral_region\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Wales_(Senedd_electoral_region)) [Accessed: 23 August].

Wikipedia. 2022. *Llanelli (Senedd constituency)*. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llanelli_\(Senedd_constituency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llanelli_(Senedd_constituency)) [Accessed: 11 August].

Williams, K., Froud, J., Haslam, C., Johal, S. and Tsitsianis, N. 2018. *Foundational Livability: rethinking territorial inequalities*. Foundational Economy Collective.

Williams, R. 2017. *Culture and Society*. London: Vintage.

World Bank. 2009. *World Development Report 2009 : Reshaping Economic Geography*. Washington, DC:

Wrexham AFC. 2022. *The oldest professional Football Club in Wales*. Available at: <https://www.wrexhamafc.co.uk/club/history/> [Accessed: 19 May].

Wrexham City of Culture 2025. 2022. *Our UK City of Culture 2025 bid. Wrexham UK City of Culture Bid 2025*. Available at: <https://www.wrexham2025.com/our-bid/?cn-reloaded=1> [Accessed].

Wrexham County Borough Council. 2018. *Wrexham Local Development Plan 2013-2028*. Wrexham: Available at: https://wrexham-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/ldp/dldp/ldp_deposit [Accessed: 2 April].

Wrexham County Borough Council. 2009. *Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area Assessment and Management Plan*. Available at: https://www.wrexham.gov.uk/assets/pdfs/planning/wtc_assessment.pdf [Accessed: 5 April].

Wrexham County Borough Council. 2016. *Wrexham Town Centre Masterplan*. Wrexham: Available at:

https://www.wrexham.gov.uk/english/planning_portal/plan_policy/town_masterplan.htm
[Accessed: 26 April].

Wrexham County Borough Museum. 2019. *Industrial History*. Available at:
http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/english/heritage/industrial_history.htm [Accessed: 30 April].

Wrexham Glyndwr University. 2021. Campus 2025.

Wrexham Industrial Estate. 2022. *Wrexham Industrial Estate*. Available at:
<https://wrexham-industrial.com/location/> [Accessed: 30 April].

Wrexham Public Service Board. 2022. An assessment of well-being Wrexham County Borough.

WSP and Parsons Brinckerhoff. 2017. Employment Sectoral Study. In: Council, C.C. ed.

Yin, R. K. 2018. *Case study research and applications : design and methods*. Sixth edition. ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Youle, R. 2023. 'Very good day for Llanelli' as work starts on £200m-plus Pentre Awel project - beginning with a new leisure centre. *Wales Online*. Available at:
<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/pentre-awel-llanelli-carmarthenshire-26400018> [Accessed: 30 March 2023].

10 APPENDICES

10.1 Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Establish Rapport and Outline Aims

- Thank the interviewee for his/her time and ask again for permission to record
- Present a brief overview of the research
- Explain its role within the wider ACORE project context
- Outline the aims of the research
- Explain how the interview will contribute to the research

Questions Focusing on Setting the Context

- 1) Explain your relationship to Llanelli/Wrexham
i.e. How long have you lived/worked there?
- 2) Why live/work in Llanelli/Wrexham and not elsewhere?
- 3) What are the town's best traits/What's good about the town?
- 4) Have there been any significant changes in Llanelli/Wrexham?
What are they and how did they impact upon the town?
- 5) Is there anything that you would change about the town/What in your mind could be done to improve the town?

Questions Focusing on the Agent's Role in the Case Study Project

- 6) How were you involved in the Pentre Awel/Tŷ Pawb project?
What was your role?
- 7) Can you explain the journey of this project in terms of how and why it came to be?
- 8) Were there any challenges?
What were they and how did they impact upon the project?
- 9) What impact do you see this project having upon the town/wider region?

Concluding Remarks

- Ask the interviewee whether he/she has any questions
- Ask him/her whether he/she could recommend someone else who would be happy to be interviewed
- Thank the interviewee again his/her time

10.2 Appendix B: Anonymised Interviewee List

LLANELLI INTERVIEWS

The Political Realm

Member of Senedd for Llanelli	03/09/2019	English
Carmarthenshire Councillor	02/12/2019	Welsh
Deputy Mayor of Llanelli	03/06/2020	English
Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager - Carmarthenshire Council	29/07/2020	Welsh

The Economic Realm

Leading Business Representative	02/12/2019	Welsh
Former Swansea University Employee	16/04/2020	Welsh
Economic Development Manager - Carmarthenshire Council	20/05/2020	English
The Head of Design Europe & North America of a local Automotive Manufacturing Company	22/05/2020	English
Project Leader of Pentre Awel - Carmarthenshire Council	17/06/2020	English
Strategic Programme Manager - Carmarthenshire Council	05/11/2020	Welsh
Project Officer - Carmarthenshire Council	24/11/2020	English & Welsh
Programme Director - Swansea Bay City Deal	05/01/2021	English
Director for Research, Innovation and University Partnerships - Hywel Dda University Health Board	08/09/2021	English
Project Leader of Pentre Awel - Carmarthenshire Council	09/09/2021	English

The Cultural Realm

Former BBC Journalist & Senior Lecturer - Swansea University	10/02/2020	Welsh
Economic Development Manager - Carmarthenshire Council	20/05/2020	English
Former Employee at an Automotive Manufacturing Company	02/06/2020	English
Project Leader of Pentre Awel - Carmarthenshire Council	06/11/2020	English
Community Development Officer - Carmarthenshire Council	08/11/2020	English

WREXHAM INTERVIEWS

The Political Realm

Former Member of Parliament for Wrexham	18/05/2020	English
Town Centre Manager - Wrexham Council	19/05/2020	English
Wrexham Councillor	21/08/2020	Welsh
Council Deputy Leader	12/11/2020	English

The Economic Realm

Founder of a Coworking Space	20/03/2020	English
Business Support Officer - Business Wales	05/05/2020	English
Programme Director - North Wales Economic Ambition Board	13/05/2020	English
Head of Economic Development and Regeneration - Wrexham Council	31/07/2020	English
Leader of Tŷ Pawb - Arts Council of Wales	27/08/2020	English

The Cultural Realm

Former BBC Journalist from Wrexham	31/01/2020	Welsh
Music Festival Organiser	02/04/2020	English & Welsh
Founder of Art Co-working & Exhibition Space	06/04/2020	English
Wrexham-based Film Maker	14/05/2020	English
Creative Director of Tŷ Pawb	19/05/2020	English
Head of School of Creative Arts - Wrexham Glyndŵr University	19/05/2020	English
The Dean of Research for the School of Creative Arts - Wrexham Glyndŵr University	19/05/2020	English
Project Coordinator for Tŷ Pawb - Arts Council of Wales	27/08/2020	English & Welsh
Football Correspondent from Wrexham	11/11/2020	English
Chair of the Tŷ Pawb Advisory Board	18/11/2020	English

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS

Professor of Public Policy - Wales Governance Centre	21/04/2020	English & Welsh
Professor of Political Science - Wales Governance Centre	21/04/2020	English & Welsh
Director - Welsh Governance Centre	23/04/2020	Welsh
Arts & Health Officer - Arts Council of Wales	28/08/2020	English

10.3 Appendix C: Ethical Approval Form

Cardiff School of Geography and Planning

SUBMISSION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FORMS

Staff and MPhil/PhD Projects

ALL FORMS FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL **MUST** BE SUBMITTED TO THE SECRETARY OF THE SCHOOL ETHICS COMMITTEE IN GOOD TIME (PREFERABLY 2 WEEKS) BEFORE THE NEXT SCHEDULED SREC MEETING

An electronic version must to emailed to Ethan Lumb, Secretary of Ethics Committee LumbE@cardiff.ac.uk / Tel Ext: 76412/ Room 2.54 Glamorgan Building as a work attachment, bearing relevant staff and/or PGR Student signatures.

Title of Project: Agents of Change in Old Industrial Regions in Wales	
Name of researcher(s): Ani Saunders	
Date: 23/08/19	Signature of lead researcher:
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"><i>Ani Saunders</i></div>
Student project	
Anticipated Start Date of Fieldwork: 02/09/19	

Recruitment Procedures:		Yes	No	N/A
1	Does your project include children under 16 years of age?		X	
2	Have you read the Child Protection Procedures below?			X
3	Does your project include people with learning or communication difficulties?		X	
4	Does your project include people in custody?		X	

5	Is your project likely to include people involved in illegal activities?		X	
6	Does your project involve people belonging to a vulnerable group, other than those listed above?		X	
7	Does your project include people who are, or are likely to become your clients or clients of the department in which you work?		X	
8	Does your project include people for whom English / Welsh is not their first language?		X	

*** Cardiff University's Child Protection Procedures:**

https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/995094/Safeguarding-Policy-October-2017.pdf

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the above questions please outline (in an attached ethics statement) how you intend to deal with the ethical issues involved

Data Protection:		Yes	No	N/A
9	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	X		
10	Will you obtain written consent for participation? If "No" please explain how you will be getting informed consent.	X		
11	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?			X
12	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reasons?	X		
13	Will you give potential participants a significant period of time to consider participation?	X		

If you have answered 'no' to any of these questions please explain (in your ethics statement) the reasons for your decision and how you intend to deal with any ethical decisions involved

Possible Harm to Participants:		Yes	No	N/A
14	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?		X	
15	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing a detriment to their interests as a result of participation?		X	

Research Governance:		Yes	No	N/A
16	Does your study include the use of a drug? You will need to contact Research Governance before submission (resgov@cf.ac.uk)		X	
17	Does the study involve the collection or use of human tissue? You will need to contact the Human Tissue Act team before submission (hta@cf.ac.uk)		X	

If there are any risks to the participants you must explain in your ethics statement how you intend to minimise these risks

Data Protection:		Yes	No	N/A
18	Will any non-anonymised and/or personalised data be generated and/or stored?	X		
19	Will you have access to documents containing sensitive ¹ data about living individuals?		X	
	If "Yes" will you gain the consent of the individuals concerned?			

Data protection Act Guidelines

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/data-protection>

If there are any other potential ethical issues that you think the Committee should consider please explain them in an ethics statement. It is your obligation to bring to the attention of the Committee any ethical issues not covered on this form.

<u>Health and Safety:</u>	Yes
Does the research meet the requirements of the University's Health & Safety policies? https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/89405/SHWE-Policy-Statement-English.pdf	N/A
Does the study involve the collection or use of human tissue (including, but not limited to, blood, saliva and bodily waste fluids)? If yes, a copy of the submitted application form and any supporting documentation must be emailed to the Human Tissue Act Compliance Team (HTA@cf.ac.uk). A decision will only be made once these documents have been received.	

<u>Risk Assessment</u>	Yes	No
<p>Has the relevant risk assessment form been completed?</p> <p>Research abroad, complete: \\Geoplpool1\geopl\SHARED\05-RESEARCH\ETHICS\SREC Forms & guidance\SREC Risk Assessment Forms\RA_Abroad_Example.doc</p> <p>Research in the UK, complete: \\Geoplpool1\geopl\SHARED\05-RESEARCH\ETHICS\SREC Forms & guidance\SREC Risk Assessment Forms\RA_UK_Example.doc</p> <p>Research on campus, complete: \\Geoplpool1\geopl\SHARED\05-RESEARCH\ETHICS\SREC Forms & guidance\SREC Risk Assessment Forms\RA_Campus_Example.doc</p> <p>If yes, ensure a copy is submitted with the completed application</p>	X	

If no, explain why a risk assessment form is not necessary...

Please provide following information for the committee:

Funding Source

VW Foundation

What are the main objectives of this research?

As the suburbs spill and boundaries blur, the ideology of urbanisation and growth as core components of development continue to assert the notion that all roads (should) lead to Rome (the city). If cities and large urban areas are still being heralded as the future of growth (and growth as the future for that matter), it is worth considering how this way of thinking impacts on smaller, lesser developed, more peripheral places. As such, I'm currently working with an organising principle that considers the changing emphasis placed on well-being within place-based theory, policy and practice whilst looking at the extent to which feminist debates and ideas within this field influence this narrative. Research will look at the role of agents and agency and seek to understand the process and nature of change.

Who are the research participants?

Agents and leaders within communities, businesses and government who are driving development and striving for change. Individuals won't be isolated to any specific business or societal sectors but I do hope to provide a clear narrative of the creative sectors within these towns.

What methodologies will you be using?

This research will use the comparative case study approach - the main advantage being the opportunity to conduct in-depth analysis of the case which will bring to the fore local conditions thus highlighting the dynamics of path creation. The comparative element will aid in the quest to understand variations and identify the influence of national and regional policies on the creation of new development paths as well as help to identify commonalities in agency-based processes.

The research will focus on two cases and a cross-case comparison of Case 1 (Llanelli) and Case 2 (Wrexham) will allow to isolate factors which are responsible for the success or failure in establishing a new development path. Within each case, the analysis will focus on:

- agents' motivation and resources;
- strategic relations with other agents;
- narratives of their region's future;
- institutional arrangements and policies;
- socio-cultural and historical contexts;
- resulting processes and mechanisms driving local and regional change.

I will begin by approaching prominent individuals and from then onwards use the snowball sampling method to identify interviewees. Data collection will be conducted through qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and actor network mapping.

Ethics Statement

If your answers to questions 1-19 raise any ethical issues, please explain here how you will deal with them.

I do not foresee any ethical issues with my research. With reference to the storage of non-anonymised and/or personalised data – due to the nature of the snowball sampling methods, it is possible that names of organisations/companies/individuals may get mentioned during interviews however no further information beyond their role/job will be mentioned. As understanding strategic relation between agents is a central part of the project, it is inevitable that others will be named. However, if appropriate and necessary, such details will be omitted from transcripts. All data collected will be stored on an encrypted external hard drive (only accessible to myself) and kept for a period of five years following the completion of my PhD should I choose to access it for any related papers or books.

Any changes to the nature of the project that result in the project being significantly different to that originally approved by the committee must be communicated to the Ethics Committee immediately.