

The Politics of Urban Regeneration in Cardiff, UK

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Introduction

While most cities in the developing world have, necessarily, been preoccupied with how to accommodate their growing urban populations and provide adequate services, the economies and built fabric of cities also inevitably become outdated and run down. Processes of internal urban change and restructuring produce tensions, demands and opportunities that need to be managed in all cities. Increasingly, however, in older cities policy priorities have shifted to the process of rejuvenating and transforming urban economies and built environments. Internationally, the focus has been on restructuring urban economies; competing for investment in the regional, national and global economies; renewing ageing infrastructure; achieving a balance between redevelopment, conservation and rehabilitation of the built environment; solving transportation problems; and, more recently, addressing issues of social inclusion and environmental sustainability. The organisational structures, financial mechanisms, technologies and design solutions needed have also received extensive research and policy consideration. Less attention has been given to the politics of managing urban change, and this case study of Cardiff, the capital of Wales in the UK, will focus on this aspect.

Its intention is to examine the political dynamics that have enabled a highly collaborative approach to urban regeneration to be developed and sustained over many years, despite political changes, tensions, disagreements within the salient political coalitions and occasional public opposition. In Section 2, the main historical, economic and physical characteristics of the city are sketched, to provide a context for the discussion of the politics of the regeneration process that follows. In Section 3, the basic political arrangements and basis for planning are briefly described. Section 4 analyses approaches to regeneration in the city centre and the south of the city, with particular emphasis on the politics of building coalitions for change and dealing with conflicts. Some conclusions are suggested in Section 5.

Cardiff: coal port and administrative centre

Cardiff was originally a Roman settlement built where a military road running east to west along the coastal plain of South Wales crossed a tidal estuary. After the Norman invasion in the 11th century, it became an important administrative centre for its agricultural hinterland, but thereafter as a port it was out-rivalled by Bristol and Swansea, respectively up- and downstream in the Bristol Channel. Its economic functions changed little and its population stagnated at around 2,000 until the 19th century, when other towns in the South Wales coalfield to the north grew to exceed it in size. Not until a canal was built connecting the port to its rapidly industrialising hinterland at the end of the 18th century did Cardiff start to expand, first to export iron and then, much more importantly, coal. In 1835 it was declared a borough with an elected council, and in 1839 the first modern deepwater dock was built. However, its economic and demographic growth did not take off until the construction of

1. This case study draws largely on work produced by the author's former colleagues in the Department of City and Regional Planning, Cardiff University, including the volume edited by Hooper and Punter (2006), but also on my own knowledge of the city, where the author lived from 1978 to 2001. Specific sources from which material is drawn are acknowledged in the text.

north-south rail connections between the port and the coalfield (from 1840 on) and east-west along the coast (opened in 1850) (Hooper, 2006).

From a population of just over 6,000 in 1831, by 1901 there were over 164,000 residents in the city and half a million in its hinterland (Davies, 2002, p. 36, 48). By 1850, Cardiff's worldwide exports of high quality coal, especially for steamships, had enabled it to overtake Bristol as the major commercial centre for the south west. By the 1880s it dominated British coal exports and had become 'the coal metropolis of the world' (Davies, 2002, p. 64). Although its predominance as a coal exporting port started to decline in the 1890s, it continued to dominate coal exchange and, by the end of the century, it had become the regional capital of South Wales, with significant commercial and administrative sectors (Hooper, 2006).

Early population growth in the 19th century was accommodated within the walls of the mediaeval town, a couple of miles inland from the docks. Construction of the east-west railway required re-alignment of a river to the west, making it a significant barrier to expansion in that direction. New housing areas were developed both to the east and south east of the existing town and around the docks to the south, resulting in significant segregation of the latter from the rest of the town. The north-south railways skirted the old town to the east and, together with the expanding docks, divided the growing residential settlement into distinct areas. Within the old town, adjacent to the Norman fort and alongside the main east-west highway, the central business district took shape, while there was another major commercial and business area near the docks. The area between the docks and the city centre was gradually built up with a mixture of large and small scale industry, service activities and low income housing. Nevertheless, the physical distance between the CBD and the residential and business areas around the docks (approximately 2 km) posed a major problem once local government started to tackle the problems of economic decline and physical decay.

Cardiff in the 19th century was essentially a city of migrants (as was the whole coalfield area to the north). Because of its port functions, these in-migrants included a significant number of foreign-born settlers (mainly men), who lived in the residential areas around the docks. Tensions between established residents and various groups of in-migrants occasionally erupted in riots, leading to increased segregation of the residential areas around the port and their enduring stigmatisation. Later waves of in-migrants in the 1980s settled in largely separate communities in other inner city areas, resulting in a multi-ethnic urban population and sometimes giving rise to social tensions that have not always been acknowledged and addressed (Hooper, 2006).

By 1914, coal exports were declining and they ended completely in 1964. Failure to develop a balanced import and export trade meant that the dock facilities became increasingly under-utilised and some were abandoned. Only limited manufacturing associated with the port was developed (some ship maintenance and iron and steel). As South Wales' iron and steel industry came under increasing global competitive pressure in the 1980s, the failure of the city to develop a significant diversified manufacturing base became increasingly evident. De-industrialisation was marked by the closure of the main steel works in 1978 and a vehicle assembly plant in the 1980s, with the result that manufacturing employment shrank from just over a fifth of the total to a mere 6.7 per cent in 2003, despite some inward foreign direct investment attracted with the assistance of government and EU financial support (Bristow and Morgan, 2006, p. 49). Nevertheless, the expanding commercial, administrative and service sectors meant that, with the exception of the 1920s and the 1970s, Cardiff's economy and population continued to grow gradually, reinforced by its designation as the capital of Wales in 1955 and the establishment of a major regional office of central government (the Welsh

Office) in 1964 (Hooper, 2006). The city's transformation into a service-dominated economy is by no means unusual. Public administration, including the health and education sectors, with nearly one in three service sector jobs in 2003, is less common, although more recently, the private-sector consumer-services complex, including retailing, leisure and tourism, has become more important and employment in business and financial services has also been growing (although less so in high-technology and high value-added activities) (Bristow and Morgan, 2006).

In the 20th century Cardiff grew to the west, north and east of the Central Business District (CBD) (the Central Business Area identified in Fig. 1). Physical decentralisation was accompanied by successive boundary extensions from 1875 onwards, increasing its administrative area from 768 ha in the original two parishes to nearly 14,000 ha by the beginning of the 21st century (Davies, 2002). Its population grew to 305,353 in 2001 and an estimated 315,000 in 2004. Since the late 1920s, the council has demolished areas of poor quality inner city housing and resettled their occupants in peripheral housing estates, mainly to the west and east, while a variety of private housing areas developed to the north. In the late 1970s, the construction of a motorway connection to London and west Wales to the north of the city provided an effective barrier to further expansion into the hilly area to the north. Because of continued employment growth and physical limits to the city's peripheral expansion, the proportion of Cardiff's workforce that commutes into the city from outside its administrative boundaries has increased to more than one in three (Morgan, 2006b).

In the 1970s, the location of administrative and commercial activities and public investment in and around the CBD, reinforced by the improved access to the northern and central parts of the city provided by the motorway and its link roads, meant that the city "largely turned its back upon the docks which rapidly became associated with physical decline, urban dereliction and social deprivation/marginalization" (Hooper, 2006, p. 10). Urban regeneration in the late 1960s and 1970s focused on the city centre and the surrounding areas of poor quality inner city terrace housing, some of which was demolished. However, by the mid-1970s, it was recognised that demolition and relocation of occupants was both costly and socially problematic. In addition, the city was severely affected by economic crisis and manufacturing job losses, so the emphasis shifted to employment generation, in situ rehabilitation and encouragement of mixed uses. Areas for office and light industrial employment were allocated around motorway (M4) junctions (see Figure 1). In addition, although in the second half of the 20th century the port replaced export with import trade, by the 1980s, semi-derelict land associated with disused docks and declining industry "was beginning to attract some speculative interest and key national and local politicians were beginning to see the docklands as offering enough space for grandiose plans" (Cowell and Thomas, 2002, p. 1248).

The nature and some outcomes of attempts to tackle the city's problems are the subject of the remainder of this paper. First, the scene will be set by discussions of the political arrangements and the planning framework. Then some of the major initiatives taken to achieve regeneration aims will be discussed, with particular emphasis on the political dimensions.

The political and planning systems

This section provides further background by sketching first, the evolution of administrative structures and political arrangements for the governance of the city and second, the bare bones of the planning system.

Political arrangements

Declared a city in 1905, until the 1970s Cardiff was governed by a City Council, but was also part of a large county (Glamorgan) that stretched from Cardiff in the east to Swansea and its region to the west. Ward councillors were elected through a majoritarian electoral system. Mayors were unelected symbolic figures, while Council leaders, elected from amongst the councillors of the majority party, were the most powerful local politicians. From 1926 to 1976 the Glamorgan County Council was under the control of a single party - the Labour Party. Despite considerable achievements, especially in the field of working class education, by the 1970s the reputation of the controlling party was sullied by “growing suspicions of administrative malpractice and corruption, the hallmarks of a one party state” (Morgan, 2006a, p. 32). These arose out of a lack of scrutiny of the ruling Labour group and substitution of the party for the council (by a tactic of holding meetings of the Labour councillors to make decisions in advance of council meetings). Following a national election in 1970 that was won by the main opposition party, the Conservative Party, concerns about the stagnation and malpractice to which such long-term control by a single party had given rise in British local government, as well as issues about the most effective scale and division of responsibilities for service delivery and development, led to major local government reform in 1974. As part of this reform, “party interest [was put] above the public interest by dividing Glamorgan into three rather than two counties in the belief that South Glamorgan could be a Tory [i.e. Conservative]-controlled authority” (Morgan, 2006a, p. 32). Cardiff became part of the South Glamorgan County Council, comprised of just two lower level units (Cardiff City Council and the Vale of Glamorgan District Council). Between 1974 and 1996, when a further reorganisation of local government occurred, local politics were marked by rivalry between the two levels.

In 1974,

“For the first time in its history the city council in Cardiff found itself having to share political power with a county council that was both bigger and better resourced, making it very much the junior partner in the new twin-tier structure. The conflicts between the two tiers tended to grow over time and these were fuelled by a combination of institutional and political factors. On the institutional front a degree of conflict was perhaps inevitable given the division of labour between counties and districts under the 1974 reform. By and large the counties were given the big spending functions, like education and social services for example, while the districts were responsible for housing, local planning, refuse collection and the like. The greatest conflicts arose where responsibility was shared between the county and the district, as in economic development, for example, which proved to be the most contentious of the split functions” (Morgan, 2006a, p. 32-3).

Moreover, as in England and Wales as a whole, planning functions were split between the two levels, with the County responsible for structure planning and the City for local planning and development control (see also Section 3.2).

Politically, differences not just in party control but also between politicians within the dominant Labour party fuelled the rivalry. While the County Council was Labour controlled for 18 of the 22 years between 1974 and 1996, the City Council was more unstable, alternating between Labour and Conservative control (or no overall control) in successive elections. Bolstered by the prevalent Labour political culture, which was paternalistic and member-led rather than participatory (Morgan, 2006a, p. 45), as well as Labour’s consistent

control of the County Council, party politics in South Glamorgan had a tradition of strong leadership. The County regarded itself as having a clear vision for economic regeneration and the ability to contribute to the achievement of this aim through the mobilisation of government and European Union funding (for example, for road building projects). It was dismissive of the City and District Councils, which it associated with menial tasks like rubbish collection. In contrast, from the city's standpoint, the county was dominated by the highways lobby (Morgan, 2006a, p. 33). Differences were also emerging within the Labour party, especially in the City Council where, by the early 1990s, the ruling Labour group "was pursuing a very different agenda to its counterparts in the county – the most conspicuous example of this growing political divergence being the city's commitment to waste management, recycling and the wider sustainability agenda" (Morgan, 2006a, p. 33). This represented the formation of a 'new urban left' in the city, marked by the engagement of young professionals (including more women), rather than the traditional working class, in local politics. An internal coup in 1994 resulted in one of their number being elected as leader of the party group in the council, fuelling the fractious relationship between the county and the city (Morgan, 2006a). The extent to which these differences and political rivalries influenced the urban regeneration agenda will be explored further below.

In 1996, with a further round of local government reform, unitary government for Cardiff was restored². Elections saw Labour win control of the unitary council, and the previous leader of the South Glamorgan County Council was elected leader of the new Cardiff City and County Council, displacing the previous leader, perpetuating the political culture and tradition of strong leadership associated with the County Council, and exacerbating the ideological differences amongst Labour councillors mentioned above.

The leader of successive councils from 1992 to 2004 had a strong vision, a high profile, an autocratic streak and highly developed political skills. He had, as we will see below, a strong influence on the approach adopted to urban regeneration. However, his control also demonstrated some of the disadvantages of strong leadership. Accountability problems contributed to growing internal and external criticism. In 2003, the central government set up a commission on the governance of Cardiff Council to investigate mounting concerns about its leadership and management. The commission's report in 2004 concluded that Cardiff had a presidential leadership style that marginalised both other senior politicians and paid officials, weak internal accountability, poor corporate governance, service delivery that focused on economic development to the neglect of social infrastructure and poor day-to-day management (Lyons, 2004).

As a result, Labour's performance in the 2004 elections was disastrous. With no party having an overall majority, the largest group (the Liberal Democrats) formed a minority administration. Again in 2008, the Liberal Democrats won the most seats (35 of 75 in 29 wards) and formed a joint administration with Plaid Cymru (the Welsh nationalist party), which had seven councillors. Only 13 Labour councillors were elected (down from 61 in 1995). While most of the urban regeneration initiatives discussed in this case study were taken between the 1970s and 2004, the implications of the loss of clear political control for urban regeneration policies will also be commented on.

² The proposal for a city region (including the towns and villages of the Vale of Glamorgan district to the west of the city) was blocked for party political reasons, with the Conservatives backing the establishment of a separate Vale of Glamorgan council in the hope that it would be Conservative controlled (Morgan, 2006a).

Planning for Cardiff³

The earliest planning legislation in England and Wales dates from 1909. In Cardiff it was used to control development in a succession of residential neighbourhoods through the preparation of town planning schemes, which were consolidated into a single scheme in 1933. “In this period, town planning was essentially reactive and pragmatic” (Coop and Thomas, 2007, p. 172). It focused on regulating and coordinating growth and did not contain a coherent vision of the future city. After the 1939-45 war, the Council prepared a development plan in accordance with the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. The plan priorities were to find large sites on the city periphery for new (largely public sector) housing and new industry, to increase the retail floor space in the city centre and to improve the flow of vehicular traffic around the city. The legislation contained few requirements for participation – merely for the draft plan to be exhibited so that comments and objectives could be made and considered by the Council. The plan proposals implicitly assumed that the city’s spatial structure would continue to develop along its existing trajectory. The draft 1953 plan and subsequent revised proposals focused on responses to various planning issues, with little overall vision or framework. Although the development plan was eventually approved in 1959, its lack of vision prompted the central government to urge the City Council to seek specialist planning advice, particularly in the light of Cardiff’s designation as the capital of Wales in 1955 (Coop and Thomas, 2007).

The eminent planning consultant, Colin Buchanan and Partners, was recruited to produce a report and suggest policy guidelines to the year 2001, including a strategic land use framework and recommendations for a primary highway network and public transport policy. The resulting plan emphasised Cardiff’s role as a capital city and provided a long term framework to ensure that it was fit for purpose by concentrating investment in a compact, diverse and expanded city centre; encouraging growth northwards; and retaining the southern area as a mainly industrial area to reduce traffic congestion in the city centre. Transport proposals included pedestrianising the main city centre shopping streets and major new roads, not all of which were constructed. Buchanan’s proposals were accepted by central and local government alike as the basis of future planning policies and development control activities. (Coop and Thomas, 2007).

In 1968 new planning legislation replaced town development plans with structure and local plans. It provided not only for draft plans to be made available for a minimum of six weeks, but also urged local authorities to arrange for wider participation by local people, although no guidance or code of practice was issued. As noted above, responsibility for structure planning was, on local government reorganisation, given to South Glamorgan County Council, while Cardiff City Council became responsible for local planning. A structure plan largely reflecting the Buchanan proposals was produced by the County Council in the 1970s (1976-91) and a revised plan in the 1990s, although this had not been approved at the time of local government reorganisation in 1996. The City Council produced a series of rather fragmented local plans and then a single City Local Plan in 1996. Together, the structure and local plans provided a framework for public investment and development control through framing policies and allocating land for a range of uses (Harris, 2006).

Reforms to the planning system accompanied the introduction of unitary local government. Cardiff Council started preparation of a Unitary Development Plan in 1997. A series of consultation documents, which identified the challenges with which planning policies needed

³ See Harris (2006, p. 76) for a chronology of the evolution of the city’s statutory planning framework 1974-2005.

to deal, were issued. In line with statutory requirements, it was 'placed on deposit' in 2003, but statutory requirements for public consultation and a public inquiry meant that it had not been approved before devolution to the National Assembly for Wales resulted in yet more changes to the planning system.

During the same period, greater attention began to be paid to environmental concerns. During the late 1990s, Cardiff County Council undertook a highly participatory Local Agenda 21 process, which resulted in the adoption of a set of sustainability indicators and a local sustainability strategy and action programme (2006-9), accompanied by steps to mainstream sustainability issues in all council departments. A sustainability programme panel was set up for senior officials and councillors to oversee progress, while twenty nominated sustainability advocates and a green team was put in place for each of fifteen services. Implementation focused on the Council putting its own house in order rather than exhorting the public to act more sustainably and, although environmental NGOs took action to protect valued local green spaces against proposals for development, environmental concerns had little impact on wider competitive city policies (Cowell, 2006b).

Legislative change in 2004 resulted in a requirement for preparation of Local Development Plans, subject to Sustainability Appraisals and linked to a Community Strategies (action programmes designed to promote cooperation between government and communities in service delivery and other actions). Preparation of a statutory local development plan to replace the 1996 plan commenced in 2005 (Harris, 2006). Although the 2004 Act includes few specific directions to local authorities on participation, it does require the preparation of a Statement of Community Involvement that specifies how communities are to be involved in plan-making. Cardiff Council held a series of issues meetings with Community Councils (elected local government at the neighbourhood level), a Consultee Conference, consultations with a variety of groups and a first workshop on sustainability issues in April-June 2006. Towards the end of that year, a further two workshops on sustainability and consultations on the scoping report for the Sustainability Appraisal were held and the results published. In mid-2007, the views of a representative sample of 1,500 residents (the Citizens' Panel) and participants in a number of existing partnerships and networks (especially those involving groups who had not in the past participated in planning) were sought. In October/November 2007 consultations were held on the draft preferred strategy and sustainability appraisal. A variety of methods were used to publicise the proposals and seek responses, including questionnaires, the internet, the local media, public exhibitions, meetings and focus group discussions. All the documents, including information on the responses received were placed 'on deposit' for a period of 6 weeks during 2008 for further consultations. All the documents and the responses will be sent to the Welsh Assembly Government during 2009 and a public enquiry held by an independent inspector. It is hoped that the plan will be approved by the end of the year (www.cardiff.gov.uk).

Although the preparation and approval of *statutory* development plans has not kept up with local government reorganisation and changing legislative requirements, they remain the core of the planning system, providing a framework for a variety of other policy and planning documents, as well as local authority decision-making and negotiations with private developers. The successive documents have, Harris argues, incorporated a set of overarching ideas that have provided a consistent framework for the city's development. Interactions between the policies set out in the plans, politics and implementation will be discussed in the next section.

Tackling urban regeneration: governance, politics and planning

Between the 1960s and the early 1980s, priority was given to the regeneration of the city centre. In the 1980s, greater attention began to be paid to the rundown mainly industrial area between the city centre and the docks to the south. The policies, actions and partnerships associated with these two major regeneration areas will be discussed in turn in Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2, paying particular attention to the political drivers and relationships underpinning them.

A focus on the city centre

Cardiff in the 1960s was an undistinguished city lacking a clear spatial identity and vision for the future. It had an unattractive and worn out city centre bisected by the main east-west highway. Buchanan's proposals and the planning activities that built on them gave rise to a "vision of what a new capital city should prioritize; i.e. the redevelopment of a compact, accessible city centre as a civic, commercial and leisure core with pleasant residential areas to the north, east and west and industrial areas to the south" (Coop and Thomas, 2007, p. 180). The overarching aim of using planning to ensure that the city was a suitable capital for Wales (and to justify its later badging as European capital city), in particular by supporting the pre-eminent role of the city centre, has, Coop and Thomas argue, consistently provided a 'planning doctrine' capable of commanding all-party political and public support.

An outline planning brief for the city centre was produced in 1967, based on the planning principles and proposals set out in the Buchanan Report. To assemble the land and financial resources necessary, working partnerships needed to be built both between local and central government, and between local government and private developers. "These involved the city council as the creator of a framework for development, working with private sector partners to invest in specific sites. Behind this stood the regional arm of central government (since 1964 the Welsh Office), which had initiated the process of developing an ambitious plan for the city" (Coop and Thomas, 2007, p. 180). A partnership with a major developer was forged, economic analysis of preliminary proposals carried out, and a plan for redevelopment of the city centre put on public exhibition in 1970. Although the proposals involved large scale redevelopment, the central area residents living in poor quality housing and the businesses affected were politically neutralised by the coalition of political interests at all levels of government that lined up, with wide public support, behind the proposals.

The political coalition, as suggested in Section 2.1, rested on a long history of Labour Party dominance in South Wales politics and the prevailing political culture. The history of the South Wales coalfield had led, Cowell and Thomas argue, to the emergence of

"dominant values [which] have emphasised the worth of communal solidarity organised around a notion of a distinctively (industrial) south Walian way of life which is egalitarian, patriarchal and socially conservative. It has led to a political style which has dominated local politics for at least 50 years and which is still strong – a style which depends on patronage (more cynically described as cronyism), justified as loyalty and 'not forgetting one's friends', [and] on informal networks typically organised around gender- (and indeed racially-)

segregated institutions such as union branches, working men's clubs, [and] rugby clubs... (Cowell and Thomas, 2002, p. 1245).

A closed political community, the scope for participation was limited, allowing the city to be re-planned with limited public consultation but the general acquiescence of the population at large (see also Imrie and Raco, 2003). The patriarchal style facilitated the emergence of a succession of strong (male) leaders, initially in the Glamorgan County Council and subsequently in the South Glamorgan County Council (from 1974) and the Cardiff City and County Council (from 1996) (Morgan, 2006a). In 1974 the new County Council inherited a severe economic crisis, which all the parties (including the Conservative opposition) recognised could deepen without a sustained programme of economic regeneration. The shared goal “created a bi-partisan alliance in the county, reinforcing the stable political environment” (Morgan, 2006a, p. 34).

All this is not to say that, despite general support for city centre redevelopment, there was no opposition to the plans. In the 1970s, proposals for the northward expansion of the centre into residential areas and new roads that would have entailed the demolition of large numbers of houses were widely opposed. A combination of this opposition to particular proposals by important groups of voters and a less favourable economic climate for attracting private investment following the first oil price increase led to some changes in detail. The priority of officials and councillors alike was to get new offices, retail space and cultural facilities built and traffic better managed. Much was achieved. Pedestrianisation of the main shopping street was made possible by the construction (by the national government) of the motorway to the north of the city and an inner ring road around the CBD. A link road from the motorway to the north west of the city (partly financed by central government) improved access to the city centre (Yewlett, 2006). The City Council acquired development sites to attract private investment. However, the slow property market meant that additional grants were often required to attract investors and the quality of the developments varied widely. Nevertheless, the retail functions of the CBD revived and a number of cultural facilities (concert hall, library) were built.

By the 1990s, it was realised that even more needed to be done if the city centre was to match Cardiff's rival European cities. Wider stakeholder involvement was sought in town centre management through the establishment of City Centre Partnership Forum. Officials from all levels of government, planners, councillors and private sector actors collaborated in the preparation of design guidance (1994) and a prospectus designed to attract further private investment (1995) as well as the design and implementation of a new 'café quarter and further pedestrianisation schemes. Two additional conservation areas were added to the existing six that had been declared since 1972. Significant improvements to the built environment resulted. Nevertheless, “when the city was given unitary status in 1996, and the county's Labour politicians took control of the city council, much more ambitious goals were set for central area development. [The reconstituted council favoured]...a more development-led, project-by-project approach managed by the special projects team” (Punter, 2006b, p. 129). The County's politicians had come to regard planning as an obstacle rather than a facilitator and this was reflected in the reorganisation and weakening of the planning department. Major retail, housing and other projects were implemented, resulting in a prosperous and vibrant city centre. However, they were pushed through quickly, indicating a “much more entrepreneurial administration at work, more autocratic and less democratic” (Punter, 2006b, p. 130). When public consultation was undertaken, as for a major retail-led redevelopment in the early 2000s, it was carefully managed, and the outcome, in Punter's view,

“illustrates perfectly the remorseless commercialization of the public realm and deep penetration of marketing and branding of the city’s cultural and civic life as the interests of council leaders, the Chamber of Commerce and the retail investors are conjoined. The council, for its part, argues that there is no other way of funding large-scale public realm improvements or creating new facilities in the city centre” (Punter, 2006b, p. 137).

Given its ambitious ‘European capital’ objectives and the limited availability of public funds, the council had to seek investment from other sources, especially partnerships with the private sector. These have enabled major regeneration projects to be undertaken, but have resulted in major investor-developer and construction companies having considerable influence on city centre redevelopment, despite the council’s efforts to achieve wider planning and urban design objectives. Most recently, the Council’s attempt to increase the economic returns from city parks, including the main city centre park, have sparked considerable opposition from middle class voters who oppose such commercialisation of the public realm.

Regenerating South Cardiff

The 1970s recession led to another major shift in planning policy, as manufacturing plants in the southern part of the city closed down, with significant employment losses. The continued decline of the docks and manufacturing resulted in widespread dereliction. Planning policy, however, still stressed the continued use of this area for industry, interspersed with some working class housing, mainly in Butetown. Not until the early 1980s did the County Council suggest that economic regeneration policy needed to shift from promoting manufacturing to developing the services sector. Initial reaction from the City Council was wary – it feared that development of retail and office complexes outside the city centre would threaten the vitality of the latter. What seems to have tipped the balance was a relatively small (40 ha) speculative proposal for redevelopment and re-use of some old warehouses put forward in the early 1980s by a local developer and architect. Atlantic Wharf, as it was named, was in south Cardiff, but not far from the city centre and sufficiently small in scale that it did not appear to pose a threat to the overall vision of a compact city focused on a commercially viable city centre. Combining residential, office, hotel and leisure uses with refurbishment of a disused dock, the proposal won the approval of the County Council, the Welsh Office, the local press, and eventually the City Council (Coop and Thomas, 2007).

”Not only did that redevelopment change local political and planning ideas about the future (and commercial potential) of the largely industrial southside of Cardiff, it also established regular dialogue between the two local authorities for the area, central government (the Welsh Office), the major local landowner (Associated British Ports), and industrial employer (Allied Steel and Wire). These agencies set up a network of joint working groups involving officers and (on occasion) councillors to plan and manage the implementation of the Atlantic Wharf redevelopment, networks which have been extended into the regeneration of [the wider area of] Cardiff Bay” (Thomas and Imrie, 1993, p. 81).

The loss of some new industrial employment that had been attracted to South Wales in the early 1980s reinforced the arguments of those who believed that economic regeneration, in “a new age in which cities constitute the nexus for global competitive processes (both material and cultural)” (Hooper, 2006, p. 13) had to be based on services. It was also believed that only continued economic and physical modernisation would produce a city fit to be the capital of

Wales and the main motor of the South Wales economy. These beliefs reflected the “dominant discourse in economic development theory and practice which argues that in an era of globalization cities must be competitive, entrepreneurial and market themselves as attractive locations in order to stimulate economic growth” (Boland, 2006, p. 17). In the UK, as elsewhere,

“the competitiveness discourse and competitiveness rankings have become hugely seductive and politically symbolic for city managers and council leaders as they provide seemingly accurate and accessible indicators of how an area is performing relative to its perceived competitors. Indeed, recent political praxis in the UK is driven by a policy discourse promoting an economic development toolkit comprising competitiveness, innovation, the knowledge economy, entrepreneurialism and the marketing of cities and regions” (Boland, 2006, p. 22).

This discourse and practice was bought into by the Welsh Development Agency and the County Council. It marked a shift from the old politics of urban managerialism to a new politics of urban entrepreneurialism and was promoted especially by the new leader of the South Glamorgan County Council, elected in 1985. The City Council, with its responsibilities for housing, services and social welfare, was less sure. Disagreements continued and progress with developing planning proposals and infrastructure was slow.

A way forward was found through the local application of a wider initiative. In England in the early 1980s, the Conservative government desired a more market-oriented approach to economic and physical regeneration. It was impatient with local government’s perceived non-entrepreneurial attitudes and practices, its inability to use public funds to leverage private sector investment in large scale regeneration, the perceived strangling effects of over-regulation through the local planning system, as well as the failure of adjacent councils to cooperate. It established twelve well-resourced Urban Development Corporations to undertake large scale regeneration. The UDCs were given autonomy, considerable financial resources and planning powers. In Wales, a thirteenth UDC was established in 1987 to implement a new vision for a large swathe of the southern area of Cardiff (Waterfront Business Area in Figure 1) and to overcome the rivalry between the two levels of local government in the city. Proposed by the County Council, to allay some of the fears of the City Council, it was, unusually, not given development control powers. Moreover, the 13-member Board included local representation (the Labour leader of the County Council and four councillors from the various local authorities). Operational from 1987-2000, the area for which the UDC was made responsible was 1,093 ha, within which there were, at designation, 5,000 residents and about 1,000 enterprises employing 15,000 people.

The vision for this large area was inspired by a visit to Baltimore in the US by county councillors; ideas of entrepreneurialism and city marketing as a way of competing for international investment; and the apparent success of approaches to using public sector powers and funding to speed up decision-making, facilitate land assembly, modernise infrastructure and leverage private sector investment (e.g. in the London Docklands). It aspired to economic and physical regeneration based on mixed residential, office, leisure, culture and some industrial development to create employment, bring un- or under-used land and buildings into new uses, and create an attractive built environment. An identity and image was invented for the area through its branding as ‘Cardiff Bay’. An overall strategy, detailed plans, briefs for prospective developers and plentiful marketing materials were produced by the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (CBDC).

The regeneration efforts have been successful in attracting investment in offices (and some industry) into the derelict former industrial areas around the docks and to the south of the city centre. Flagship projects, including a 1 km barrage that has created a permanent 200 ha freshwater lake where there were previously tidal mudflats, a building for the new Welsh Assembly, an opera house and arts centre and a 5 star hotel have been implemented, with mixed tenure residential development, waterfront open spaces, and a variety of other cultural, leisure and sports facilities. Development is ongoing on sites to the west and east of the Bay and between this area and the city centre (Figure 1).

There have been setbacks and delays, due to adverse property market conditions between 1989 and 1994 and less public finance being made available than required. By the time it was wound up in 2000, the CBDC's activities had generated less employment than hoped and had not succeeded in completing all the planned infrastructure and other major projects. It had achieved a private investment gearing ratio of only 1:2.38, below the average achieved by the other UDCs (Punter, 2006a). Evaluations reveal a number of problems. Social inclusion objectives were voiced but not prioritised (Thomas and Imrie, 1999). As a relatively small provincial city, Cardiff continues to struggle to project an image as a European capital city and to attract major international investment. Access to the employment generated has been uneven, with persistent high unemployment rates among local residents and in other inner city housing areas and peripheral housing estates (Bristow and Lovering, 2006; Bristow and Morgan, 2006). Concerns over environmental sustainability have been voiced (Cowell, 2006b). However, it is not the purpose of this case study to conduct a systematic evaluation of the achievements of urban regeneration strategies in the southern part of the city or of the CBDC. Instead, the remainder of the discussion will focus on the politics of the process – how political alliances were built to enable large scale regeneration to occur (and to be sustained since 2000) and how they have weathered political challenges, as well as how influential wider public views have been.

First, the County Council and its leader's support for a vision of Cardiff as a European capital city with lifestyles and a built environment to match, their promotion of a revised policy for economic regeneration based on services (culture, tourism, offices, retailing, leisure) rather than industry and their support for the establishment of a UDC were critical. This support was expressed in practical terms when the new South Glamorgan County Council decided to build its headquarters in the middle of a semi-derelict industrial area to kick start development in the Bay. The consistency of support for the new approach was linked both to the longstanding political dominance of the Labour Party and the strong and rather autocratic mode of leadership with which it was associated. However, the backing of the County Council would have been insufficient without its close political links with the regional arm of the central government⁴ and a large proportion of the Labour politicians in the City Council. In addition, a political coalition would have been insufficient without strong partnerships with private developers. Of particular importance were the main landowners and major developers (especially Associated British Ports), with which close working relationships were established. These helped create confidence, bring in other investors and undermine the ability of small landowners and businesses to resist proposals that often involved expropriation and relocation.

Nevertheless, there were challenges to the CBDC's plans and to the dominant political coalition that backed them. First, City Council politicians, wary that the regeneration of south

⁴ Even when the central government was under Conservative Party control, the vast majority of South Wales MPs were Labour.

Cardiff would threaten the continued viability of the city centre, where the Council was a major landowner, and generally suspicious of the County Council's attempts to dominate local politics, were less enthusiastic. Second, there was widespread opposition to the barrage from residents in inner city areas backed by their councillors, as well as environmental interests. The reasons included the effect it was feared the barrage and lake would have on groundwater levels and building foundations and the destruction of a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest. Third, the agencies submitted what were effectively competing bids for major public sporting/arts venues. Fourth, low income residents living in south Cardiff and small businesses dependent on paying low rents in poor quality buildings for their viability opposed a commercial property-led and culture-led approach to regeneration that seemed to bring them few benefits and in some instances disadvantaged them.

The political responses to these challenges were directed at maintaining commitment to the overall aim, vision and approach by managing the way in which proposals were presented and justified and making concessions where necessary.

The regeneration of south Cardiff through mixed use development departed from the Buchanan recommendations and subsequent development plans, to which both local governments and the Welsh Office were committed, as described above. However, rather than couching the debate in terms of a direct conflict of planning priorities, the regeneration strategy for Cardiff Bay was portrayed as essential to modernisation, economic revival and realising the vision of Cardiff as capital of Wales and a European capital. In addition, despite the relatively long distance from the CBD to the waterfront, where many of the hotel, cultural, leisure and civic buildings were to be located, along with some luxury housing, the strategy was portrayed as integrating the Cardiff Bay area into Cardiff, complementary to rather than competing with the city centre. This was to be achieved partly by zoning areas for office development immediately to the south of the CBD near the main railway station and partly by constructing a new 'boulevard' connecting the two areas alongside the existing railway (Thomas and Imrie, 1999). In addition, to placate the City Council, 'city centre' type retail uses (rather than 'festival' or 'out of town' retailing) have not been permitted in the Bay area. The idea that new office and retail facilities in the Bay will both regenerate the area and complement the city centre have subsequently been incorporated in successive planning documents (the South Glamorgan Structure Plan 1990, the 1995 and 1997 Structure Plans, and successive plans for the city, including the Local Development Plan that is currently under preparation) (Coop and Thomas, 2007).

The barrage across the mouths of the two rivers that run north-south through Cardiff was proposed to create a permanent freshwater lake on the grounds that tidal mudflats, whatever their wildlife interest, would attract neither investors nor consumers of the leisure, cultural and residential facilities planned for the waterfront area.

“Right from the inception of the full barrage project in 1987, it generated a diverse but often tightly organized alliance of opponents, including residents groups, dissenting politicians, helpful academics and environmental organizations. A key moment in the conflict was the joint production of The Living Waterfront as an alternative to the proposals of the CBDC... This rarest of beasts - an alternative development vision for Cardiff – proposed a mini-barrage, enclosing only the Inner Harbour... In the end, high-level political support ensured that the CBDC's barrage gained Parliamentary approval [in 1993], but the unstinting opposition forced CBDC and its successors to meet stringent environmental conditions for water quality, groundwater monitoring, bird populations and fisheries... Within local government relations between the old

Cardiff City Council and CBDC over the land drainage and water quality impacts had become rather fraught..... However, the reorganization of Welsh local government saw the strong pro-barrage contingent from South Glamorgan gain leading positions in the new, unitary authority” (Cowell, 2006b, p. 225).

Construction was completed in 1999. There had been little doubt that the barrage would be approved, as it had support from all the political parties at both local and national levels (Cowell and Thomas, 2002). However, pressure from the conservation lobby ensured that the necessary legislation contained provision for replacement wetland habitats outside the city (especially for migratory birds), improved treatment of sewage discharges into the rivers feeding the lake, environmental safeguards and, following lobbying from residents and City councillors in south Cardiff, provision for compensation should rising groundwater levels affect houses (Thomas and Imrie, 1993). Although the new lake, with its 12 Km waterfront, is popular, the central government had to spend a sizeable sum on establishing the new wetlands and management of water quality in the lake is complex and costly (Cowell, 2006a).

At the end of the last century, as part of the increasingly dominant approach to regeneration through cultural development and tourism, the CBDC and the County Council submitted separate bids for national funding for major millennium projects. The regeneration strategy for the Bay contained provision for an Opera House to provide a permanent and more satisfactory home for the Welsh National Opera. Following an international architectural competition organised by the Cardiff Bay Opera Trust, the winning design was submitted for National Lottery funding. At the same time, the County Council, working with the Welsh Rugby Union, owner of the national stadium in the centre of Cardiff, applied for funding to rebuild it (Thomas and Imrie, 1999). Both were controversial. Many disliked Zaha Hadid’s winning design for the Opera House and contrasted the supposedly elitist appeal of opera to the wider populist appeal of the sports events and rock concerts to be held in the stadium (although the stress imposed on the city centre by large volumes of vehicular and pedestrian traffic during events was also a major concern). As might have been expected, and amidst considerable political and public recrimination, only one proposal was funded in time for the millennium (the stadium), although eventually a revised proposal for an opera house and arts centre appealing to a wider range of users and with a less controversial architectural design did secure Lottery funding.

The main existing community in the Cardiff Bay area was Butetown, an ethnically mixed low income area that originally developed to house dock workers and provide services for sailors. In 1987, it accommodated some 3,500 of the 5,000 residents in the CBDC area. Residents already felt physically isolated, stigmatised and marginalised; health indicators were poor and unemployment high. In the surrounding run down areas, small dockland firms feared the dislocation and higher costs that they would incur if relocated. It was not only the estuaries and mudflats that were perceived by the CBDC and its allies as being incompatible with the vision of regenerated south Cardiff, it was also Butetown and the diverse small businesses in ramshackle premises. They shared the docks’ peripheral physical location, cut off by railway lines and a river, and had been neglected by the local authorities and the main landowner (Associated British Ports) alike. Like the mudflats, salt marshes and river banks, the “Butetown community was the subject of persistent negative stereotyping: different but dangerously different, exotic but dangerously exotic.... ‘Re-uniting Cardiff and its waterfront’ clearly meant, from the outset, negating the area’s danger, making Butetown safe for respectable Cardiff” (Cowell and Thomas, 2002, p. 1252). That a new ‘boulevard’ was built to link the CBD with the waterfront rather than upgrading the existing road running through Butetown symbolised its social and physical marginalisation (Punter, 2006a; Thomas and

Imrie, 1999). The hegemonic 'environmental imaginary' that envisages Cardiff Bay as a 'new' site capable of competing for private investment in prestigious economic, administrative and leisure facilities, Cowell and Thomas assert, involves 'integrating' and 'reclaiming' landscapes, people and activities that are perceived to be 'deviant'.

As might have been expected, there was some resistance to the proposals and some of those affected were able to challenge the CBDC's policies and priorities. The City Council, local councillors, residents' groups, a business association and a local enterprise support agency were able to secure some compromises: the housing target for the Bay area included 25 per cent affordable housing, to be provided by housing associations; rather than being subject to arbitrary relocation, local businesses were provided with legal and financial assistance to help them negotiate for the compensation packages available and often to relocate to industrial estates within the CBDC area; and some 'social projects' were provided to local residents (a new school, a youth centre) (Thomas and Imrie, 1993). The small community development team at the CBDC was strengthened and worked to support local groups and set up training schemes for local people (Thomas and Imrie, 1999). However, some businesses were adversely affected by their relocation, fewer jobs were created in the area than planned (Bristow and Morgan, 2006; Punter, 2006a), a very small proportion of the CBDC's budget was devoted to social projects and the cultural facilities provided are, it is argued, "spectacular places of consumption" that contribute to the quality of life of the well off rather than the cultural life of the local population (especially the less well off) (Boland, 2006). In essence, Thomas and Imrie conclude, the CBDC was prepared "to deliver some community benefits in return for community acquiescence in its overall strategy" (Thomas and Imrie, 1999, p. 121). Further, these represented negotiated ways of ensuring continued community support beyond the life of the CBDC. The relatively weak political voice of low income residents and small businesses was sufficient to win a few concessions but insufficient in the face of the wider political and public support for the regeneration strategy to achieve any significant reorientation of the CBDC's property-led approach.

Conclusion

In Cardiff, consistent regeneration policies have been pursued for its city centre since the 1960s and for southern Cardiff since the early 1980s. Today, like many other cities, the city's economy has been re-oriented away from manufacturing towards a greater emphasis on services, especially consumer services and public administration. The physical face of the city, especially the rundown and semi-derelict areas of port and industrial land between the city centre and the docks, has changed dramatically. Despite its relatively small size and the delaying effects of periodic downturns in the property market, significant changes were achieved before and during the life of the CBDC and these have continued since. Despite the continued rivalries between the agencies and politicians involved, the dramatic removal of the long dominant Labour Party from local political control, and periodic protests from local residents, small businesses and environmental interests, the basic regeneration strategy is unchanged and public and private investment in major projects continues. This can be attributed to the creation and maintenance of political alliances committed to the realisation of a common vision for the city. This vision has been encapsulated and reinforced, but also modified in detail when necessary, in successive planning documents and development control decisions.

Political commitment to modernisation, economic restructuring and physical regeneration to transform Cardiff into an appropriate capital for Wales, a smaller version of Baltimore

capable of competing for domestic and international investment and assisting Wales to take its place amongst the significant regions of Europe, was sustained until 2004 through strong political leadership, enduring relationships between local and regional/national politicians and a willingness to compromise when this would not jeopardise the overall vision. Cross-party support for the long term vision and most of the strategies pursued to realise economic and physical regeneration meant that they survived the inter- and intra-party and council conflicts, as well as public opposition to aspects of the proposals (Coop and Thomas, 2007). Given the large gap between investment needs and public sector funding, regeneration has depended on private capital. Therefore, the construction of a coalition between the political elite and private sector commercial property development interests is also central to explaining the success achieved, through the enabling and investment roles of the public sector and investment by the private sector (Hooper, 2006). Such public-private partnerships are a key characteristic of ‘civic boosterism’ everywhere. However, often this approach, as in Cardiff, tends to sideline social inclusion, equality and sustainability objectives, everyday service delivery and the achievement of high quality urban design (Cowell, 2006b; Cowell and Thomas, 2002; Punter, 2006a). Moreover, commitment to culture-led development by the County Council in the early 1990s led to the addition of “a prominent but problematic layer of spectator sports and related facilities to the spontaneous acceleration of mass-market commercial street culture (level 1) and the expansion of layer 2 [facilities for formal culture], which has developed largely of its own public-subsidised accord [because of Cardiff’s capital city status]” (Lovering, 2006, p. 192). Although the high profile projects have placed Cardiff on the national and international map, Lovering suggests, not only does this approach to culture as part of civic boosterism and place marketing neglect diverse local needs and erode local distinctiveness, it is also incoherent and culturally ‘empty’.

The planning system has been a key instrument in the regeneration process. This is not because a blueprint plan was developed in the late 1960s and consistently adhered to ever since. Instead, a succession of strategic plans have provided a spatial framework for the overall aims and reiterated the key themes through their policy statements, but have also permitted the planning doctrine to evolve to accommodate changed market and political circumstances (Coop and Thomas, 2007), not least the portrayal of the mixed use regeneration of south Cardiff as complementary to rather than competing with city centre redevelopment. These strategic plans have been supported by a bewildering array of local plans, regeneration strategies, planning briefs for particular sites, conservation area strategies etc, as the distribution of planning responsibilities between levels of local government, the planning legislation and immediate needs have changed (Harris, 2006). Nevertheless, testament to the good working relationships and shared objectives, Punter (2006a) points out, was the fact that in only 5 of the 3,000 planning decisions made during the life of the CBDC did differences between the agencies fail to be resolved by negotiation and have to be referred to the Welsh Office. The consistent planning doctrine, in Coop and Thomas’s view, “provided a screen for disagreement but also a boundary within which it could be contained” (Coop and Thomas, 2007, p. 184).

Despite the increasingly elaborate requirements for participation specified in successive planning legislation, public participation has played a limited role in planning for urban regeneration. Most voters were persuaded by the vision for the city, its Central Business District and Cardiff Bay. Few residents lived in these two areas and those that did were generally members of socially disadvantaged groups, especially poor people and ethnic minorities. In the face of the central/local cross-party political coalition and large-scale private actors backing the proposals, they won few concessions. Even the well organised and articulate environmental lobby was unable to defeat the main proposals. Despite the intentions

of the legislation, participation appears to have been used instrumentally to gain public support and defuse opposition, rather than give residents genuine influence over major planning decisions.

Both a willingness to sink political differences in pursuit of a broadly agreed long-term vision and an ability to respond to changing issues have been demonstrated in recent years. Key narratives and practices persisted beyond the winding up of the CBDC. This is unsurprising, “given that the social relations of the CBDC built substantially upon existing networks within the regional coalition” (Cowell and Thomas, 2002, p. 1252). Many of the dissenting Labour politicians who had tried in the 1990s to raise issues of environmental sustainability and social inclusion were elected as members of the new national Assembly, from where they attempted to work in more participatory ways and prioritise sustainability, an agenda which has had some influence on local plans and policies, facilitated by the changing political configuration within the Council since 2005 (Cowell, 2006b; Morgan, 2006a). Subsequent planning documents have given more recognition to environmental issues and reducing inequality – although politicians, planners, citizens and businesses have been persuaded by the growth and development agenda, participatory processes reveal that this is not the only priority and national policy guidance also tries to strike a balance between economic development, environmental sustainability and social inclusion. Nevertheless, the core political and regeneration priorities of transforming Cardiff into a modern, attractive, competitive European capital through becoming a national and international centre of investment and consumption remain central.

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