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# **Spaces of City-regionalism: conceptualising pluralism in policymaking**

**David Waite and Gillian Bristow**

## **Abstract**

City-regionalism is now established as a key spatial arena for shaping sub-national urban policy. In these spaces, economic growth interests are marshalled within a competitiveness narrative as the dominant approach for the development of governance and policy. Yet such dominance in principle does not preclude other policy approaches from emerging and re-fashioning city-regionalism. In this paper, making reference to evolving city-region arrangements in the UK, specifically Cardiff, we explore and conceptualise policy pluralism. Our core argument is that to determine the possibilities for plural approaches to emerge, researchers can productively assess the intersections of relational and territorial geographies filtered through a micro-meso-macro framework. The framework positions governing principles, institutions and practices as mediators of, or triggers for, relational and territorial policymaking processes whose interaction may open up windows through which pluralistic approaches might develop. With such a conceptual approach applied in the context of city-regionalism, the break points in competitiveness-focused policymaking may more readily come into view.

## **Introduction – possibilities for pluralism in city-region politics**

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in understanding the emergence of city-regions as key spaces of governance (Kantor and Nelles, 2015; Levelt and Janssen-Jansen, 2013; Wachsmuth, 2017) and economic development (Scott et al., 2002; Morgan, 2014). This has given rise to a new city-regional orthodoxy in political-economic theory and indeed in political praxis, with the task of devising city-regional policies becoming firmly established as a central institutional task throughout much of Western Europe, North America and beyond (Harrison, 2007). City-regions present many practical and political conundrums nonetheless, from technical challenges of matching functional systems to administrative geographies, to those of securing appropriate inter-municipal competition and collaboration.

City-regionalist policy thinking has been captured, to some degree, by narratives suggesting that such economic spaces are critical for the pursuit of competitiveness (Malecki, 2007; Lovering, 1999). However, city-regionalism may also emerge as a product of various social and environmental movements and in response to struggles and strategies around the effective management of social relations of production and matters of collective consumption around, for example, housing, education and the environment (Brenner, 2002; Ward and Jonas, 2004). In short, whilst competitive city-regionalism abounds, there is now greater recognition for the potential of a more plural agenda for city-regionalism (Pike et al, 2007; Pike et al, 2017; Jonas, 2013). This paper contributes to a literature on urban and

regional pluralism and suggests a conceptual way forward to outline policies and politics constructed through varying relational and territorial processes (Osgood et al., 2016; Lauermann, 2016; Andrew and Doloreux, 2012). Positing city-region policy as an evolutionary logic or approach, the conceptual framework we present helps to reveal the openings in policymaking and thus the potential opportunities for pluralism to emerge. This inserts within old yet resonant debates about city-regions reflecting both material socio-economic formations (Harding, 2007) and sites of political construction and contestation (Jonas and Ward, 2007a; 2007b). Recalling Harding (2007: 445) who noted that there are explanatory gaps in identifying where a “new [progressive] politics might arise from or what, if anything, might be ‘city-regional’ about it”, this paper serves to move the critique of competitive city-regionalism beyond simply a normative plea.

To make headway with the possibility of policy plurality for city-regions, we argue that an appreciation of the complex socio-spatial underpinnings of city-region politics and policymaking is required. Doing this highlights how, for example, much of urban politics is triggered and necessitated by administrative processes and regulatory mechanisms working at wider geographic scales; reflecting spatial policy reach, Lauermann (2016: 2) talks of “political logics that [are] nested within an exogenous political economy”. This paper argues that, through three framings that help to order the policymaking processes – the “micro-meso-macro” – we have a useful framework to consider the

complex dimensions of city-region politics and thus have a lens to consider persistence or change within a city-region policy process.

As an empirical concern, this paper directs focus to the emergence of city-region politics and policymaking in Cardiff (south east Wales) and reflects on the dominance, hitherto, of competitiveness approaches (Bristow and Morgan, 2006; Waite, 2015). Rather than take a binary position and seek to reject competitiveness approaches per se, this paper seeks to understand why, with various different rationales for city-regionalism apparent, competitive approaches dominate in the Cardiff context. We also enquire as to how competitiveness approaches may be put in balance to a greater degree with other rationales for city-region policymaking (Tomaney, 2017; Jonas, 2013), arguing that the conceptual framing - in exhibiting a range of socio-spatial processes and their evolution - may reveal the potential break points in extant city-region policy approaches. Coupled with the recent introduction of a City Deal, Cardiff's nascent city-regionalism presents an interesting case for study for a number of reasons including its complex multi-layered governance and its history of challenging city-hinterland economic dynamics.

City Deals – one of which has rejuvenated city-region policy in Cardiff - are negotiated funding and policy settlements between local authorities (LAs) and national and central government bodies. Underpinned by inter-city competition, deals set out to stimulate local economic growth based on the notion that local leaders are in the best position to shape interventions in their areas. In the Welsh context, City

Deals reflect complex tripartite negotiations, linking the UK Government (UKG), the devolved administration in Wales, and clusters of local authorities (reflecting, a city-region form, to some degree).<sup>1</sup> Deals are promoted for their bespoke nature, and while capital infrastructure investments reflect the core of City Deals, policies and investments concerning sector, labour and welfare programmes also feature in some. Deals tend to be designed and negotiated behind “closed doors” (House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2016: 11) by a small cadre of elites, thus raising questions about what Kantor and Nelles (2013: 543) term “input legitimacy”. This paper seeks to question whether the city-regional institutions advanced and required by deal-making will permit or close off pluralistic policy agendas from emerging.

The paper proceeds with a review covering core themes in the city-regional literature and suggests that progressive regionalism provides a potential hook for framing policy pluralism. An overview of the variegated policy context in south-east Wales follows this, before we set out the methods adopted in our empirical work. An outline of the micro-meso-macro framework then provides the basis to consider how city-region logics in Cardiff have been initiated and how approaches to city-regionalism may morph (to accommodate more pluralistic approaches). We end with reflections on the direction of travel of the city-region agenda in Cardiff, and the utility of the framework set out.

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<sup>1</sup> The city-region or south-east Wales is comprised of 10 local authorities: Cardiff, Newport, Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Vale of Glamorgan, Rhonda Cynon Taf, Caerphilly, Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire.

## Literature Review

There is a sprawling literature on city-regionalism, and in this section we suggest the body of work can be considered across three inter-linking dimensions; technical/functional; economic; and political. Our contribution is primarily to the latter, yet technical and economic accounts – which reflect on material city-region forms – are key inputs and support the prominence of city-regions within sub-national policy debates.

First, as a technical concern, city-regions are widely referred to yet difficult to precisely define. Functional understandings of city-regions dominate typically (Parr, 2005; Coombes, 2014), with a strong tendency to focus on commuting flows (travel-to-work areas) or boundaries set to determine urban contiguity (“primary urban areas”) (DCLG, 2011). However, there is a degree of slipperiness in the literature when it comes to distinguishing cities, city-regions and metropolitan areas (Parr, 2008; 2014). Furthermore, demarcating coherent administrative spaces for sub-national policymaking – as a response to such material city-region systems - has proved a point of ongoing contention and controversy.

Distinct though not separable from the technical questions, is the literature that considers the position or framing of city-regions as key spaces within the global economy (Malecki, 2007; Wu and Zhang, 2007). Scott et al (2002) for example, posit global city-regions as key sites within contemporary capitalism, where the global meets the local

through the novelty of knowledge exchange processes and uncodifiable innovations and commercial practices that bind firms and workers. City-regions, in such a framing, benefit from the processes of agglomeration, which - marked by their specialisations and favourable sectoral compositions and triggered through effects hinging on density and scale - are adopted by policymakers as place-specific opportunities to address economic growth concerns (Storper, 2013; Harding, 2007).

Linking to varying degrees with technical and economic accounts, politics is critically important in shaping how city-region policies play out in numerous ways (Harrison and Grove, 2014; Tomàs, 2011). The literature offers reflections on top-down versus bottom-up city-regionalism (Rodríguez-Pose, 2008; Kantor, 2008; Harrison, 2010; Jonas et al., 2014), the differentiated treatment of urban and rural places within city-region contexts (Harrison and Heley, 2015), and the roles played by nation-states in influencing city-region politics (Harrison, 2007; Bristow, 2013). Storper (2013: 10) notes with respect to the latter: “City regions ... are shaped by national policies in different ways, and in turn, they enter into national political and social life in a variety of ways that are often not apparent to the naked eye”.

The literature has pointed to two particularly important political issues. First, issues concerning the structures of and relationships within governance are increasingly prominent in city-region debates, with the academic and policy rhetoric of competitive city-regionalism criticised for its tendency to imply the existence of a smooth transition

to new, city-region arrangements (Harrison, 2007; Harrison, 2012). In practice, city-region policies and institutions tend to layer over old, inherited landscapes and cultures of local and regional economic governance and spatial planning (Harrison, 2007; Harrison and Growe, 2014), resulting in a dynamic and conflict-ridden politics of, and in, space (Jonas and Ward, 2007a). Second, a range of different rationales for city-regionalism may emerge in practice. Indeed, the management of social and environmental issues may require responses in areas of housing and taxation, for example, potentially leading to new relationships between state actors and communities (Brenner, 2002; Jonas and Ward, 2007a; Krueger and Savage, 2007; Mackinnon and Derickson, 2013; Purcell, 2013). This creates an imperative to understand the “particular ways in which state activity and politics have been rescaled at, around, and within city-regions” (Jonas and Ward, 2007a: 170). The contested politics of institutional history and developmental focus particularly resonate in the context of south-east Wales, where numerous policy tools have been tried, tested and (typically) abandoned (Morgan, 2014).

The politics of city-regionalism is striking in the UK (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2016). Whilst successive national governments have demonstrated increasing interest in city-regionalism, progress in the development of structures to manage the city-region has been “ad hoc”, “uneven” and “incremental” (Turok, 2009: 846). In the UK, persistent or “compulsive re-organisation” can be witnessed (Jones, 2010: 373), yet, within such organisational tumult, city-regions, have

emerged as a partial response to the abolition of wider regional development bodies. Combined authorities have come to prominence more recently to reflect city-region-based geographies in England, whilst more tentative progress can be pointed in the devolved administrations (of Scotland and Wales). In the current context of austerity and its necessity of enforced economies, however, the imperative to develop stronger municipal collaboration in places like south east Wales is growing (Waite, 2015).

### *Competitiveness and Pluralism for City-regions*

A competitiveness-based policymaking approach promotes economic development and growth over other outcomes; in this way, links to Harvey's (1989) concept of the "entrepreneurial" city are apparent. Regarded by Schoenberger (1998: 3) as a "hegemonic" discourse, the notion of firms competing for market share is swiftly translated across to places seeking finite human and capital investments, and feeds into policy design and practices (Lovering, 1999). Competitiveness thinking is used to bolster wider arguments for spatial rebalancing and related aims of national economic growth. Rather than central government taking a firm hand and pushing capital to lagging regions, a competitiveness approach hinges on a self-help prescription. Places must compete, based on astute investments, to succeed. Competitiveness approaches can be observed in policy statements at the national and supra-national levels (from the former DTI (2003) to the European Commission (CEC, 2003)) and risks

leading to “identikit” policymaking, with each place or region adopting a similar suite of business friendly approaches (Bristow, 2005; 2010).

The focus on competitiveness approaches to accompany and bolster city-regionalism in the UK was supported by work for the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister which reinvigorated an economic case for major urban areas (Parkinson et al., 2006). City Deals, which have presented growth as a central objective, and which cultivate competitive bidding between cities for larger funding and policy settlements, further embrace competitiveness as the guiding principle for intra-UK economic development policy.

Alongside the UK Government’s resurgent interest, multiple actors – including think tanks such as the Centre for Cities (e.g. Centre for Cities, 2016) - have helped to propel a competitiveness argument. The rise of city-regionalism – as a form of policy mobility and transfer (Peck, 2011; McCann, 2011) - also links to the broader “metropolitan revolution” (Katz and Bradley, 2013), with urban agglomerations posed as necessary for prosperous and sustainable futures (Glaeser, 2011) as well as for innovative communities of commerce and policymaking (Katz and Bradley, 2013). Cumulatively, through the aforementioned processes, it is argued that city-regions provide the ideal scale through which economic competitiveness can be promoted and nurtured, with such an approach maintained through complex and diffuse socio-spatial policymaking techniques.

Given the dominance of competitiveness, a whole series of other rationales for city-regionalism, which embrace the diverse and

conflicting politics both of and in urban and regional space, are somewhat side-lined. Such plural rationales include the potential for social and environmental objectives to factor into policy prioritisation, leading to a city-region politics that places economic growth in balance with a wider set of desired outcomes. This does not eschew a focus on productionist processes per se, but looks at different (and additional) forms and ways of governing capital, with varying ends or outcomes in mind. Aligned with such a perspective, progressive regionalism – a form of regional policy based on an embrace of democracy, leading to greater spatial and territorial justice and equity - is a notion advanced by some authors and offers a potential framing for pluralism (Clark and Christopherson, 2009; Mackinnon, 2017). More radically, others have called for a different city-region growth model to be adopted, premised on principles of the foundational economy (Folkman et al., 2016). Connected to such ideas, a policy thrust gaining attention in the UK is “inclusive growth”, which broadly seeks to re-orient policy around those who have yet to reap the benefits of existing growth (RSA Inclusive Growth Commission, 2017; Bevan Foundation and JRF, 2017).

Our contribution to these literatures is to provide a framework by which to decompose politics, and thus move debate from the realms of a normative appeal, to a more granular appraisal of where openings in city-region politics may permit pluralist agendas to insert and take hold. Indeed, it is an open question in the Welsh context as to whether city-region policymaking may allow or further close-off more plural approaches vis-à-vis policymaking at a local authority level. Indeed,

local authorities retain duties to perform managerialist functions of service provision alongside competitiveness agendas fashioned by economic development departments. There are two pertinent considerations here. On the one hand, a new scale of strategic decision making – set at a city-region geography - may allow for broader geographical and sectoral issues to be articulated (perhaps through new institutional capacity). On the other hand, city-regionalism may simply enrol more peripheral parts of a city-region in the competitiveness agenda that the dominant local authority within the city-region (Cardiff City Council) has long embraced (Boland, 2006). We can observe from other contexts such as Greater Manchester, nevertheless, how city-regionalism has evolved to embrace more pluralistic policy agendas including for health<sup>2</sup>. Given the politics of city-regionalism and the different institutions and circumstances in place, the competitive agenda – and the unfettered pursuit of growth blind to local distributional and social consequences - is unlikely to be the only agenda that will sustain city-regionalism.

## **Policy Context**

City-regionalism in Cardiff reflects a conjuncture of multiple policy strands, relating to the new urban focus of the devolved administration, and the UK Government's interest in localism paired with deal-making. More particularly, two policy threads underpin the

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<sup>2</sup> This particular city-region evolution is tied to the decentralisation agenda in the UK.

city-regional discussion in Cardiff: one, a Welsh Government-led (WG) policy emphasis borne out of the 2012 Haywood report<sup>3</sup>; and, two, a more recent attachment to City Deals - a flagship decentralising policy tool - which have been imported from the English sub-national policy context. Both processes tie an emergent city-regionalism to a competitiveness ethos.

Prior to the new-found policy focus in south-east Wales, numerous starting points for city-regionalism in Wales can be identified. Cooke's (1992) report: "making a European city of the future", first deployed a city-region narrative according to Allan (2011). This underscored the idea that a Cardiff-centric approach is of benefit to all in south-east Wales. Cooke (1992: 2; cited in Allan, 2011: 136) remarked: "in many cases capital cities [...] have a "locomotive" effect, pulling their neighbours in a particular direction". At a technical level, in terms of planning guidance, the Wales Spatial Plan had a notably formative role (Welsh Government, 2008; also see Heley, 2013). At present, city-region initiatives - from high-level strategy to on the ground tools - form part of a suite of interventions, involving varying degrees of local and national co-ordination, which seek to remedy Wales' parlous economic performance vis-à-vis the rest of the UK (for example, Wales exhibits the lowest GVA per head of any region in the UK while inactivity rates are higher than the UK average (StatsWales, 2017)).

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<sup>3</sup> Which recommended city-region bodies be formed for Cardiff and Swansea.

The Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) was established to address the city-region dynamics presented in south-east Wales and flows from a recommendation made in the Haywood report (Welsh Government, 2012). The Cardiff Capital Region Board (2015) – an advisory grouping consisting of cross-sectoral leaders - presented a strong competitiveness focus in their report, “Powering the Welsh economy” (in seeking to give direction to the city-region agenda). The report noted:

“We believe that if we are to compete in this new global market, we must develop the capabilities, resources and critical mass to give us a competitive advantage. We must also present and market these globally in a compelling and consistent way. Investors from new markets may not know much about the Cardiff Capital Region at the moment, so we need to actively promote it, rather than expect them to come to us.” (Cardiff Capital Region Board, 2015: 12)

It is apparent here, that key to the competitive armoury is a strong emphasis on marketing and branding in efforts to attract inward investment. Aligning with this view, Cardiff Council’s recent fondness for promoting “quality of life” hinges on the aspiration to attract and retain highly skilled workers (City of Cardiff Council, 2015), while the Welsh Government’s experiment with three enterprise zone areas in the city-region seeks to lure investment on the back of incentives

provided<sup>4</sup>. From such interventions, a view of city-regionalism as an investment opportunity is put forward.

Whilst the advisory boards re-kindled city-region interests in Wales, the City Deal, bringing in the influence of the UK Government, can be regarded as the key process driving city-region policymaking in south-east Wales since 2015-16. With capital funding of £1.2 billion agreed over 20 years, a City Deal for the Cardiff city-region has been confirmed (HM Government, 2016). Each part of the triumvirate – the UK Government, Welsh Government and the ten local authorities - is required to contribute to an infrastructure fund, be it through existing capital budgets or by raising debt. Additional policy areas relate to labour markets and innovation. The overall growth focus is exemplified in the following statement from the City Deal document which points to future funding hinging on growth performance: "... The next five year tranche of funding will be unlocked if the UK and Welsh Governments are satisfied ... [the investments] have met key objectives and contributed to national growth" (HM Government, 2016).

An opportunity for the devolved administration in Wales to set a different course for city-region policy does exist to some extent, and the tri-lateralism of City Deals in Wales, with the devolved administration's involvement, brings this opportunity into sharp relief. Whilst the Welsh Government is ultimately limited by the scope of devolution agreed with the UK Government and the consequential of the Barnett formula - which determines the fiscal scope of the devolved administration -

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<sup>4</sup> <https://businesswales.gov.wales/enterprisezones/> [retrieved 15/10/17]

policy choices can be made to some degree (housing and economic development are two such areas). Devolution politics in the UK, however, has tended to focus more on the devolved administrations seeking to address the perceived insufficiencies of their own settlements, as they relate to the UK Government. A new metropolitan policymaking vogue raises questions, nevertheless, about the Welsh Government's own commitment to localism and, particularly, the powers granted to local bodies (Waite, 2016; Travers, 2016).

As an example of policy innovation, the Welsh Government have embraced sustainability themes, and new wellbeing legislation – the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) - places sustainability at the core of work by newly established Public Service Boards (PSBs) established at each local authority area. The key principles within the act may evince high-level gesturing to a sceptic; indeed, determining the boundaries between rhetoric and reality will be important (Davies, 2016). However, notions of a “more resilient Wales”, “a healthier Wales” and a “more equal Wales” offer a glimpse of future development aspirations not restricted to competitiveness aims (Welsh Government, 2015). Significant institutional change across Wales is proposed through the wellbeing legislation, with local authority based PSBs required to interact with auditing bodies, an advisory panel, a Future Generations Commissioner and government ministers at various points (Davies, 2016). Impacts on city-regional policies will hinge on the degree to which governance arrangements are more firmly established. At present, PSBs will be established for local

authority areas, so whether a city-region governance level would be expected to embrace such aims remains open to conjecture. There is provision in the legislation, however, for local bodies to take into account objectives and goals set in neighbouring areas.

[insert table 1 about here]

Underlying the City Deal and the wellbeing agenda have been long-running challenges relating to the territorial economic development of south-east Wales. A central concern here has been the varying fortunes of the coastal belt (Cardiff and connected areas) vis-à-vis the Heads of the Valleys (in the north of the city-region). Numerous initiatives have been proposed to strengthen economic conditions in the Valleys - areas which have experienced long decline through de-industrialisation (Burgess and Moles, 2016) – and the latest policy strategy, “Our Valleys, Our Future”, was released in 2017 (Welsh Government, 2017). A city-region perspective brings the diverging fortunes of the Valleys and Cardiff into sharp focus, and raises thorny questions around policy prioritisation and focus. For example, there are mixed views and evidence as to whether strengthening the city of Cardiff – which presents favourable growth characteristics relatively - will be beneficial for the whole city-region, or whether this will simply

serve to hollow out other places in the city-region (with weaker commercial and economic bases).

Mindful of this complex policy backcloth, the following discussion applies a framework that permits consideration of how a wellbeing or inclusivity focus might inflect city-regional policymaking, which is dominated by a competitiveness thrust at present.

## **Methods and framework**

The empirical material in this paper is based on qualitative, textual analysis and draws on documentary material, including: Welsh Government, UK Government and local authority reports; think tank papers and position pieces; and relevant media commentaries. The analysis also takes into account submissions made to the Welsh Assembly, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee enquiry into City Deals (in mid-2017), along with Committee transcripts. These provide a wide source of viewpoints, from a range of stakeholders, on how City Deals have progressed and what challenges are being confronted. The documentary material has been collected over a three-year period, permitting changing perspectives and narratives to emerge - from initial conversations about the prospect of a deal, to agreement and implementation. From the documentary repository, keyword searches, set within wider reading to assess the nature and veracity of the sources, were used to draw out key aspects of the data. The purpose of the method deployed was ultimately to evidence the logics behind the rise of a city-region agenda, and to consider to what extent

city-regionalism may morph to embrace more pluralistic aims.

Moreover, the empirical material serves the purpose of an animating an a priori conceptual framework, fleshing out its potential applicability and use within the urban governance literature (McCann, 2017).

In applying a conceptual framework, we seek to reveal how a growing impulse for city-regionalism is leading to new institutional configurations oriented around particular policy themes or focus areas (the policy approach). In charting the potential for changes to the policy approach over time, we are confronted with a policymaking space that involves multiple layers of government, with potentially competing policy motivations. The conceptual framework, we argue, can help to illuminate how and at what point a change in regional politics and policymaking approach may emerge.

The “macro”, “meso” and “micro” has been framed by evolutionary economists (Dopfer et al, 2004), utilised by others to look at institutional change (analogous to our approach) (Ostrom and Basurto, 2011), and deployed more generically within human geography (Reid et al., 2010) and political science (Belchior, 2013) for empirical categorisation. Dopfer et al (2004) – whose broad approach we attach to - outline the micro as the activities of the “agent” and how the agent makes and adapts to broader social arrangements. Meso sits above the micro and has a critical co-ordination role between the micro and macro levels. Macro then relates to social structures and orders. Key to the three layers is that micro does not sum into macro; a role for institutions, as determinants of rules and logics at the meso, is

therefore apparent. At the meso level, moreover, change in both regular patterns at the micro (how agents respond to a policy logic) and co-ordination at the macro (structures shaping policy logics), can be initiated. Accommodation is given here to practices as politics constructed in the day-to-day, and to broader structural conditions that order and determine phenomena such as practices (Fuller, 2012; 2013).

Applied to our interests in city-region policymaking, each conceptual layer is now outlined in turn:

- The micro layer reflects agential activities. These may manifest in artefacts or events. Events are usually time-limited, but can have enduring effects. The passing of legislation is one example, as is a budget declaration.
- The meso layer refers to the co-ordination of policymaking in some way through new institutional forms. Meso processes – where an idea or rule is advanced (in our case, city-regionalism) - bring into view multiple actors, aligned under an objective. Though differences may emerge within this common objective, institutional processes have a basic disciplining effect on who can participate and on what terms.
- The macro level reflects a greater degree of abstraction as given by broad principles and ideologies of policymaking and government (the objectives and roles of the state). Micro events are moulded to satisfy or fit with macro settings, however, macro change can be brought about by moments of agency.

Critical to the operation of the framework, is that triggers for a shift in policy logic or approach may stem from any of the conceptual layers. For example, a monetary shock, with implications for fiscal policy and thus public spending, is most obviously conceived at the macro level when the empirical object is the city-region (though the mechanism to enforce fiscal constraint will emerge through micro relationships, such as budget setting). A local political event, such as change within the ruling political party of local government, is more credibly considered at the micro-level, meanwhile. Additionally, reflecting the activating qualities of the framework, each of the three layers may point to different aspects of relational and territorial geographies. For example, macro conditions may reflect national tendencies toward fiscal conservatism, while, at a city-region geography, macro conditions may also reflect a long culture of labour unionism. In essence, while a global trend will always be a macro condition, local political tendencies or cultures, given their structuring effects on policy activities, may be considered macro settings also. Such multi-scalar complexities are not easy to unravel (Levelt and Janssen-Jansen, 2013: 545) and we attempt to decompose this further when we consider phases of a policy logic.

The multiple interests exposed in such layers present thorny conceptual challenges requiring nimble and reflexive empirical judgement. The issue therefore, is to attempt to factor in multiple sets of political and governance dimensions – whether they rest at the

micro, meso or macro – and try to distil what may shift a logic or approach to city-regionalism to accommodate more plural, non-competitive, policy themes. In essence, competitiveness approaches are sustained because, with supporting narratives and activities *inter alia*, policymakers are able to shunt to the centre ground, economic growth concerns, while other matters are side-lined to some degree. Critical to the framework applied is that the durability of a policy logic will be context dependent.

The paper now animates the framework above with reference to dominant policy threads and tools emerging in the Cardiff city-region context. In what follows, we flesh out the micro-meso-macro layers of city-region policymaking as expressed through the City Deal and the imperatives of the wellbeing legislation. We then draw attention to how policy approaches change – in other words, how might competitiveness as the driving approach for the city-region be balanced with wellbeing aims.

At the macro level we refer to the overarching principles (and strategic accommodation) of a particular policy logic; in this case, city-regionalism. With respect to City Deals, firstly, one can observe a tool that is undergirded by inter-place competition set out by the UK Government. For example, the Secretary of State for Wales discussed the Cardiff City Deal in terms of something the city-region cannot afford to lose out on to other areas; in other words, how will Cardiff beat another city-region to a better deal and thus more funds. He also emphasised how local bodies must deliver a growth-focused

proposition to the UK Government that they “can’t refuse” (Denholm-Hall, 2015). Austerity conditions and broad mantras of localism, reflect further centrally (UK) sanctioned policy parameters. With respect to well-being legislation, on the other hand, the macro principle is orchestrated at a Welsh rather than UK geography. Taking a very different orientation, the well-being legislation is rooted in previous commitments made by the devolved administration in Wales to promote sustainability concerns (Government of Wales Act (section 79); also see Welsh Government, 2009). Though taking varying UK and Welsh orientations, the aforementioned macro settings reflect principles and ideologies of policymaking.

At the meso level - the central layer of Dopfer et al’s (2004: 273) framework - we can point to a range of new institutional formations emerging to govern and progress city-regionalism (which reflects the policy logic or approach). Whilst lacking the formalism given through Combined Authorities in England linked to Devolution Deals, the City Deal Cabinet is composed of local authorities from across the Cardiff city-region. Such accountability arrangements are specifically required by the City Deal to give the UK and Welsh Governments confidence that risks are being managed appropriately. The heads of terms document for the City Deal also points to a new city-region business organisation being established as well as a pan regional leadership grouping. Such groups, typically comprised of elites, will have roles in tracking the progress of capital investment projects as well as helping to lever in private sector investment which many of the growth claims

for the City Deal hinge on. Economic growth is a key focus for such new city-region institutional formations, yet an interesting question relates to what scope may exist to consider more plural objectives. In essence, will macro principles relating to wellbeing, as manifested in new legislative steps in Wales, inflect the city-region agenda? In Dopfer et al's (2004) framework, scope is given for an idea or rule - in this case city-region policy - to adapt and take on new approaches and emphases (across the "meso trajectory"). The CCR Growth and Competitiveness Commission, borne out of but independent of the City Deal<sup>5</sup>, sought to mesh a competitiveness thrust with inclusive growth and wellbeing considerations. The Commission's report in proposing "competitiveness with inclusion" therefore offers some contrast with the dominant growth focus expressed in the deal document (Growth and Competitiveness Commission, 2016: 20). Yet whether plurality is put into effect in Cardiff's emergent city-regionalism – and whether wellbeing or inclusivity considerations will be weighted or prioritised alongside extant growth and competitiveness aims (Welsh Government, 2016) - is less clear, but will become apparent in City Deal activities such as how projects are selected, delivered and measured.

The micro level points to the day-to-day political and policy practices and activities that will animate and sustain a city-regional institution (and the policy approach city-region institutions adopt). In terms of the City Deal, a key event was the signing of the heads of

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<sup>5</sup> Set up to advise on how the City Deal can be effectively operationalised.

terms agreement, and the political lobbying and negotiations that preceded the agreement. These were relationships, disruptive to existing governance approaches - where localities would report solely to the Welsh Government, and the Welsh Government to the UK Government - driven by personalities who latched on to an agenda of city-region growth. As the City Deal progresses, the programme management of the City Deal may also shape stances on local procurement and engagement and dialogue with local communities. The wellbeing legislation, in terms of activities, imposes regular reporting requirements on PSBs to an auditing body, yet it is uncertain – or at least ambiguous in the legislation – as to the consequences of meeting or failing to meet certain targets. Finally, activities relating to gateway evaluation periods within the City Deal will shape how the progress and success of the deal are viewed by the UK and Welsh governments (we discuss the gateways further below). In summary, decision taken by the PSBs, City Deal project managers and officials, and politicians, will give indications of the extent to which a competitiveness approach has been revised or moderated in progressing city-regional concerns.

Given the three layers of the framework set out, how do the layers interact in the Cardiff city-region context? It is, we argue, the interaction of the micro-meso-macro, and the relational and territorial processes functioning through these layers, that may potentially lead to a shift in city-region approaches and the adoption of pluralistic objectives. As a starting point, and if city dealing is the prime motivation

or convening force for city-regionalism at present - as an “origination” phase of the “meso trajectory” (Dopfer and Potts, 2008: 46) - the question of if and how sustainability or inclusivity principles emerge, and to what extent they will receive priority, remains open. This is ultimately a question of policy change; competitiveness triggered city-regionalism, but will it sustain it? The key conceptual opening here is whether city-regionalism - as it becomes “adopted” and “adapted” by policy actors, and as Welsh and UK Government agendas at the macro-level shift or crystallise - pivots from a dominant concern for competitiveness to embrace other social and environmental approaches. Following such adaptation of the policy logic, should it occur, city-regional approaches may plausibly exhibit greater constancy, as parties agree valid parameters for intervention (“retention” phase of the meso trajectory).

[insert figure 1 about here]

Giving some encouragement that more pluralistic stances to assessing city-region progress will be considered, the economy minister in the Welsh Government has noted in evidence to a Welsh Assembly Committee: "I've already said I think city deals must do more than just improve GVA and create jobs. They have to improve levels of health and well-being" (Ken Skates AM, evidence to the Economy,

Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Welsh Assembly, 5 July 2017).

Reflecting on the potential for changing approaches to economic policy in Wales, the Minister noted in more detail:

“I think it’s fair to say that the approach that’s been taken in recent years to create jobs, and to create jobs across Wales, has been the right approach, given that we have been sustaining a considerable period of deep austerity and significant losses in jobs in the public sector. But, now that we have record low unemployment and record economic activity, I think we need to look more closely at how the fruits of growth can be shared more equally across Wales ... That is the driving force for moving towards a regional dimension, and also for developing a new contract that will set out fresh expectations for Government support to be secured and realised. It will also require, I think, an appraisal, a fresh appraisal, of some of the indicators that we use to measure success. At the moment we use a basket of indicators. I believe that we should also be considering indicators that concern levels of well-being and happiness, because it’s been proven time and time again that the most contented, the happiest, societies are those that are also the most equal...”

(Ken Skates AM, evidence to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Welsh Assembly, 5 July 2017)

Whilst this signals possible accommodation for pluralism by the Welsh Government, HM Government's conditionality for city-region funding appears closely wedded to competitiveness and growth-based objectives. This points to a potential difference in the macro stance of the Welsh and UK Governments, and a letter from the chair of the Welsh Assembly Committee looking at City Deals – outlining the possibility of applying inclusive growth or wellbeing indicators to deal assessments - noted: “It is not clear at this stage, whether this work will provide a more useful set of indicators to judge success, or whether the UK Government will buy in to it if it does”<sup>6</sup>. We are therefore presented with a complex situation whereby the macro level – the principles of the UK and Welsh Governments toward city-region policy - permits the City Deal to be developed but may take different views on what the deal should achieve. The meso trajectory, manifested in new institutions pursuing city-regionalism, will be critical to mediation.

The gateway review mechanism, an institutional device embedded within the City Deal, provides one test for whether pluralism may be accounted for in assessing City Deal progress. Gateway activities are the five year points at which progress made by the deals are evaluated by the UK and Welsh governments, and where future capital funding tranches are released (should progress be determined to be sufficient). At such events – to gauge adaptation at the meso trajectory - it will be important to observe if wellbeing or inclusivity considerations are accepted by the Welsh and UK Governments as

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s65101/ELGC5%20-24-17%20Paper%2012.html?CT=2> [retrieved 13/10/17]

viable indicators of success. Gateways reflect, in essence, windows by which to consider whether city-regionalism is viewed - by the major funders and underwrites of the agenda - in narrow (competitive) or pluralistic terms. A lack of adaptation, would be apparent where the Welsh Government simply accepted the UK Government's narrow economic growth parameters. Should the UK and Welsh Government not agree on the gateway, furthermore, will this be a point where city-regionalism, as an institutional agenda, fails "to be viable"? (Ostrom and Basurto, 2011: 334). In other words, the City Deal may collapse at this point (at the middle stage of the meso trajectory).

Alongside the gateways events, the appointment of third sector interests to advisory boards or commitments to fund social-enterprise and environmental projects (the Valleys Regional Park, for example), would, where realised, point to micro-level activities that are reflective of pluralistic policymaking approaches. In terms of the former, documents relating to the "Regional Economic Growth Partnership" being established to advise the Cardiff City Deal suggest third sector representation may factor into the Board appointment process<sup>7</sup> (Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, 2017). Such activities, reflective of pursuing objectives beyond competitiveness, would be seen to take hold at the second stage of the meso trajectory where, following origination (the initiation of city-region working due to the City Deal), approaches to city-regionalism become adapted to satisfy a wider set of policy interests.

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<sup>7</sup> Though significantly outnumbered by business interests.

In summary and reflecting on the meso-trajectory (the horizontal movement right in Figure 1), there is a possibility that whilst city-regionalism in Cardiff initially stemmed from an overt competitiveness agenda, as city-regionalism evolves, new dimensions and priorities may be required to secure public buy-in and respond to the needs of different localities across the city-region *inter alia*. This conceptual discussion shows, moreover, that new institutions at the meso-level have the task of negotiating potentially conflicting macro principles, and gateway periods reflect one window at which this conflict comes into sharp relief (requiring some resolution).

### **Reflections on the framework?**

Reflecting on a disruptive City Deal which is re-shaping requirements for governance, this paper has applied a conceptual framework based on the micro-meso-macro as a way to go about revealing the complex socio-spatial arrangements that underpin a fledgling city-region policy agenda in south-east Wales. The framing permits the consideration of whether city-region institutions permit or close off the emergence of plural policy agendas (in an existing context where competitiveness approaches prevail). Within the micro-meso-macro framework, micro refers to policy actors and their activities; the meso points to institutions, comprised of bundles of actors, progressing a city-region logic; while the macro reflects wider policy settings that limit or open up space for city-region policy logics. The prize at stake in

applying this framework is a more considered appreciation of how plural policymaking approaches may emerge in city-region policymaking.

The project of city-regionalism in Cardiff provides an interesting context in which to examine how politics shapes the potential for pluralism. The role of the devolved administration, coupled with a city-region logic pursued by ten fragmented local authorities, underscores the novelty of the case. In order to negotiate such political mosaics, the conceptual layering of the micro-meso-macro, we argue, provides a useful lens that equips the researcher when seeking to assess how city-region policy approaches are maintained and what openings might exist for approaches to change or morph. While competitiveness is the clear, binding approach at present, it is not inconceivable that other rationales may emerge and perhaps stand in parity with economic growth concerns (Morgan, 2014) and this paper has evidenced signals that convergence between City Deals and wellbeing agendas will be considered. Disparate policy approaches, from competitiveness to a more capacious notion of wellbeing, ultimately have to be reconciled through meso-level institution building for city-regionalism.

Through the conceptual framework applied to city-regionalism, this paper reflects a preliminary step in efforts to unpack a thorny conceptual and empirical problem relating to persistence and change in city-region politics. Further applying the framework in other city-region contexts will enhance conceptual generalisability. As “inclusive growth” gains greater focus internationally, the framework has the potential to

illustrate how distributional concerns may be centred in city-region strategies and policies (OECD, 2016; Williams, 2017). Moreover, further conceptual work could usefully interrogate the transmission mechanisms that bind the macro, meso and micro. The domains take distinct identities yet overlap and cohere. We are acutely aware moreover, that the framework has been drawn from evolutionary economics, and thus more work considering adaption, and ontological traction, in a policymaking context would be beneficial.

City-region building in Cardiff is in its early stages and a much broader suite of policy programmes will be needed to emulate the steps made in institutionally mature city-regions such as Stuttgart and Manchester (from policy content to governance architectures)<sup>8</sup>. How policymaking unfolds and whether competitiveness approaches persist, remain to be seen. Tracking progress through the micro-meso-macro provides a generative analytical step for monitoring developments in city-region politics and provides a means of understanding where the openings for change may emerge.

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<sup>8</sup> Dopfer et al (2004) denote the mature stage as “retention” – in other words, rule retention.

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**Table 1 - City Deal and Well-being Legislation**

	<b>City Deal</b>	<b>Well-being of Future Generations Act</b>
<b>Actors</b>	UKG, WG, LAs (10 in city-region)	WG and LAs
<b>Origin</b>	Core Cities lobby	“Wales we want” – the national conversation
<b>Outcome focus</b>	Growth (possibly room for other indicators to be considered)	46 indicators (economic output and jobs are included)
<b>Logic of tool/mechanism</b>	Sub-national economic development	Wellbeing across economic, social and environmental indicators
<b>Funding</b>	Additional capital pot of £1.2 billion	Existing LA revenue grant from WG; no additional funding apparent
<b>Policy commitment (nature of)</b>	Signed policy commitment in heads of terms document	Legislative onus on LAs
<b>Geography</b>	City-region (10 LAs)	Individual LAs but scope in legislation for cross-LA working

**Figure 1 – Changing city-region approaches through an adapted macro-meso-micro framework**

**Examples of literature framing plural policy**

Jonas (2013) - “alternative regionalism”

Purcell (2013) – Lefebvre’s “right to the city”

Nelles (2013: 1360) – “civic capital” driving a “common sense of community based on a shared identity, set of goals and expectations”

