The Growing Influence of Well-Being as a Mechanism for Tackling Regional Inequality

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As the suburbs spill and boundaries blur, the ideology of urbanization and growth as core components of development continue to assert the notion that all roads (should) lead to Rome (the city), and this despite there being growing skepticism over the effectiveness of economistic approaches. Within the context of this paper, focus will be placed on presenting how this model of development has shaped old-industrial towns and cities - leading to increasing levels of inequality - and will highlight how and why some places are responding differently. Examining the case study of Llanelli in Wales, UK, it considers how the town has managed to adapt its approach without changing the structure of delivery, in this case - the growth-driven City Deal. These large investment programmes between neighboring regions are tasked with delivering projects, such as the proposed Pentre Awel Wellness and Life Science Village in Llanelli, that address specific regional weaknesses.

In this innovative approach, improving well-being is seen not only as the goal, but also as the mechanism for achieving it thereby challenging the economistic agendas of current development structures. As well as reflecting global trends, this case is also situated within a specific political context. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – the first of its kind in the world – places Wales at the forefront of theoretical development and policy design which amplifies the capacity of smaller regions to take a more equitable
approach to urban development. By using the snowballing method to identify key agents involved and conducting one-to-one interviews, early analysis indicates that given the context of a radical change in policy, a more holistic approach to development, that encompasses conceptions of well-being as well as the economy, can be achieved.

- Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

  **Ani Saunders** is a PhD candidate in the School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University, UK. She specialises in research on urban and regional development with a specific interest in the social and cultural aspects and attributes of old-industrial regions. Ani has a wealth of experience in the creative industries working both nationally and internationally – most recently as Culture Manager of Creative Europe Desk UK, Wales and previously at the Arts Council of Wales. Her current research forms part of a pan-European project (ACORE) which focusses on the role of agents and agency in the development of new economic paths within old-industrial regions. Ani’s research considers how the gendered nature of economics has shaped towns and cities and looks at the growing influence of other approaches that focus on well-being as a driver and outcome of change – more specifically within the context of Wales, UK.