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# GOVERNING BEYOND THE METROPOLIS: PLACING THE RURAL IN CITY-REGION DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** Despite a select group of urban centres generating a disproportionate amount of global economic output, significant attention is being devoted to the impact of urban-economic processes on interstitial spaces lying between metropolitan areas. Nevertheless, there remains a noticeable silence in city-region debate concerning how rural spaces are conceptualised, governed and represented. In this paper we draw on recent city-region developments in England and Wales to suggest a paralysis of city-region policymaking has ensued from policy elites constantly swaying between a spatially-selective, city-first, agglomeration perspective on city-regionalism and a spatially-inclusive, region-first, scalar approach which fragments and divides territorial space along historical lines. In the final part we provide a typology of functionally dominant city-region constructs which we suggest offers a way out from the paralysis that currently grips city-region policymaking.

**Key words:** City-region    Metropolis    Rural space    Subnational governance    Planning  
Functional areas

# GOVERNING BEYOND THE METROPOLIS: PLACING THE RURAL IN CITY-REGION DEVELOPMENT

“The focus thus far has been almost exclusively on urban manifestations ... But what, we might ask, is becoming of the interstitial spaces lying between metropolitan areas ... Many such spaces are undergoing significant transformation in this historical moment of capitalism, especially as they become increasingly articulated with the rhythms and cultures of the modern metropolis. As such, they are also a significant and revealing element of the world in emergence” (Scott, 2011, pp. 857-858)

“Sub-regional scales of working have increasingly been promoted as a means of securing greater spatial equity and economic competitiveness. But whilst significant attention has been placed on the impact of new sub-regional governance arrangements on urban areas, there has been little consideration of the nature and effectiveness of such arrangements on rural areas” (Pemberton and Shaw, 2012, p. 441)

## INTRODUCTION: CITY-REGIONALISM AND THE RURAL QUESTION

Avoiding the clichés about this being the ‘urban century’ or that 50% of world population are now urban dwellers is a near impossible task. Even within more critical scholarship we are replete with references to the ‘triumph of the city’ (Glaeser, 2011), the ‘resurgent metropolis’ (Scott, 2008), even ‘planetary urbanisation’ (Brenner, 2013). All this is fuelled by a belief in bigger urban-economic units being the key drivers of the global economy, alongside a recognition that the exceptional rate of city expansion into larger (mega) city-regions continues apace. But while accounts documenting processes of global urban change undoubtedly do much to break down the traditional dichotomy between urban and rural, city and country, it is our contention that even in our increasingly urbanised modern world there remains much to be achieved by tackling the ‘rural question’ within a critical urban studies. Here we echo concerns raised elsewhere regarding the

ascendency of city-regional planning models in Europe (Hoggart, 2005), concurring with Woods (2009, p. 852) that the city-region approach

“... carries risks of addressing rural localities solely in terms of their relation to the urban, of disregarding any sense of an overarching, interregional rural condition, and of marginalizing rural concerns within structures dominated economically and demographically by cities.”

Simply put, there is a limit to how far city-regionalism – as currently constructed – can represent the interests of the population at large.

If the two opening quotations point to a shared endeavour their propositions emerge from distinctly different academic impulses: one addresses a process-driven ‘post-rural/post-urban’ manifesto, the other remains tied to the relevance of urban/rural distinction in a socio-political context. In the first instance, Allen Scott (2001, p. 858) is concerned with the diffusion of the “ethos of capitalism across the entirety of geographic space”. In this era of greater economic integration and rapid urbanisation, Scott’s interest in rural space is determined by what he and others identify as ‘continuity’ and ‘interpenetration’ of urban-economic processes across all geographic space. From this perspective even the least urbanised spaces on the planet have “become increasingly articulated with the rhythms and cultures of the modern metropolis” (ibid., p. 857; Brenner, 2013). It follows that these spaces ‘prosper’ from their deepening connection to, and integration with, the modern metropolis.

One important consequence of this intensifying interest in the interdependence of urban and rural places and economies is the heightened awareness among policy elites of the need to design new subnational planning and governance arrangements which cross-cut the territorial divides that have traditionally prorated geographic space into localised urban, rural, or peri-urban units. Aided and abetted by ‘new regionalist’ orthodoxy this heightened consciousness among

policy elites has been reflected in a move from 'rural' to 'regional' to 'city-regional' in subnational planning policy and economic governance. The latter is especially significant because the popular consensus surrounding city-regions is that they represent the "ideal scale for policy intervention" (Rodríguez-Pose, 2008, p. 1029) - itself a recognition that functionally integrated urban-regional spaces are pivotal societal and political-economic formations in globalization.

This argument is based in large part on the normative claim that city-region policy interventions can overcome the arbitrary divide between urban and rural, city and country, because they are based on functionally networked, not territorial administrative, geographies. Nonetheless, those approaching the city-region debate from a more explicitly policy-oriented governance perspective have been quick to identify the emergence of a new territorial politics around the recasting of 'the rural' in regional, then city-regional, discourse and policy. One of the most prominent in this respect has been Neil Ward, whose work placing the rural in regional development has led him to suggest the city-region approach represents something of a backward step:

"The city region approach reproduces a rural development problem. It establishes and reinforces out-of-date notions of geographical centrality and hierarchies, and it actively marginalises places, consigning them to the periphery, dividing and polarising. City regions are taking root in regional economic development and spatial planning across the UK, and they are raising profound challenges for those involved in the economic development of rural areas." (Ward, 2006, p. 52)

It is in this context that Pemberton and Shaw (2012) examine the wider implications for rural spaces of new forms of regional and sub-regional governance structures in England. Talking of the perceived 'cloudiness' surrounding city-regionalism in UK political discourse, they concede that in spite of a critical body of work emerging to address the impact of city-regionalism on major urban areas, this has not been adequately explored in the rural context. Echoing Shucksmith's (2008, p. 63)

critical account of the geo-economic logic of city-regionalism – which sees the UK Government’s<sup>i</sup> approach to city-region policy caricature the modern metropolis as being the ‘locomotives’ of economic competitiveness and rural areas the ‘carriages’ being pulled along in their wake – Pemberton and Shaw (2012, p. 446) stress that spaces located between metropolitan areas “are important spaces that cannot and should not be ignored”. Whether it is the geo-economic logic (of Scott and others) or the geo-political rationale (of Pemberton and Shaw) surely these interstitial spaces must be brought into closer conceptual focus. Ultimately, this means building them into our theories of city-regionalism.

This is particularly important in the present era. Despite a select group of urban centres generating a disproportionate amount of global economic output, the bulk of national growth is generated *outside* those cities positioned at the epicentre of the global economy (OECD, 2012). By way of illustration, the OECD highlights how 57 per cent of net aggregate growth in the UK was accounted for by ‘intermediate regions’ in the period 1995-2007<sup>ii</sup>. More broadly, Europe is particularly exposed to the importance of growth beyond the metropolis. Only 7% of the EU population live in cities with over 5 million inhabitants<sup>iii</sup> while 56% of Europe’s urban population, approximately 38% of total European population, live in small and medium sized cities between 5,000 and 100,000 inhabitants (European Commission, 2011). Of course, the OECD (2012) is using this data to argue that “promoting growth in all regions makes good economic sense”. Broad-based growth, they contend, is good growth because it could reduce vulnerability to external shocks, is more likely to be good for equity (e.g. access to services and economic opportunity), while reducing the fiscal pressure to ‘prop up’ underperforming areas. Nevertheless urban economists such as Henry Overman working at the Spatial Economics Research Centre argue the opposite – namely that privileging investment in successful cities “may make for good economic policy” because, at least in the UK, “the evidence points towards prioritising growth in our more successful cities”

(Overman, 2012). This raises important questions concerning the geoeconomic and geopolitical logics underpinning city-regionalism as a political project. Furthermore what we will focus on in this paper is the noticeable – and we would argue worrying – silence at the centre of contemporary accounts of city-regionalism concerning the way rural spaces are conceptualised, governed, and represented, and the potential role those interstitial spaces located between metropolitan areas have in contributing to ‘growth *beyond* the metropolis’ and/or ‘growth *in* the metropolis’.

In this paper we aim to respond to the OECD’s (2011, p. 222) recent claim that “city-regions are an innovative way to manage urban-rural interaction, but at present the rural component seems to be ignored”. We do this by putting forward the argument that city-regionalism, as constructed politically, continually reproduces a rural development problem when agglomeration is taken as the starting point for defining, delimiting and designating city-regions. This emphasis on agglomeration in discourses of global economic development actively promotes a city-first perspective, often marginalising (rural) spaces dislocated physically from an urban centre irrespective of whether they are functionally (dis)connected. Indeed, when agglomeration is the determining factor in the political construction of city-regions the functional coherence of these spaces is often assumed (Harrison and Hoyler, 2013). Conversely, when economic function is the key determinant this permits the identification of spaces which are city-region-like in appearance, but which do not necessarily represent a metropolitan landscape or have a city (or cities) as their designated centre. These spaces constitute one aspect of the world’s ‘imagined metropolis’ (Nelles, 2012), that is, those non-urban spaces which albeit exhibiting urban-economic functions do not currently feature prominently in the dominant city-first framing of city-regionalism in national and international political discourse. Here we can think in particular of the rural economic development literature, which despite some resistance now plays more determinedly to the notion of a multifunctioning globalising countryside (McCarthy 2008; Woods 2007).



Notwithstanding the fact that each geopolitical project of city-regionalism is specific to the national context within which it is located (Jonas, 2013), our paper focuses on recent developments in the UK. This focus is guided, in part, by recognition that England includes no ‘predominantly rural’ areas (OECD, 2010)<sup>iv</sup>. The OECD go on to suggest that England’s compactness results in “a high degree of connectivity between urban and rural” (OECD, 2011, p. 17), with its policy elites at the ‘forefront’ of policy advances to develop those new subnational planning and governance arrangements necessary to ‘bridge’ the urban-rural divide. Wales by contrast is comprised of three ‘predominantly rural’, three ‘intermediate’, and six ‘predominantly urban’ areas (OECD, 2010), and as a devolved nation has only just embarked on a city-region institution building programme (City Regions Task and Finish Group, 2012). When considered together, our empirical research reveals how policy elites in England and Wales are responding differently to the challenge of placing the rural in city-region development. This is due in large part to their different geo-political construction of city-regionalism. In this way it also provides a revealing context from which to unpack how and why city-regionalism continues to be constructed geo-politically to the detriment of rural spaces and rural development needs, and to begin considering how to build these interstitial spaces between metropolitan areas into our theories of city-regionalism.

To develop this argument, the next section places the rural in city-region development through a retrospective take on the ‘rural’ to ‘regional’ to ‘city-regional’ shifts in UK subnational policy and governance. This is important in providing a platform for analysing how the divergent city-region initiatives recently developed and currently pursued in England and Wales have been constructed politically. Our aim is to account for the opportunities, barriers and constraints to constructing city-region governance frameworks that adequately reflect the interpenetration of urban-economic processes across all geographic space and the contribution of rural areas to growth in and beyond the metropolis. In its broadest terms we suggest this can only be achieved where

city-first agglomeration perspectives give way to functional dominance in the geopolitical construction of city-regionalism.

## **PLACING THE RURAL IN CITY-REGION DEVELOPMENT**

### *1997 and beyond: rural development and the regional agenda*

Rural affairs were one of the policy areas immediately devolved by the UK Labour Government to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly in 1999. Likewise there was a concerted effort to have more rural policy intervention at the regional level in England, with rural development policy incorporated into the remits of Government Offices for the Regions (GOR) and Regional Development Agencies (RDA) (Ward et al., 2003; Winter 2006). This regionalization of rural affairs and rural development policy had important consequences. Established in 1994 to be voice of regions in Whitehall and the voice of Whitehall in the regions, GORs coordinated the regional spending and activities for the departments of the environment, employment, and trade and industry. By 2002 ten central government departments had initiatives which were administered and delivered through GORs, and rural affairs were central to the work of the bodies. In their early years GORs implemented the work of the Department of the Environment and delivered European Structural Fund Programmes such as LEADER and Objective 5b. Thereafter, the growing remit of GORs required them to deliver Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs policy through designated Rural Affairs Teams, draft regional strategies for rural affairs, and establish Rural Affairs Forums.

GORs undoubtedly played an important role in defining the region as the scale at which to identify and tackle rural problems in England. Yet the extent to which they raised the profile of rural issues and highlighted the importance of rural areas to national growth—let alone whether their interventions proved successful in tackling rural problems—have all been called into question

(Pearce et al, 2008; Winter, 2006). Contributing to the perception that GORs failed to adequately place the rural in regional development, the still hard felt effects of deindustrialisation in England's major cities also ensured the regionalization of activity through GORs was driven forward ostensibly to tackle urban problems by facilitating implementation of urban policy (Winter, 2006).

By contrast, the RDA had the hallmarks of the new regionalist orthodoxy. Enriched with an economic boosterism that promoted regions and regional institutions as a means to generating meaningful economic prosperity and greater spatial equity, part and parcel of this political discourse was an explicit focus on how RDAs would help tackle rural problems (Ward et al, 2003). In the RDA White Paper, *Building Partnerships for Prosperity*, the “need to understand the particular needs of rural areas, but to address them within an overall framework for the region as a whole” (DETR, 1997, p. 24) made clear the Labour Government's approach to placing the rural in regional development. To facilitate this, the Rural Development Commission (established 1909) was abolished: its rural regeneration remit passing to the RDAs, and its community development functions transferring to the Countryside Agency. The Countryside Commission (established 1969) was also folded: its social and conservation activities transferring to the Countryside Agency, which operated as a national organisation operating with regional offices. In turn, and in the wake of the 2003 Haskins Review into rural policy and delivery, the socio-economic functions of the Countryside Agency passed into the hands of RDAs. The significance of this is it pointed to Labour's regional devolution and rural policy agendas being developed in conjunction, as if they were two sides of the same economic development coin. Yet for all the political hubris surrounding the interface between Labour's regional devolution and rural policy agendas the reality was this period saw institutional flux surrounding rural policy and a fragmentation of responsibility (Goodwin, 2008). Illustrating this point, Ward and Lowe (2007, p. 413) assert how the Countryside Agency was

established as “a side effect of setting up the RDAs” rather than any “urge to improve the institutional machinery” of rural policy.

In addition, RDAs were criticised because: (i) national co-ordination and co-operation on rural affairs proved much weaker than its predecessor, the Rural Development Commission (Ward, 2006); (ii) their business-led boards were dominated by representatives with a strong urban focus; (iii) nationally prescribed performance targets greatly influenced RDA priorities, encouraging large scale programmes of investment and activity to the detriment of the smaller investments with more modest returns that are often required in less urban areas; and critically, (iv) following the failure to establish directly elected regional assemblies in 2004, RDAs became increasingly involved in promoting the interests of England’s core cities and their advocacy of a city-region approach to spatial economic development (Harrison, 2012). It can come as little surprise that the OECD surmised that while “there is clear evidence that rural proofing<sup>v</sup> has had a positive impact” at the regional scale “there still appears to be a policy bias in favour of urban areas” (OECD, 2011, pp. 22-24).

All of which points to rural issues being squeezed out of the mainstream agenda of regional economic development. But it was also serving to reignite the local territorial politics surrounding spatial equity of RDA investment, which although evident in the debates surrounding the regionalization of economic development activities in the late-1990s had been largely contained to this point. Pike and Tomaney encapsulate the ensuing territorial politics best when arguing:

“... in the wake of a faltering commitment to regionalization and regionalism, the UK state in England has recently encouraged a proliferation of competing ‘spatial imaginaries’ – cities and/or city-regions, localisms and pen-regionalisms – in order to identify, mobilize and valorize their economic growth potentials ... [As a result] the experience of the governance of economic development within England is marked by complexity, experimentation, fragmentation and incoherence with largely negative implications for territorial equity and justice.” (Pike and Tomaney, 2009, p. 14)

What is missing from their quote is that regions and regional institutions remained important actors in constructing these competing ‘spatial imaginaries’ and the institutional landscape of subnational economic development. In fact it was only after 2010 that GORs, RDAs, and the regionalisation of economic development activity were annulled by the incoming coalition government. As a result, in those intervening years the challenge of ‘placing the rural’ was further complicated by Labour pursuing regional, city-regional, as well as local and pan-regional, agendas in England.

#### *2004 and beyond: city-regions and rural development*

In 2000 a New Local Government Network pamphlet entitled *Is There a ‘Missing Middle’ in English Governance?* suggested that policy interventions in economic development could be more usefully delivered at the scale of city-regions in England. Published at a time when political commentators were heralding RDAs as trailblazers in economic development it is perhaps unsurprising that the case for city-region governance received a lukewarm reception. Nevertheless, the stalling of Labour’s regionalisation agenda in England in 2004 paralleled by city-regionalism becoming an officially institutionalised task for policy elites worldwide saw the city-region discourse emerge from the shadows cast by regions to establish itself as the in vogue spatial scale among policy makers in the mid-2000s<sup>vi</sup>. Firmly focused on ensuring England’s major urban regions became more attractive to transnational capital there was now a strong political desire to create new, generally accepted to mean more flexible, networked, and smart forms of metropolitan-scaled economic infrastructure, governance and planning arrangements across England.

Initially this saw the government prioritise new governance structures in south east England – the UK’s only genuine ‘global’/‘mega’ city-region (ODPM, 2003). Four designated growth areas – London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough, Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes-South Midlands, and

Ashford – were established, all located *beyond* the metropolis (up to 125km from central London) and with eighteen ‘key growth locations’ identified ranging in population from 50,000-200,000. And yet, it was actually in response to this prioritising of growth within south east England that the overt language of city-regionalism in England rose to prominence with the launch of *The Northern Way*. Conforming to the principles of city-region orthodoxy, the Northern Way was constructed as a multi-nodal inter-urban network based around eight interacting, but hierarchically differentiated, city-regions in the north of England. Quickly followed by like-minded initiatives in the Midlands, South West, and East of England, the dominance of the city-region approach in England became synonymous with a new city-centric representation of the space economy (Harrison, 2012). Nevertheless, England’s first attempt at city-regionalism was guilty of overlooking the potential contribution of prospering rural spaces – most notably market towns and the rural landscape which have become increasingly attractive to growth-oriented businesses and key to an increasingly profitable tourist trade (see Scott, 2010; 2012) – it reawakened urban-rural political divides by partitioning and fragmenting regional space (Harrison, 2010), and it reproduced Ward’s (2006) rural development problem.

The response in England was noteworthy. Programmes launched in 2006 as part of Labour’s second-wave of city-region initiatives included *City Development Companies*, organisations charged with stimulating economic growth and regeneration across a city or city-region-wide geography, and *Multi-Area Agreements*, institutional arrangements designed to enable local authorities to engage more effectively in cross-boundary working across functional economic areas. Both initiatives promoted collaboration between local authorities on those ‘strategic’ issues identified as crucial to the effective functioning of city-regions – economic development, housing, and transport. More than this, they marked a discursive shift in the framing of city-regionalism from a spatially

selective, city-first, agglomeration approach to a situation where relations between local governments were positioned more centrally.

By 2007 city-regions had been replaced – or relegated to a subset of – the more politically-palatable concept of ‘sub-regions’ in the discursive framing of subnational economic development. City Development Companies were quickly rebranded as Economic Development Companies, a recognition that they were “equally valid vehicles for urban and non-urban sub-regions” (Communities and Local Government [CLG], 2007, p. 6), while a major *Review of Subnational Economic Development and Regeneration* signalled how “MAAs will allow sub-regions, including city-regions, to take a much more active role in leading economic development” (HM Treasury, 2007, p. 89). Conscious not to reproduce Ward’s rural development problem by overtly promoting a city-first approach, retuning the discursive frame to focus on sub-regions provided political leaders with a mechanism to continue promoting city-regions, but crucially, within a spatially inclusive framework which allows all geographic spaces to establish institutional arrangements that are city-region-like in appearance. Illustrating this point more sanguinely a national evaluation of MAAs went on to record how “in areas that span urban and rural areas, one of the dimensions of the MAA that will have to be carefully managed will be the perception that the rural authorities are getting fewer benefits” (CLG, 2010, p. 50) – for only in areas encapsulating a large rural territory did

“... elements of the new rural paradigm ... appear ... to be informing the views of dominant metropolitan actors towards fully engaging their rural equivalents ... to secure benefits for the overall sub-region.” (Pemberton and Shaw, 2012, p. 455)

Nevertheless, the perception of metropolitan dominance was not alleviated when a series of follow-up announcements amounted to the creation of an MAA hierarchy, whereby some predominantly urban MAA were ascribed statutory duties, and Leeds and Manchester became forerunner statutory city-regions (with the prospect more core cities could soon follow)<sup>vii</sup>.

In May 2010, a new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government formed in the UK and with it the challenge of placing the rural in city-region development took another twist. Fervent opponents of Labour's regional policies, the Coalition Government quickly signalled the end of regionalisation. According to Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the problem was simple:

“the whole concept of ‘regional economies’ is a non-starter. Arbitrary dividing lines across the country for bureaucratic convenience ignore the fact that towns probably have far more in common with their neighbours than with another town in the same region but many miles away.” (Pickles, 2010, p. 1)

In the place of regionalism Pickles and his colleagues took to advocating localism, central to which was the establishment Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs): joint local authority-business bodies to promote local economic development across functional economic areas. LEPs are designed to operate across the ‘natural’ economic geography of England, replacing what are seen as the ‘unnatural’ regional blocks which had arbitrarily divided the country along politico-administrative lines and “did not always reflect real functional economic areas” (HM Government, 2010, 13). Crucially it was claimed LEPs can “differ across the country in both form and functions” (CLG, 2010, p. 14). Clearly implying that the political construction of LEPs does not prescribe a city-centric focus, it opened the way for a more flexible approach which can, in principle, respond more directly to the challenge of placing the rural in city-region development.

The next section uncovers how local policy elites have responded to this particular challenge. We do this by contrasting the evolving landscape of LEPs in England with the embryonic city-region agenda emerging in Wales. The aim is to account for the opportunities, barriers, and constraints to constructing city-region governance frameworks that reflect the interpenetration of urban-economic processes across all geographic space. In adopting this approach, we argue that only by



analysing the construction of city-regions politically can we begin to comprehend how – and critically *why* – the rural component continues to be ignored as a basis for practical policy development despite a semantic recognition of its importance to growth both in and beyond the metropolis.

### **RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE: PLACING THE RURAL IN CITY-REGION DEVELOPMENT<sup>viii</sup>**

The challenge of placing the rural in city-region development derives from the foundations upon which the global discourse of city-regionalism is constructed. Principally founded on a geo-economic logic affirming the propensity of wealth-creating economic activity to coalesce in dense metropolitan clusters of socioeconomic activity, the discourse of city-regionalism has been deepened by a belief that it is ‘a city and *its* region’ (Parr, 2005) – or increasingly cities and *their* region – which are key to global competitiveness. This ensures city-regionalism is politically constructed by conferring city-region status upon designated cities; only then does the process of locating the wider region begin. Depending on their proximity to an urban centre the consequence is that while some rural areas are included, some are located on the fringes, and some are clearly excluded from the political project of city-regionalism altogether.

This city-first approach has clearly been evident in England, but is also visible in other national and international contexts. Within national discourses, political pressure (particularly from the rural lobby) forces political elites to respond to their previous spatial selectivity and more often than not this leads to compromises being struck. The nature of this compromise is important. Firstly, as noted above, it is common for the ‘city-region’ to be actively marginalised or removed completely from the political discourse by invoking ‘subregions’ as a concept that enables spatially inclusivity to be achieved. However this compromise only serves to frustrate the urban lobby, who feel the city-region concept is being watered-down to the detriment of their pursuit of global urban

competitiveness, while not fully appeasing the rural lobby, who see this as ‘mainstreaming’ city-first policies for application in rural areas.

The second trend is to redefine city-regions within an existing discursive frame. Almost always defined by a spatially-selective city-first ‘agglomeration’ perspective, many spatial strategies have seen their ‘city-region’ geography morph over time to employ alternative geopolitical definitions. Relating directly to the first point, one approach sees city-regions morph from a spatial to a scalar concept: “a strategic and political level of administration and policymaking” (Tewdwr-Jones and McNeill, 2000, p. 131). This scalar construct is employed by policy elites who wish to ensure spatial inclusivity while still allowing the superior strategic importance of city-regions to be recognised. A second option is to employ a functionally-networked definition. Often referred to as the ‘hub and spokes’ model, this way of defining city-regions is commonly used by policy elites to visually represent how city-regionalism promotes interaction and integration across space. In short, it is a way of ensuring that even the most peripheral, least urbanised, and most functionally disconnected places can be represented as being somehow connected to, and prospering from, the modern metropolis.

As we will illustrate below, this geopolitical construction of city-regions is absolutely crucial to the placing of rural areas in contemporary city-region development. But more particularly, it is a necessary starting point for understanding how the rural component could be more directly integrated and ensure that “city-regions *are* an innovative way to manage urban-rural interaction” (OECD, 2011, our emphasis). The divergent trajectories of city-regionalism currently being constructed in England and Wales are particularly illustrative of this broader point. In their own way they both highlight our more specific contention that they represent missed opportunities for creating the type of innovative city-region framework necessary to begin considering whether city-regionalism can in fact generate meaningful growth both in and beyond the metropolis.

### *Closing the door: Local Enterprise Partnerships and rural development*

The large-scale removal of regional governance in England saw LEPs installed as the preferred governance model for subnational economic development. Able to take on different forms and functions across the country, there was no suggestion that LEPs would be a spatially-selective, city-first, initiative ('agglomeration'). LEPs were to be defined instead by functional economies geographies ('hub and spokes') and be open to all areas alike ('scale'). What this amounted to was an acceptance that although the LEP programme was never explicitly branded as city-regional, it did have the hallmarks of city-regionalism, albeit an alternative, functionally-dominant, city-regionalism. Yet, what is striking about the 39 LEPs established is that they are not city-regional in appearance – either as city-dominant or functionally-dominant (Pike et al., 2012). Over half of LEP areas are based on existing (or amalgamated) county structures – that is, historically-embedded political structures which territorially divide space along politico-administrative lines. Conversely, only 4 LEPs explicitly identify with being 'city-regional'. A further 15 explicitly identify a city (or cities) at the heart of their LEP. In fact, only 3 LEP areas have a core geography which identifies them as cross-regional – in each case reflecting established cross-regional partnership working.

What LEPs represent is a transition in England's city-region political discourse from constructs framed according to city-first 'agglomeration' or 'hub and spokes' perspectives to the total coverage availed by the (sub) region-first 'scale' concept. Producing a subregional mosaic of territorial units (tessellate except for 37 local authorities included in more than one LEP area) total LEP coverage does ensure no local authority in England is excluded (and therefore marginalised politically) but this is something already afforded by the previous model of regionalisation. In this way, and contrary to the need for new, more flexible and networked forms of subnational economic governance, LEPs are likely to fail in generating the new local authority relations and

strengthened partnership working across functional economic units necessary to confer the potential benefits of city-regions managing urban-rural interaction in an innovative way. Nevertheless, it is our contention that the original premise of a functionally-dominant city-regionalism was a step in the right direction – a view supported by amongst others Coombes (2013). However, the opportunity for LEPs to be an innovative way to manage interaction between urban-rural areas was lost when the window to functional dominance was closed. In the context of this paper it is important to briefly reflect why this was.

With only 69 days to design a ‘new’ institutional architecture for England, evidence points to the positive intentions some actors had to examine the potential for developing more appropriate, flexible and networked arrangements being stymied by the practical reality of having to put bids together quickly to meet the deadline (Harrison, 2011). The outcome was a retreat by policy elites to already existing territorially-embedded politico-administrative structures, with the few trans-territorial spaces to emerge as part of this new landscape reflecting areas where partnership working already existed. But much more than this, the LEP example is a useful reminder that the (city-)regionalism question is as much about state territoriality and territorial politics as it is discourses of globalized economic competitiveness (Jonas, 2012). For what we see with the establishment of LEPs in England reflects the division between the globalisation-driven geoeconomic logic for a competitive, selective and differential approach to the regional scale, and the more state-centric geopolitical logic for achieving inclusivity and uniformity with its territorial-scalar hierarchy. On the one hand, despite the UK Coalition Government’s ideological opposition to regions (a manifestation of what David Cameron’s right-of-centre Conservative Party view as one of the worst examples of ‘big state’), that the result of LEPs is a de facto new manifestation of a regional scale of governance suggests that regionalisation is accepted from an economic pragmatism perspective (if not featuring as overt state policy). Meanwhile, on the other hand, that

the result of LEPs is a set of territorial structures which are both inclusive and uniform alerts us to how the centrally-orchestrated process by which LEPs were constructed politically could be seen as the latest in a long-line of state spatial strategies designed to protect the state's legitimacy for maintaining regulatory control and management of the economy in the face of globalising trends.

Our argument is that despite the existence of a functional definition of city-regions, as currently constructed the 'hub and spokes' model is limiting because it is used to identify a hub (or hubs) before then indicating the metropolitan functions linked to them and which define the wider region. Put simply, the 'hub and spokes' model is a functional definition but it is not a functionally-dominant definition for city-regions. The option which remains un(der)explored in city-region policymaking is functionally dominant city-regions. Following Coombes (2013), this would see the identification of functional regions first, with or without a dominant city (or cities) acting as the hub<sup>ix</sup>. From this perspective city-regions could be variously conceptualised as *'spokes with a dominant hub (or hubs)'*, *'spokes with an emerging hub (or hubs)'* or *'spokes with a formerly dominant hub (or hubs)'* to reflect the size and relative importance (centrality) of the hubs in relation to their spokes. In particular, 'spokes with an emerging hub (or hubs)' could be usefully deployed to capture those rural places – e.g. market towns, tourist hotspots – which Scott (2011) and others (notably McCarthy, 2008 and Woods, 2007) have demonstrated are becoming more centrally positioned within wider circuits of globalized capital accumulation and modes of state intervention. For us this typology of functionally dominant city-region constructs offer a way out of the paralysis that currently grips city-region policymaking; a paralysis resulting from policy elites constantly swaying between a spatially-selective, city-first, agglomeration perspective on city-regionalism and a spatially inclusive, region-first, scalar approach, which fragments and divides territorial space along historical lines<sup>x</sup>.

Returning to the example of LEPs, the paralysis caused by these two dominant approaches ensured the initial premise of identifying functional economic geographies was quickly drowned out by the ensuing *realpolitik*. As Coombes (2013) notes the resulting compromise is those aforementioned county structures which, while often holding a significant level of functional dominance as, most certainly did not amount to new governance arrangements bearing the hallmarks of the new city-regionalism in action. Nor did they recognise the contribution of rural areas to growth in and beyond the metropolis. The Commission for Rural Communities (2010), for example, reflected on a ‘patchy’ appreciation of rural economic contributions in many LEP areas. As a matter of fact, since their launch the effects of compromised city-regionalism have been accentuated by a shift in the UK Government metanarrative for economic development away from a need to rebalance the economy spatially and sectorally to an increased acceptance that growth, wherever this is most viable, was vital in an economy which at the time was moving in and out of recession.

Placing LEPs in the broader context of subnational economic development also reveals that overlaying their spatially-inclusivity are a series of city-centric policy programmes and interventions acting as stimuli for growth in the metropolis. These stimuli include; the Regional Growth Fund, a competitive fund of £2.6bn open to all but which by virtue of requiring matched funding by private investment and an ability to create jobs in the private sector channelled funds towards metropolitan areas; Enterprise Zones, which offer simplified planning and business rates discounts to attract private sector investment into areas with specific local economic challenges, but mainly located in metropolitan areas; City Deals, tailored arrangements designed to enable cities to identify their economic priorities, with central government devolving power to unlock projects or initiatives to help boost the urban economy; the establishment of Combined Authorities in the

Manchester and Leeds city-region's; and finally, the creation of a Minister for Cities (July 2011) and Cities Policy Unit (August 2012).

What we have arrived at in England is a decade of city-regionalism dominated and confounded by a paralysis of city-region policymaking; the result of on-going failure to adequately redress two prevailing tendencies. On the one hand, this apparent impasse is caused by the need for a spatially-selective, city-first, agglomeration perspective on city-regionalism to conform to the geo-economic principles of city-regionalism and assuage the demands of the urban lobby. On the other hand, there is a conflicting tendency to pursue a spatially inclusive, region-first, scalar approach to placate the fears of a rural lobby who see city-regionalism as reproducing this traditional rural development problem. This bottleneck serves to scupper attempts to forge new, more networked and flexible planning and governance arrangements in England, which rarely – if ever – make headway in solving the city-region conundrum. The result is we do not have the type of innovative framework for managing urban-rural interaction necessary to consider whether city-regionalism, as a political project, can actually generate meaningful growth both in *and* beyond the metropolis.

Nevertheless, this is not the end to this particular story. For in the UK context what is most interesting is how Wales, as a devolved nation, did not pursue city-regionalism as an explicit policy agenda in the 2000s. Yet arguably, through the Wales Spatial Plan, they *did* provide an innovative framework for managing urban-rural interaction. That was until political leaders took the decision to pursue an explicitly 'city-region' agenda in 2011 and became confronted by the same city-region conundrum that continues to plague political attempts to implement city-region policy in England and other national contexts.

*From functional economies to city-first: The Welsh retreat*

As a newly devolved administration the eagerly anticipated *Wales Spatial Plan* (WSP) signalled a new approach to planning for economic development in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government [WAG], 2004, 2008). Akin to the new spatial planning frameworks promoting ‘soft space’ and ‘fuzzy boundaries’ found in England’s aforementioned *Sustainable Communities Plan* and *Northern Way* growth strategy – as well as *National Planning Framework for Scotland* (Scottish Executive, 2004) and *Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025* (Department for Regional Development, 2001) in the other devolved nations – the ‘invention’ of six new loosely-bound regional ‘areas’ not coterminous with any pre-existing territorial units ensured the WSP was imbued with all the hallmarks of the policy rationale for city-regionalism (Heley, 2013). Where Wales is especially relevant though, is the prominent role afforded to market town initiatives in the development strategies for rural regions. With no mention of market towns (and very little on rural areas) in WSP 2004, the market town occupied a more prominent role in the 2008 update where, *pace* Scott (2010, 2011), it was heralded as having the “potential to develop cultural tourism [...] through developing ‘place marketing’, building on local assets of culture, history and landscape” (WAG, 2008, pp. 60-61). But perhaps more important than this, market towns were defined in contrast to urban forms:

“These small market towns differ from the extensive urban areas ... in their relative isolation, their enhanced service function compared to population and their interactions with the surrounding rural areas. Because of the Area’s rurality, relative peripherality and population sparsity, *its most populous settlements need to fulfil roles and functions that would normally be associated with much larger towns.* (WAG, 2008, p. 85 our emphasis)

A reflection of the growing importance attached to market towns by policy elites the revised national spatial vision expanded the 35 ‘key centres’ identified in 2004 to spatially select 57 ‘key settlements’ in the 2008 WSP update. Prioritising growth in and beyond the metropolis, this inclusion of settlements located on the fringes of (and even beyond) metropolitan areas signalled



clear engagement by the WAG to drive forward competitiveness by engendering functional integration across all geographic space. The significance of the Wales case is that for the first time rural spaces were constructed, represented and governed by a functionally dominant city-regionalism that recognised the ‘continuity’ and ‘interpenetration’ of urban-economic processes across all geographic space (cf. Scott, 2011).

Shifting the discursive frame from ‘key centres’ in WSP 2004 to ‘key settlements’ in WSP 2008 recognises that despite market towns not independently providing the full suite of services, amenities and functions of larger towns and cities, their enhanced service provision relative to their population renders them vital for securing socio-economic viability. As such, while market towns may not easily conform to a ‘city-regional’ profile in terms of their physical appearance, their multi-functional role as prime locations for retail, service, administrative, tourist, leisure and cultural purposes certainly renders these settlements as punching above their weight and ‘acting’ in a way which increasingly resembles city-regionalism in action. In short, the city-first, agglomeration approach (as seen in WSP 2004) excludes these more ‘imagined’ metropolises (cf. Nelles, 2012) and alerts us once more to the need for functionally-dominant approaches to conceptualising city-regions.

This is further supported by the new typology of ‘key settlements’ utilised in WSP 2008 to reflect the functional roles performed by different types of settlement – 6 key settlements with national significance (Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, Wrexham); 26 primary key settlements; 7 cross-boundary settlements (e.g. Carmarthen, Dolgellau); and, 9 linked centres representing a single ‘key settlement’ (e.g. Pwllheli-Porthmadog). This new typology is important in allowing those emerging hubs (e.g. market towns) and those linked-towns – which as part of a polycentric network amount to a local functioning economic area – to be included alongside the ‘key centres’ identified in WSP 2004. In so doing WSP 2008 enabled those settlements which were

peripheral to the new governance areas in WSP 2004 to be identified as integral components of this new spatial planning framework because while they may be small in agglomeration terms they are not functionally disconnected. And finally, we argue it offered a middle-way between the extremes of agglomeration and scalar approaches. On the one hand, the 2008 typology allowed those urban centres with the most metropolitan functions to be recognised as such, but did so without falling into the trap of fuelling the perception that a new hierarchy had been constructed to prioritise investment and growth in a select group of city-regions. Meanwhile, on the other hand, it did not actively marginalise those places which fell on the fringes of, or outside, the larger agglomerations. In effect, WSP 2008 effectively achieved spatial inclusivity but crucially it did so without the need for territorial division.

What makes the Wales case so alluring is despite this there has been a significant retreat from WSP 2008. For in the years thereafter, the WAG has become increasingly captivated by the geo-economic arguments of economic boosterism underpinning what Jonas (2013) recognises as the trend toward ‘international-orchestrated city-regionalism’. This is no more evident than in the words of Rosemary Thomas, head of planning at the Welsh Government: “Planning has its fashions and city-regions are the popular fashion at the moment” (quoted in Early, 2013, 24); and in the November 2011 formation of a *City Regions Task and Finish Group* “to identify potential city regions in Wales” (Chair - Elizabeth Haywood, quoted in City Regions Task and Finish Group, 2012, p. 1). The importance attached to this discursive shift in Welsh politics was recognition among policy elites that Welsh cities generate just 33% of national income/wealth – significantly lower than other parts of the UK. Compiling national and international evidence in support of city-regionalism, the City Regions Task and Finish Group strongly recommended south east Wales (Cardiff) and the Swansea Bay area be recognised by the Welsh Government as city-regions. Moreover, new ‘best-fit’ governance arrangements should be established to improve skills, infrastructure, and innovation.

Arguing that the city-region model is “tried and tested on a global scale” (City Regions Task and Finish Group, 2012, p. 6), what is revealing about the Welsh example is the retreat from a functionally dominant city-regionalism, and how giving way to the omnipresence of city-first approaches has thrust Wales headlong into Ward’s (2006) rural development problem. For in this brave new world of Welsh city-regions, not only do market towns all but vanish from the national planning agenda – and with it the ascendancy of arguments purveying the need to recognise the interpenetration of urban-economic processes across urban and rural space as mutually beneficial for growth in and beyond the metropolis – but rural areas are determinedly excluded. On this point the City Regions Task and Finish Group (2012, p. 21 our emphasis) contend:

“[Our advocacy of city-regionalism] is not to suggest that the city region approach is the only answer to economic development problems. It clearly is not applicable to large rural areas, which require a *different* approach; nor is it necessarily the answer for all towns and cities, some of which (for example Cambridge) are perfectly capable of thriving economically without recourse to the concept.”

This is one of just two acknowledgements to rural spaces in the 75-page final report. This, the first, identifies city-regionalism as ‘not applicable’ to large tracts of rural Wales, while the second relays how city-regionalism leads to “forced improvements in surrounding rural areas” (ibid., p. 22). On this point it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the new discursive frame in Wales reinforces those notions of geographical centrality and hierarchies, and actively marginalises places by dividing, polarising and consigning them to the periphery. Following Shucksmith (2008), the caricature presented is once again one which sees cities as the ‘locomotives’ of economic development and rural areas the ‘carriages’ being pulled along in the wake of the great modern metropolis.

Perhaps more significant is the reaffirmation of a city-region development problem. Any possibility of functionally-dominant city-regionalism that duly recognises the continuity and interpenetration of urban-economic processes across all geographic space is snuffed out by the irresistible force that is the geo-economic logic for an agglomeration inspired, spatially-selective, city-first construction of city-regionalism. In this respect, the quiet disappearance of the WSP from spatial planning agenda and the ascendancy of city-centric development strategies in Wales represent another missed opportunity. More pointedly, it remains to be seen if this step-change provides more ammunition to those who would argue that Welsh Government policy (inclusive of both focus and apparatus) continues to be 'Cardiff-centric', and that the devolution project continues to be unrepresentative of the nation as a whole (Foster and Scott, 2007). In making these points we should be clear that we are acutely aware of the pragmatism underpinning the pursuit of an economic dividend by constructing city-regionalism from a city-first perspective in Wales, as elsewhere. Yet it is our contention that the emphasis now attributed to the Cardiff and Swansea city-regions could equally have been achieved without being at the expense of (or rather in preference to) the WSP and the functionally-dominant approach to constructing city-regionalism we advocate. For us, extending the typology of functionally-dominant city-regions identified in WSP 2008 to create a new category of 'key settlements with *international* significance' could usefully have served the same purpose of prioritising Cardiff and Swansea as the main city-regional centres of growth and distinct from what would then be 4 key settlements with national significance (Aberystwyth, Bangor, Newport, Wrexham). Similarly, by extending the typology of functionally-dominant city-regions constructs to include '*spokes with a formerly dominant hub (or hubs)*' we can more accurately capture and represent settlements within city-region policy that despite no longer having dynamic centres do endow a legacy of functional patterns – such as the former mining and industrial towns located in South Wales.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

There is considerable evidence to demonstrate that in the era of globalization “city-regions have ... by and large, tended to perform better than their countries in economic terms” (Rodríguez-Pose, 2009, p. 51). We cannot be surprised then at the attention academics, political leaders and policymakers have afforded to analyse their growth dynamic, alongside how best to govern these dynamic ever-expanding metropolitan centres. Notwithstanding this, there is now growing appreciation among many of the same individual commentators and institutional organisations that the bulk of national growth in the Global North is generated *beyond* the new metropolis (European Commission, 2011; OECD, 2012).

All of which posits the urgent need to place the rural in city-region development. But it is also forcing us to confront searching questions as to the way city-regions are constructed politically. For despite recent academic inquiry advancing our understandings of the role of rural spaces in city-region development, the construction of city-regions in political discourse has so far failed to adequately reflect the growing importance of those interstitial spaces located between metropolitan centres to economic growth. Current constructions of city-regionalism as a political project continue to prioritise growth in the metropolis. Moreover, the geoeconomic dominance of city-first approaches can be seen, at best, to present rural areas as prospering from growth in the metropolis, and at their worst, erasing rural areas from the picture altogether. The political response is to sway between a spatially-selective, city-first, agglomeration perspective on city-regionalism and a spatially-inclusive, region-first, scalar approach which fragments and divides territorial space along historical lines). Our contention is that this has led us to a paralysis of city-region policymaking, where the strength of one approach is the weakness of the other – and vice versa.

What our paper reveals is that placing the rural in city-region development is a particularly thorny political issue. Yet if the spectre of growth in and beyond the metropolis is to be realised through city-region policymaking then it is a challenge which urgently requires our attention. A decade of city-regionalism in the UK has offered little cause for optimism. And yet we would argue contained within its recent history is one way to conceive moving beyond the current paralysis of city-region policymaking. In many ways what makes the WSP 2008 such a pertinent example for uncovering how and why city-regionalism continues to be constructed as a geo-political project to the detriment of rural spaces and rural development needs is the document's positioning of functionally-dominant city-regions as an under-explored phenomenon.

What the Welsh example in particular highlights is how functionally dominant city-region constructs could offer a middle-way between spatially-selective 'agglomeration' and spatially-inclusive 'scalar' approaches. On the one hand, the WSP 2008 update reveals the capacity for functionally-dominant city-region constructs to achieve spatial-inclusivity without the clear divisions created by partitioning and fragmenting regional space under the more commonly deployed scalar approach. Yet on the other hand, the typology of functionally-dominant city-region constructs we outlined is spatially-inclusive of the broader range of urban and rural places exhibiting city-regional tendencies: '*spokes with a hub (or hubs)*' to recognise those key centres which are generating a disproportionate amount of national economic output; '*spokes with a formerly dominant hub (or hubs)*' to acknowledge where functional economic linkages relating to former industrial towns and cities persist; and '*spokes with an emerging hub (or hubs)*' to recognise the important contribution to growth of smaller functional economies that are otherwise marginalised and/or excluded by city-first agglomeration approaches. By capturing those settlements that might not appear 'city-regional' in their physical appearance but do perform a functional role which resembles city-regionalism in action, we see functionally-dominant

approaches to conceptualising and constructing city-regions political as critical to integrating those rural spaces which are undergoing significant transformation – market towns, tourist hotspots – and increasingly attuned to the rhythms of the modern metropolis within the discursive frame of city-regional policymaking (Scott, 2011, 2012).

In making this argument we join a growing number who claim an important juncture in city-region policymaking and the construction of city-regionalism as a geopolitical project of capitalism has been reached (see Jonas, 2013; Harrison and Hoyler, 2014; Scott, 2012). In the context of our present argument, the recent work of Coombes is particularly enlightening for revealing a shared concern. Exploring how the city-region concept is translated into boundaries for governance in England, Coombes (2013, p. 4) argues “the crucial point is that there is an alternative conception of city regions which does not presume such a dominant role for the city”. The alternative spoken of is a ‘regions first’ approach to city-region definition where the “possibility of the region taking ontological precedence over the city” is considered (p. 3). Nevertheless, our analysis differs somewhat from Coombes. Coombes’ analysis proposes a new set of territorial boundaries for subnational policymaking in England - in effect, what the LEP map might have looked like if two sets of flow data (migration and commuting flows) were taken as the starting point for defining subnational governance units based on functional economic areas (Coombes, 2013, Figure 3). This achieves spatial inclusivity, but the mosaic of tessellate sub-regional units reproduces a set of territorially-bounded units. Moreover, despite adopting the ‘region first’ approach, the nodes identified subsequently are all cities; meaning “the empirical analysis found no ‘*non* city-region’ in England” (p. 15). Our analysis proposes extending the typology of functionally-dominant city-regions. We argue can achieve spatial inclusivity, but has the advantage that it does not require space to be carved up along territorial lines, and critically, it allows *non*-cities – market towns, tourism hotspots – to be duly recognised and considered as functionally important. Moreover, we

argue that our typology brings the hitherto neglected temporal aspect into sharper focus. Rather than presenting a static snapshot of regional space our typology considers which hubs are newly emergent (fledgling), which are dominant (fully fledged), and which are formerly dominant (emeritus).

Having said this, the shared concern is that for all the geo-economic logic underpinning spatially-selective, city-first, agglomeration perspectives on city-regionalism, they are proving to be a major obstacle to city-regions providing the innovative way to manage to urban-rural interaction. What this prevents is the ability to assess the degree to which city-regionalism as a political project can in fact deliver meaningful growth both in *and* beyond the metropolis. It follows that this inherent bias in city-region policymaking has a debilitating effect on the ability of rural representatives to engage in a political process, which – by virtue of urban-economic processes increasingly penetrating the entirety of geographic space – is having an ever greater impact over the constituencies they represent. Purcell (2006) has previously warned how the latter highlights the danger of such a democratic deficit in the form of a ‘local trap’. Referring to the US experience, he argues that “if we favour urban inhabitants over state-wide inhabitants, we are just as likely to diminish democracy as we are to enhance it” (p. 1936).

Nevertheless, we must also be careful how far we take this critical line and inappropriately reinforce the assumption that the order of the day in every regional context is that of the ‘urbanization of the rural’; be it in terms of governance, representation, function or otherwise. In this way we would re-emphasise the increasingly blurred status of conventional boundaries between city and country, and that this blurring is occurring in both directions. A scenario discussed at length by Cloke (2006), they bring our attention to the critically under-addressed process of the ‘ruralization of the urban’. Drawing explicitly on arguments put forward by Urbain (2002), Cloke insists that the city has itself been radically reshaped through the processes of



deconcentration and decentralization, and that the “urban form thereby encapsulates very strong rural characteristics and influences” (2006, p.19). With this influence extending to urban managers who are increasingly pursuing virtues more commonly associated with rural space and rural living, this shift is endemic in policy construction and emerging planning regimes which emphasise solidarity, identity, diversity and community - amongst other things. What is for sure, however, is that it is no longer going to be acceptable to conceptualise the rural simply as an appendage hanging on to the coattails of the great modern metropolis if city-regionalism is to succeed as a policy development tool. After all, rural areas appear increasingly to be the ‘glass jaw’ of city-region policy.

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<sup>i</sup> This is the same logic underpinning the European Spatial Development Perspective.

<sup>ii</sup> This was despite the focus of successive UK Government's on creating the conditions necessary for continued economic expansion in the London mega city-region during this period.

<sup>iii</sup> This compares to 25% in the United States.

<sup>iv</sup> This is a cross-national classification of subregional geographic space as Predominantly Urban, Intermediate, or Predominantly Rural. The OECD classifies regions as Predominantly Urban if the share of population living in rural local units is below 15%; Intermediate if the share of population living in rural local units is between 15-50%; and Predominantly Rural if the share of population living in rural local units is higher than 50%.

<sup>v</sup> Rural proofing requires policymakers to ensure the needs and interests of rural people, communities and businesses are properly considered in the development and implementation of all policies and programmes. It was one of the perceived benefits to accrue from the regionalisation of rural affairs.

<sup>vi</sup> It is important to note that the lack of devolved institutional settlement in England provided room for city-regionalism to emerge compared to the other UK territories which were all in receipt of an additional tier of elected political representation as part of Labour's post-1997 Devolution and Constitutional Change programme.

<sup>vii</sup> This point is given further weighting because Manchester, often held up as an exemplar of city-region governance on the international stage, includes none of its rural surroundings (Pike et al., 2012).

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<sup>viii</sup> The following section derives from empirical research conducted by the authors into LEPs and the Wales Spatial Plan. The former was conducted in 2011 and involved both desktop research and semi-structured interviews (x30) with the findings published in a report (Harrison, 2011). The latter was conducted as part of the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) programme, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (RES-576-25-0021) and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

<sup>ix</sup> City-regions can be monocentric (have a single centre) or polycentric (have many centres). Our analysis therefore refers to 'city (or cities)' and 'hub (or hubs)' throughout. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into this in more detail but it is also important to note that distinguishing city-regions which exhibit a more monocentric or polycentric spatial layout is important because if the size and scope of the functional region is similar, a single large hub will exercise greater dominance over its functional region than the sum of multiple smaller hubs (Meijers, 2008).

<sup>x</sup> We are not arguing that functionally dominant city-region constructs will appease both urban and rural lobbies; just that it presents an opportunity to move beyond the paralysis which currently surrounds city-region policymaking.