



Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)

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Snapshot: Expressions of Urban – Peri-Urban – Rural Relationships

Mynyddoedd Cambrian Mountains Initiative

Mid Wales

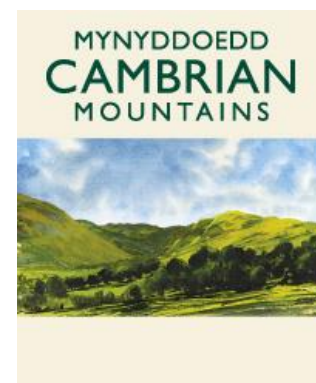
1. Brief Description

The Cambrian Mountains form the upland backbone of Wales, accounting for some 10% of Welsh land area. Population is estimated at 30,000 (CMS 2008), with just 0.07 people per hectare against a Welsh average of 1.4 (Cole et al. 2012). A sheep farming economy is recorded as early as the 14th Century (Council Regulation 1151/2012), and 85% of the mountain land is currently estimated to be in agricultural use (Joyce 2013). Agriculture, forestry and tourism are the current economic mainstays.

The Cambrian Mountains Initiative was established by HRH the Prince of Wales in 2008, with a mission statement of “Working to ensure a sustainable future for the communities of the Cambrian Mountains area in ways that care for its natural and cultural assets” (Cole et al. 2012:11). This sets out the broader ambition of the initiative, and has been at the crux of its work.

As a partnership project, the Initiative has been variously supported by the Welsh Government, local authorities, and the Countryside Council for Wales, amongst other public and private bodies. The Initiative’s development priorities have included: agri-food and forestry, conservation and ecosystem services, tourism, the built environment, and renewable energy (Cole et al. 2012).

A Community Interest Company (CIC) was established to run contracts and license branding (Fig. 1), and a charitable trust to fund community and environmental initiatives (Cole et al 2012). The Trust ceased to exist in 2017, and the Initiative is now delivering Dyfodol Cambrian Futures as a three-year cooperative project across local action groups in the counties of Ceredigion, Powys and Carmarthenshire. Three product-focused CICs, for marketing lamb, beef, and wool, have also been added to the Initiative.



2. Questions and/or Challenges

- > How has economic and community development been approached amidst the challenges of an isolated uplands environment?

Upland farming has distinct challenges, requiring substantial land area for even a bare living, and leaving farming communities often in need of aid (e.g. Midmore & Moore-Colyer 2005). Challenges identified in the Cambrian Mountains region include: disproportional local impact of fluctuating agricultural returns and policy changes; lack of affordable housing; an ageing population, limited employment opportunities, and the impact of demographic change on Welsh language; limited infrastructure and service access; declining cultural heritage including derelict properties (Cole et al. 2012).

- > How has the Cambrian Mountains Initiative changed and evolved since establishment in 2008?

Over a decade in operation, the Initiative appears to have both expanded and contracted in different ways. There is evident scope for research to investigate how and why certain aspects of the Initiative have succeeded, and others failed.

- > What is the potential for future synergies in the region?

With new elements to the Initiative recently launched, alongside other related projects and the investigation of regional designations such as AONB and *parc natur*, there are possibilities for developing future synergies within the region. Connections to urban spaces seem at present underdeveloped.

3. Main Insights

3.1. Indications of the application of the new concept of 'New Localities'

The Cambrian Mountains has no official territorial boundaries, but rather a coherence provided by the upland landscape and centrality of the agricultural economy. European Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status for Cambrian Mountains lamb appears to be the most formalized definition of the region, and includes the uplands, a 10 mile 'curtilage', and a series of towns and villages described as a 'necklace'. Three separate local authorities – Ceredigion, Powys, and Carmarthenshire – serve parts of the region, with no authority in its entirety contained within the region (Fig. 3).



Figure 2: Map of the Cambrian Mountains region showing uplands, curtilage, necklace settlements, and local authority boundaries. Source: Cole et al. 2012.

Nearly half of the people living in the Cambrian Mountains also work within the region, with surrounding settlements such as Newtown and Aberystwyth accounting for a further 30% (Manley 2009). The role of agricultural employment is marked within the region compared to the statistics for individual counties. As this indicates, the Mountains “have a highly self-contained economy” yet which can also be understood as “demonstrating a micro-economy that seeks to be self-reliant” (Cole et al. 2012:8).

At the time the Initiative was set up in 2008, the Cambrian Mountains as a region were considered to have a low level of external visibility and awareness amongst the general public: “Although identified on most maps of Wales, the area was rarely mentioned in tourism literature, simply seen as ... an area to be passed through on the way to somewhere else.” (Cole et al. 2012:8). This suggests an historic lack of imagined or material coherence, rendering the prone to the disjointed agendas of various funding schemes, rather than enabled to pursue more locally-meaningful objectives.

The symbolic shape of the region has emerged primarily through various environmental and eco-system orientated mechanisms. Efforts to formally recognize the Mountains as a region for conservation purposes date to 1947, although a proposed National Park designation never came to legislative fruition (Deane 2011). Rather, the area is characterized by a patchwork of conservation statuses, inclusive of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and areas designated as of Outstanding Historic Interest by Cadw (the Welsh Government’s historic environment service). Furthermore, the Cambrian Mountain Society has campaigned to have the region recognized as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

3.2. Insights related to the broad area of 'Smart Development'

Agricultural produce and ecosystem services are viewed as the primary sources of economic value for the Cambrian Mountains, with tourism and cultural heritage as secondary areas of growth potential (Deane 2011).

Agricultural development

2006 figures estimate the Cambrian Mountains’ total agricultural income as £47.5 million (Manley 2009), however many farms in the region would operate at a loss without agricultural subsidies (Cole et al. 2012). The regional economy is hence highly exposed to changing agricultural fortunes, and similarly to the flow-on effects of changes in agricultural policy (Cole et al. 2012). Consequently, the Cambrian Mountains Initiative’s produce marketing ventures were established to help farmers gain a premium for local products by creating a regional brand identification, and to support new agri-food business development. The Initiative charges a premium on carcass sales, plus a license fee for use of the brand (Cole et al. 2012). There are now two main produce arms –lamb, and wool – each incorporated as a Community Interest Company (CIC), a status available to social enterprises. By joining one of the Cambrian Mountains companies, farmers become entitled to use the brandmark (Fig. 1), and are required to adhere to agreed principles for practice and sustainable land management.

Marketing Cambrian Mountains lamb dates to the beginning of the Initiative, with a group of nine farmers and a supply contract with the UK-based Co-Operative supermarket (Prince of Wales 2008). By 2012, 22 farmers were involved (Council Regulation 1151/2012), and sales were estimated to have doubled on the previous year (Cole et al. 2012). The same year, Cambrian Mountains Lamb gained Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) designation. The designation requires: the lamb is bred from ewes that are at least 80% Welsh hill breeds; at least 75% of the flock's annual dry diet comes from the Cambrian Mountains region; slaughter within the region; and has traceability from “fork to farm” (Council Regulation 1151/2012). PGI designation also references the Cambrian Mountains' traditional *hafod a hendre* seasonal grazing system, and *cefnewid* cooperation between farms for shearing and autumn gathering (Council Regulation 1151/2012).

Cambrian Mountains Wool was most recently incorporated into the Initiative as a CIC in 2016, after a four year feasibility scoping process. Although Wales once had a strong textile industry, commercial scouring and spinning facilities are no longer available, and Cambrian Mountains Wool has taken the decision to promote the product rather than invest in new processing infrastructures. At present, the company purchases locally grown wool in commercial quantities, supplies a yarn range for knitting and craft, and supports designers and manufacturers using local wool.

Ecosystem services

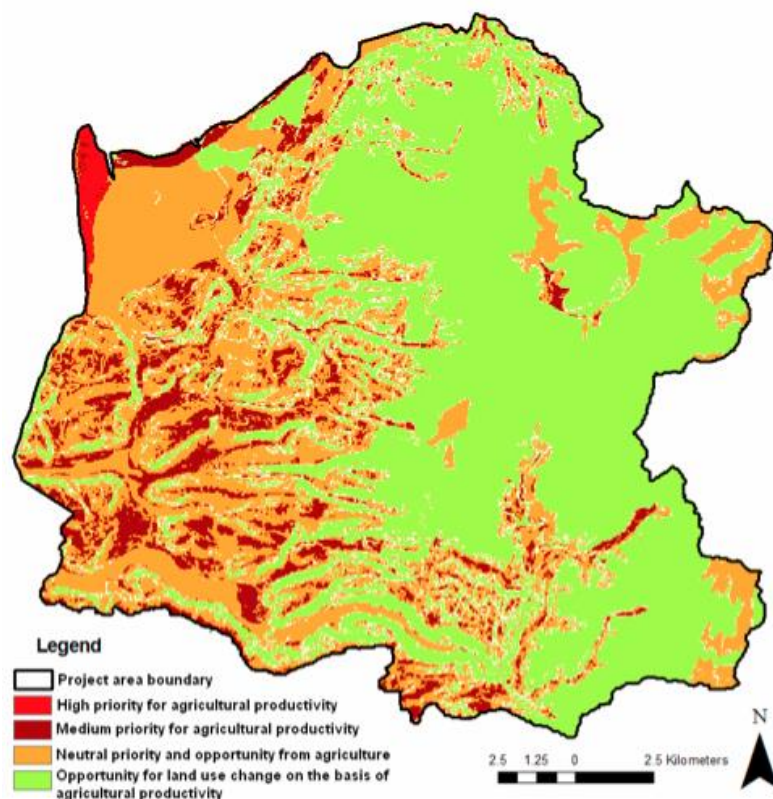


Figure 3: Spatial modelling of agricultural productivity value within a case study zone. Source: Deane 2011.

In the ecosystem services field, the Cambrian Mountains are considered a major source of carbon storage in peat soils, and critical for water management, including flooding amelioration (Cole et al. 2012, Joyce 2013). The region supplies some 222 billion litres of water annually to Wales and the English West Midlands (Manley 2009). It has been estimated that an additional £8.3 million per annum could be generated through investment in carbon storage and water regulation (Joyce 2013:5). However, investment opportunities that might work for one landowner are not necessarily available to all, and, as with conifer forestry, could be potentially counterproductive (CMS 2008).

While there has been investment in renewable energy in the region, particularly in windfarms, there have equally been concerns about profits going out of the locality (Cole et al. 2012) and conflicts with environmental values. While the development of agri-environment schemes since the 1980s has had an impact on land management within the region, Joyce (2013:34) observes that “past management has ensured that the Cambrian Mountains deliver an array of non-market ecosystem services of benefit to society, [but] where land managers do not see the benefit of their actions” they are less likely to continue to provide non-market services. The Cambrian Mountains adaptive landscapes project (Deane 2011) sought to involve farmers in land-use planning scenarios. The project spatially modelled the most agriculturally productive spaces within a case study area in order to establish where biodiversity-related activities could be least intrusively sited (Fig. 4).

Tourism

While research engagement with local stakeholders has shown that the region’s role in producing food is most valued by agriculturally-dominated groups, members of the general public emphasise recreation, culture, education, and wildlife (Evison 2011). Writing on the Welsh uplands more broadly, Midmore and Moore-Colyer (2005:4) observe that these areas “play a pivotal role in terms of culture, recreation, environment and national identity”. The Initiative has had strong interest in taking advantage of natural and cultural landscapes to support the Cambrian Mountains economy – for example, 48% of the region offers public access and the right to roam (Cole et al. 2012).

Although tourist spend is difficult to establish, a 2006 estimate for the region is £32.6 million annually (Manley 2009). However, regional tourism development faces challenges including: few high-profile attractions, poor marketing of Welsh cultural activities, limited accommodation supply, poor integration between transport provision and visitor needs, and the potential for conflict between different types of visitor (Cole et al. 2012). Visitor numbers have been considered low, despite relative proximity to the English border, and the Cambrian Mountains is reckoned to account for just 4.5% of combined tourist activity in the counties of Ceredigion, Powys and Carmarthenshire (Cole et al. 2012). The Initiative’s tourism ambassadors scheme was developed to also enable selected operators to use the Cambrian Mountains branding. EUROPARC (2009:30), however, have raised doubts about the “overly optimistic” nature of hopes that the region’s tourism revenue could be increased by focusing on stay and spend rather than increasing visitor numbers, and cite a lack of “hard business analysis”. Further, as a report for the Farmers’ Union of Wales (Joyce

2013:5) points out, “the benefits of an attractive landscape ... stem from those managing the land but accrue to tourist enterprises and the health and wellbeing of those partaking in them.”

3.3. Other insights that could be relevant for further work

The Cambrian Mountains Initiative was originally modelled on the grant-giving capacities of UK National Parks’ Sustainable Development Fund, with the core working principles of: enabling, networking, coordinating, and raising awareness (Cole et al. 2012). Early years of the Initiative saw topical working groups led by different partners, such as an ecosystem services group led by the CCW and Welsh government, and a tourism group led by Mid-Wales tourism (Deane 2011). However, an evaluation of the Initiative’s first four years critically identified a lack of formal coordination and accountability within working groups, and poor communication (Cole et al. 2012). This seems to prove early criticism of the Initiative from the consultants EUROPARC (2009:30), who argued, “We do not consider the current deficiency to be a lack of integrated thinking. Much thinking has been done about the benefits of integrated action in the uplands ... The struggle has been to achieve integrated delivery.”

The Initiative has not had permanent staff, and has largely relied on pro bono support from partners, although the CICs have directors and there have been some externally funded capacity-building positions. Reliance on external funding seems indeed to have posed enduring challenges for the Initiative. More generally within the region, concerns have been noted that “the availability of European funds has encouraged a grant dependent culture” that encourages short-termism over long-term solutions (Cole et al. 2012:9).

Beyond the Initiative itself, built environment and infrastructures remain a major area of challenge with the Cambrian Mountains. Some 10% of the region’s housing stock is either unoccupied or used as a second home (Cole et al. 2012). A 2009 pilot project for the Initiative, and supported by the Prince’s Regeneration Trust and Cadw, investigated the region’s historic farmsteads, considered “an important component of the historic environment, [which] contribute to local and regional distinctiveness” (Hayman 2009:1). Changes in farming practice have led to the deterioration, alteration or abandonment, of many of these buildings, yet the project found limited possibilities for adaptive re-use (Hayman 2009).

Lack of infrastructure can be read as both asset and liability (e.g. CMS 2008). Only one main road crosses the Cambrian Mountains, and much of the region is inaccessible by vehicle. While this leads to a pleasurable lack of light pollution and sense of rural retreat, it equally limits possibilities for development. Further, according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, the region has some of the poorest access to public services in Wales (Cole et al. 2012).

4. Data Sources and Indicators

Table 1 Data / Indicators for Example 1

Data / Indicator	Source
Demography, employment and tourism statistics	Cole et al 2012
Demography and economic estimates	Manley 2009
Archaeological survey records of 531 farmsteads	Hayman 2009
Ecosystem stakeholder workshop summary	Evison 2011
Visual and sensory spatial evaluation	LANDMAP 2011
Spatial modelling within case study area	Deane 2011, Pagella & Jackson 2012
Comparative analysis of AONB designation	EUROPARC 2009
Biodiversity and stocking statistics	Joyce 2013
Overview of past policy changes in uplands	Midmore & Moore-Colyer 2005

5. Critical Appraisal of Data Use

Detailed studies of the Cambrian Mountains region have to date been largely concerned with ecosystems and land management, such as the Polyscape spatial modelling project, (Deane 2011, Pagella & Jackson 2012), which explored a case study area near Aberystwyth. Other projects, such as Hayman's (2009) historic building survey, offer considerable detail on a comparatively niche topic.

Little evaluative data on the Cambrian Mountains Initiative itself is currently available. However, with a formal evaluation now out to tender, this information may become available in the near future. More broadly, there is little existing data on the costs and benefits of regional designation systems such as AONB and Parcs Natur (EUROPARC 2009), which nevertheless may not be easily measured in monetary terms. There is a strong bias in some existing sources, such as the Farmers' Union of Wales' firmly pro-agriculture regional study (Joyce 2013) and the Cambrian Mountains' Society's (2008) case for AONB designation.

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