Language policy in a post-territorial age?

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Structure of talk

* Introduction: academic traditions and the Welsh language

* Reinforcing territorial conventions

* The Welsh language in a post-territorial age?

* Conclusions: reimagining policy futures

Academic traditions and the Welsh language 1

* "The completeness of the traditional rural society – involving the cohesion of family, kindred and neighbours – and its capacity to give the individual a sense of belonging are phenomena that might well be pondered by all who seek a better social order" (Alwyn D. Rees, 1950, *Life in a Welsh Countryside*, p. 170)

Life in a Welsh Countryside

ALWYN D. REES
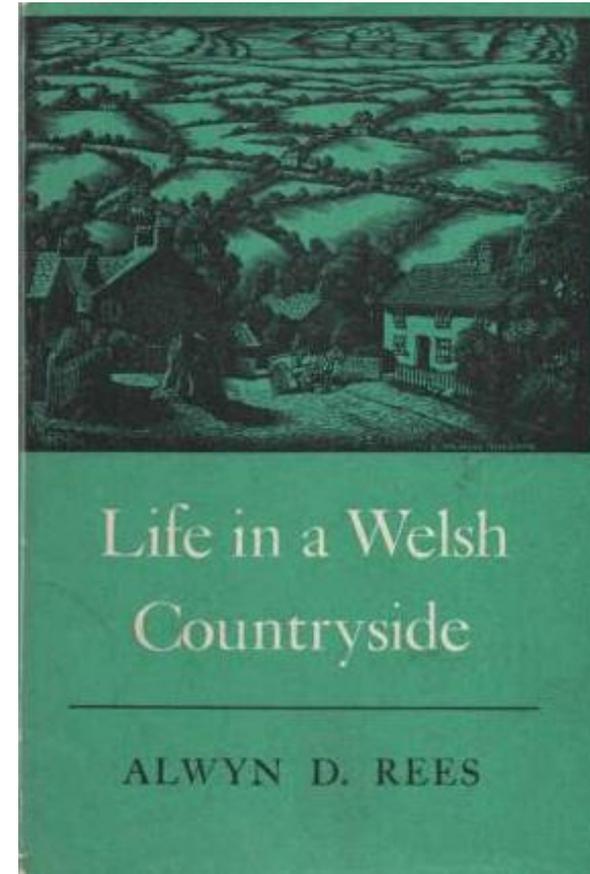
Academic traditions and the Welsh language 1

* 'Thick' description of various communities (e.g. Jones Hughes in Aberdaron, Owen In Glan-llyn, Jenkins in Aberporth)
    * Researching from within
    * Understanding the institutions and processes that sustained these communities (school, chapel, church etc)
    * Charting the challenges facing these communities, e.g. depopulation

Academic traditions and the Welsh language 1

* Rural communities?
* Uniform communities?
* Communities with little conflict?
* Enlosed communities?

* The Welsh language being reproduced within these discrete communities… and increasingly being under threat within them.

Academic traditions and the Welsh language 2

* Emrys Bowen and 'Le Pays de Galles' (1959)
* Drawing on the French school of regional geography
* Pays as distinctive regions, replete with specific physical endowments and cultural characteristics
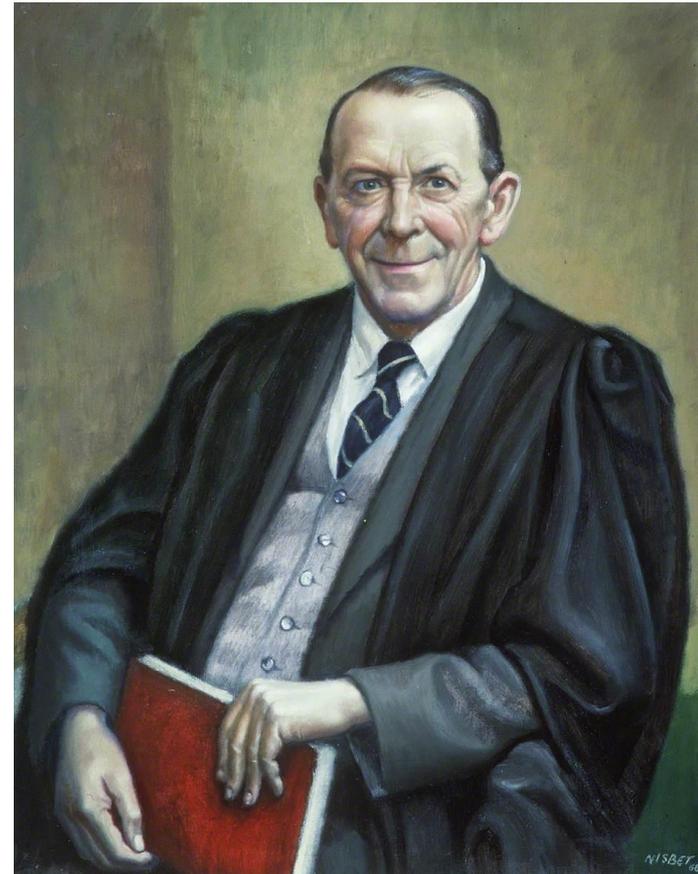
Academic traditions and the Welsh language 2
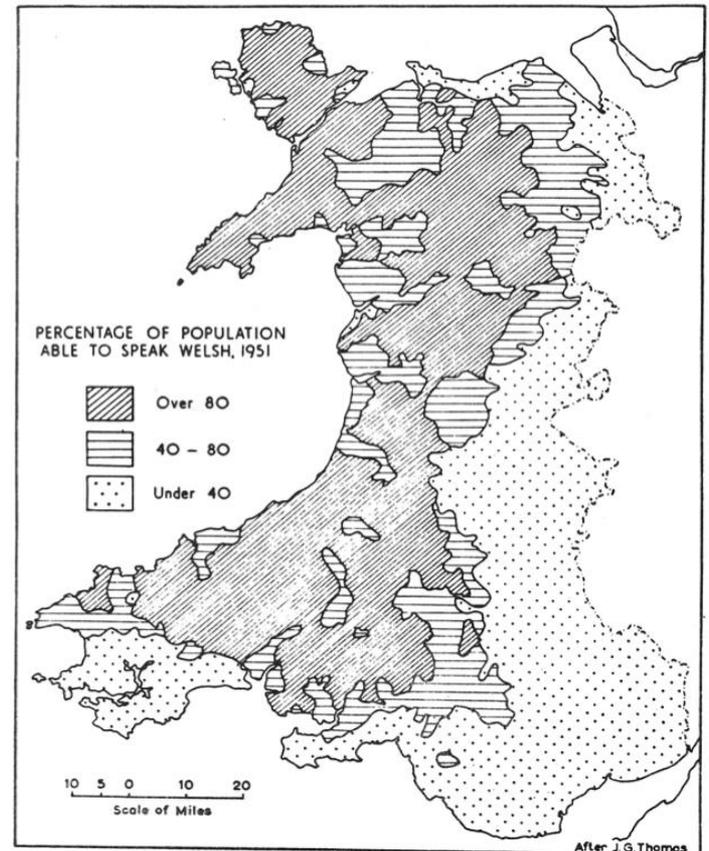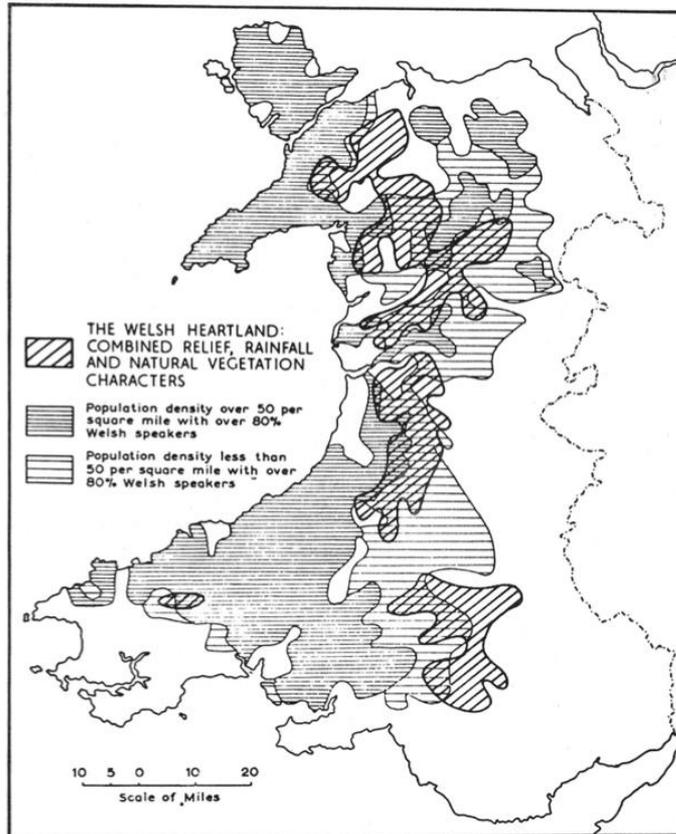
Academic traditions and the Welsh language 2

* Aitchison and Carter (1991; 1996) following in the same tradition

* A series of maps that have charted the territorial retrenchment of 'Y Fro Gymraeg' or 'Welsh heartland'

Percentage of Population
Able to Speak Welsh
1991

80
65
50
35
20
5

N

0 10 20 30 40 50 Kms
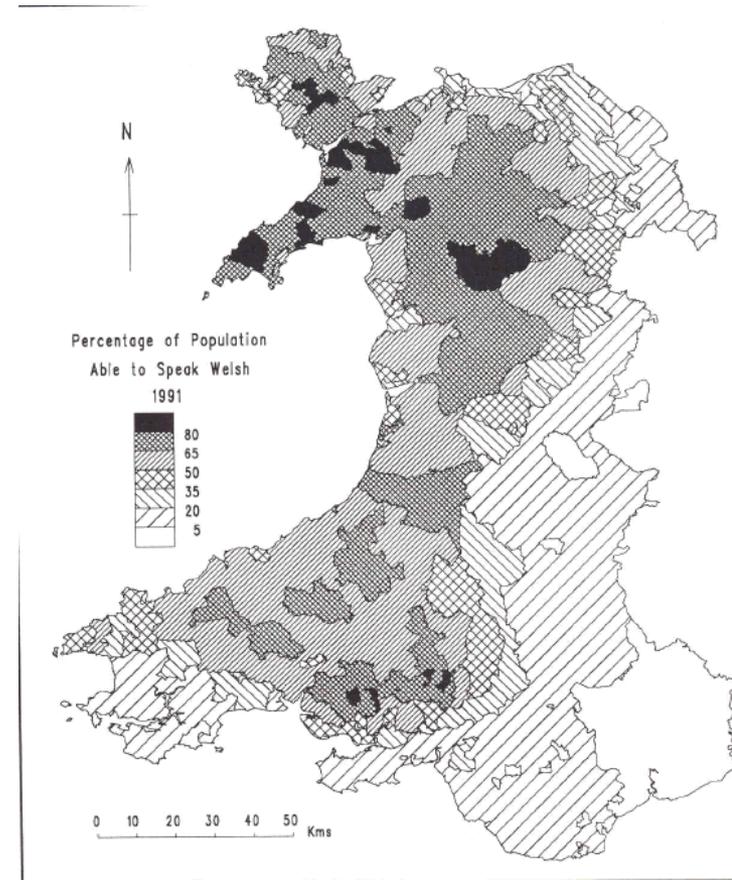
Academic traditions and the Welsh language 1 + 2

* What have been the geographical imaginations that have underpinned these academic narratives?
    * Territorial imaginations at two interlinked scales?
    * Enclosed 'communities' at two interlinked scales?
* To what extent do such geographical imaginations underpin contemporary language policy in Wales?
* Is a new, possibly post-territorial, geographical imagination required?

Reinforcing territorial conventions

* Recent language campaigns and language policy have tended to reinforce territorial imaginations – at two scales:

* The need to protect 'Y Fro Gymraeg' in its entirety
* The need to protect those communities that make up 'Y Fro Gymraeg'

Reinforcing territorial conventions

Reinforcing territorial conventions

Reinforcing territorial conventions

* 'I think that it's necessary for us to try to keep the Fro Gymraeg...unless there are communities and areas where Welsh is the natural language of the community, I don't feel that there is a future for Welsh...that is, it will become a minority language in all areas and in the end it won't be very different from Cornish, for example. That is, a hobby for people who have an interest in cultural and linguistic things, but a minority hobby, in the same way that Latin was a hobby until fairly recently for an educated minority, if you like.'

Reinforcing territorial conventions

* 'Cymuned succeeded in placing the future of the language as a community language on the political agenda, there's no doubt about that. And it was very successful. *Iaith Pawb* makes it totally clear that the continuation of Welsh as a community language is important, and I don't think that would have been as true to the degree that it is true in the document...but for the general atmosphere that Cymuned created in 2001 and 2002.'

Reinforcing territorial conventions

* 'There is further cause for concern for the sustainability of the language in its traditional Welsh-speaking heartlands… The number of communities where over 70 per cent of the population was able to speak Welsh dropped to 54 in the 2001 census, compared with 92 in 1991. It has long been argued that such a density of speakers is required in order for Welsh to be an everyday language of the community.'
* (Welsh Government, 2012, *A Living Language: A Language for Living*, p. 8).

Reinforcing territorial conventions

* 'The evidence we received during Y Gynhadledd Fawr and the various policy reviews outline the importance of the viability of Welsh in the community for the future of the language. The decline in the percentage of Welsh speakers in the counties of north and west Wales in the 2011 Census was of particular concern. We recognise the importance of supporting communities in which high percentages of Welsh speakers live' (Welsh Government, 2014, *Moving Forward*, p. 17).

Reinforcing territorial conventions
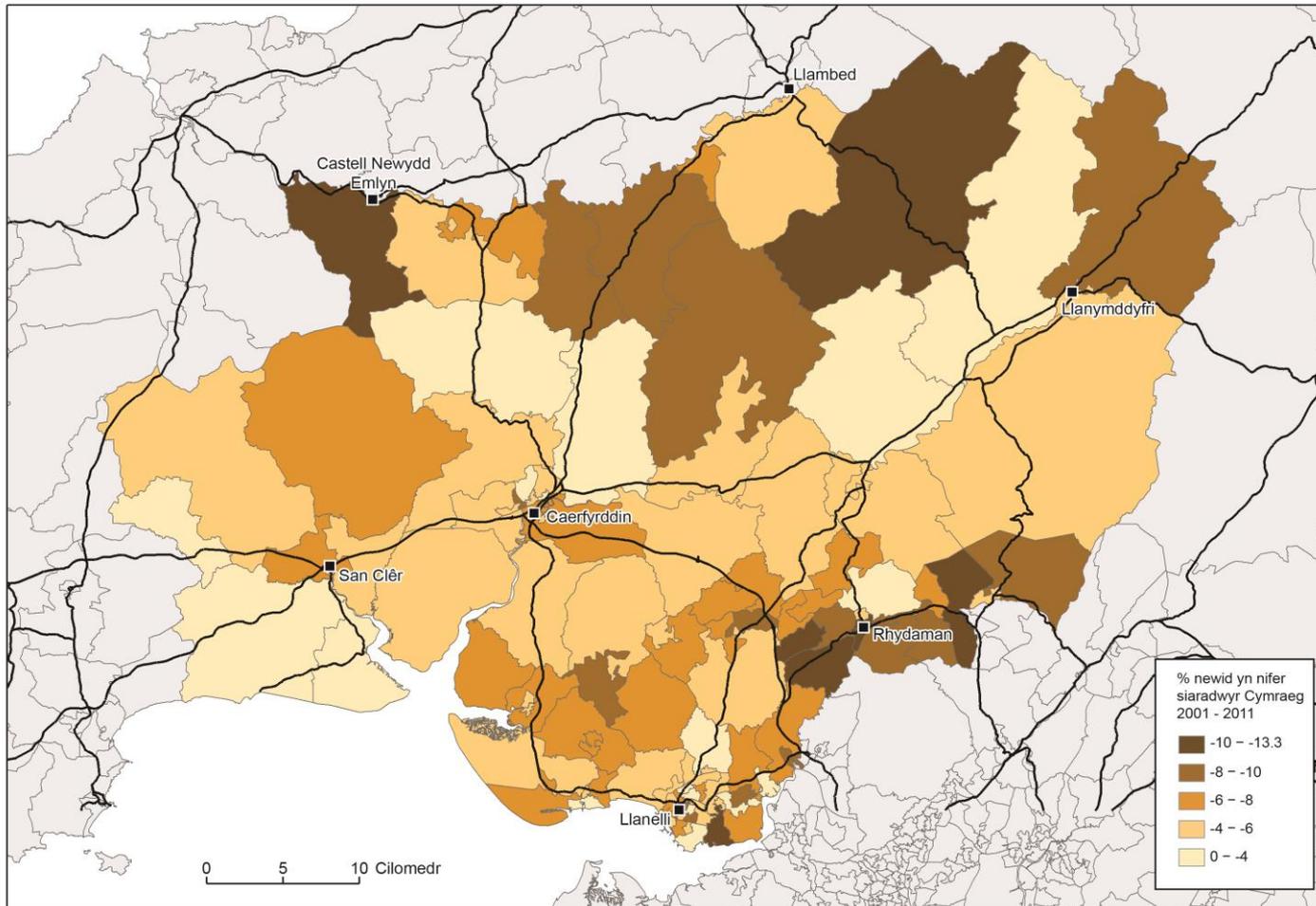
Reinforcing territorial conventions
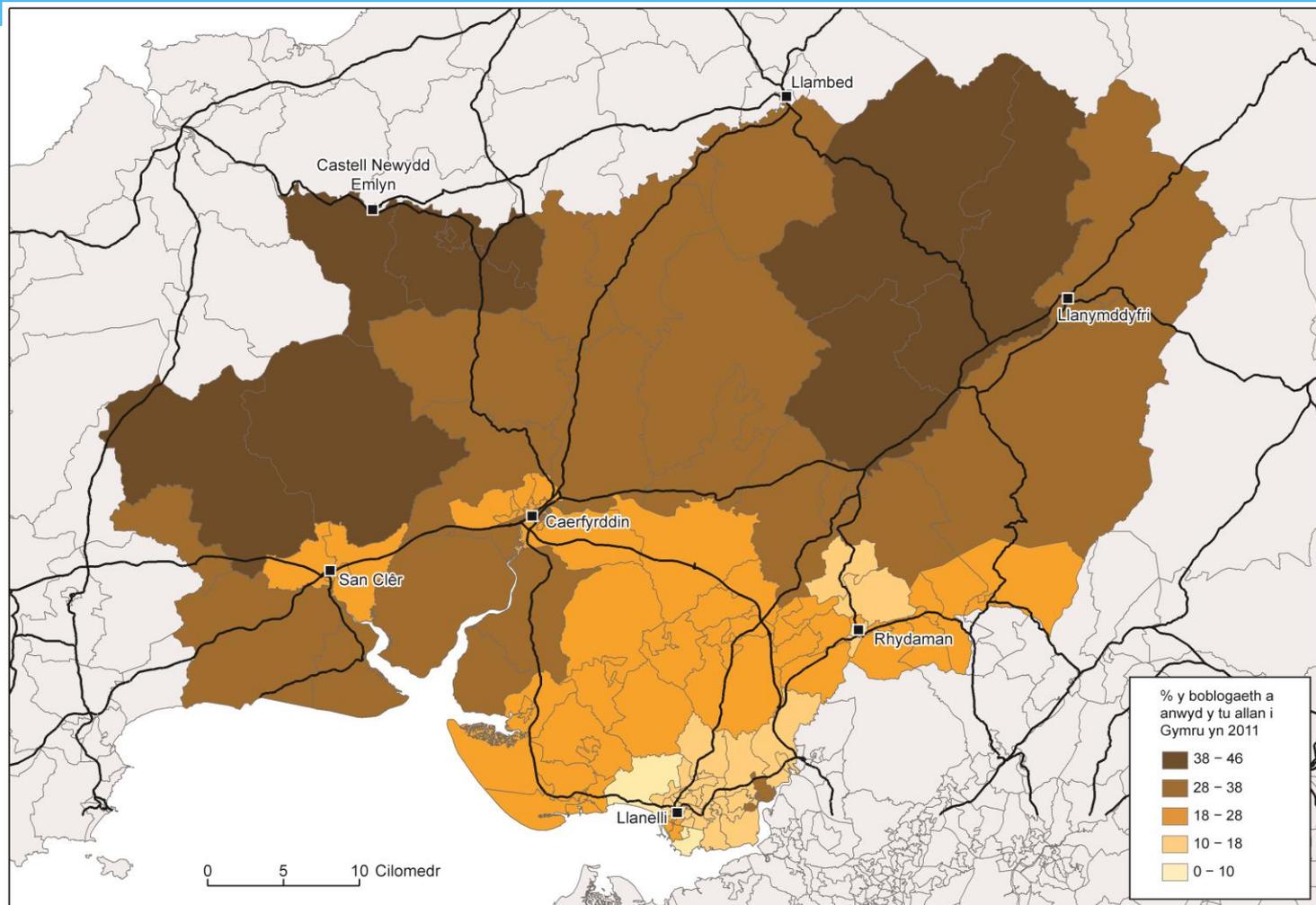
The Welsh language in a post-territorial age?

* Amin, Massey and Thrift (2003, tud. 6): "an era of increasingly geographically extended spatial flows and an intellectual context where space is frequently being imagined as a product of networks and relations is, increasingly, challenging an older topography in which territoriality was dominant".

The Welsh language in a post-territorial age?

* People don't live and work in one place or community
* Places or communities are not uniform. Nor are they bounded or enclosed
* Every place is unique but this uniqueness does not derive from that place's internal characteristics (the world is not like a mosaic)
* A need to think about places as nodes or meeting points in a series of different networks

The Welsh language in a post-territorial age?

Y Fro Gymraeg Fewnol

Y Fro Gymraeg Allanol

Y Fro Gymraeg Fewnol = O leiaf 80% o'r bobl a anwyd yng Nghymru yn siarad Cymraeg
ac o leiaf 50% o'r boblogaeth yn siarad Cymraeg

Y Fro Gymraeg Allanol = O leiaf 50% o'r bobl a anwyd yng Nghymru yn siarad Cymraeg
ac o leiaf 33% o'r boblogaeth yn siarad Cymraeg

0   30 km
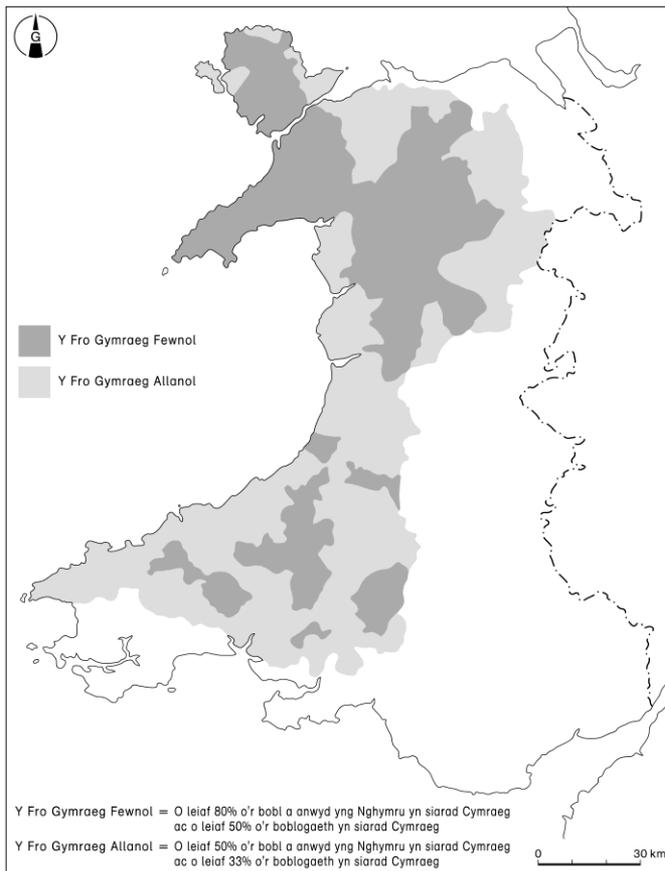
Post-territorial geographical imaginations?

The Welsh language in a post-territorial age?
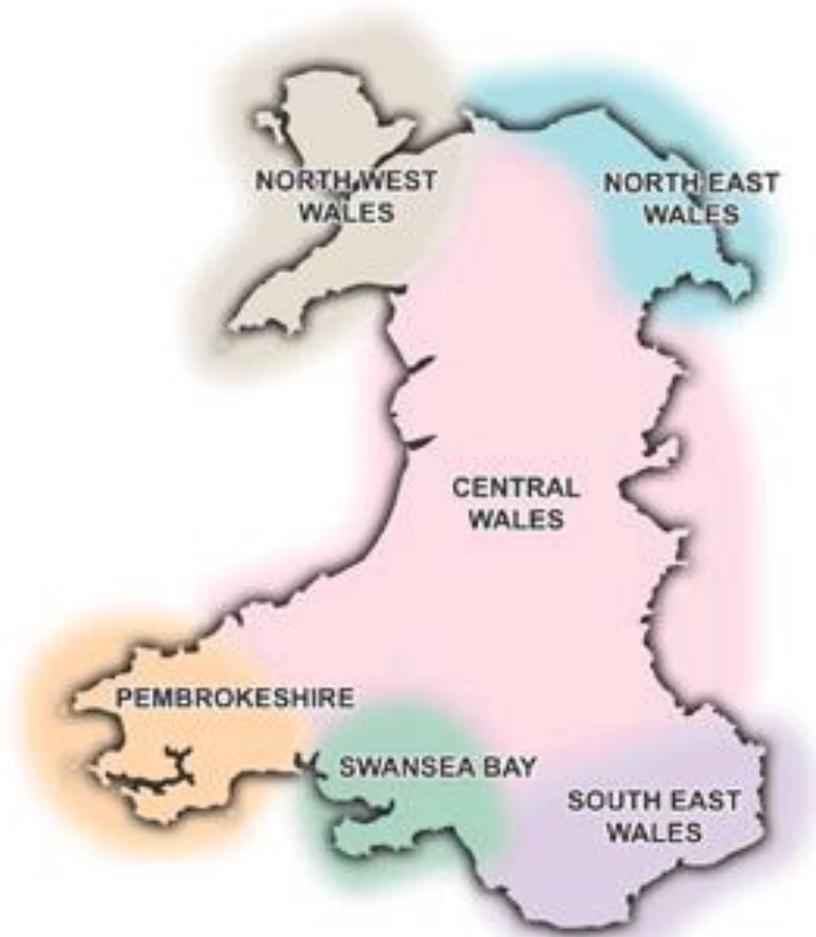
The Wales Spatial Plan and the concept of 'fuzzy' regions (Heley 2013)

The Welsh language in a post-territorial age?
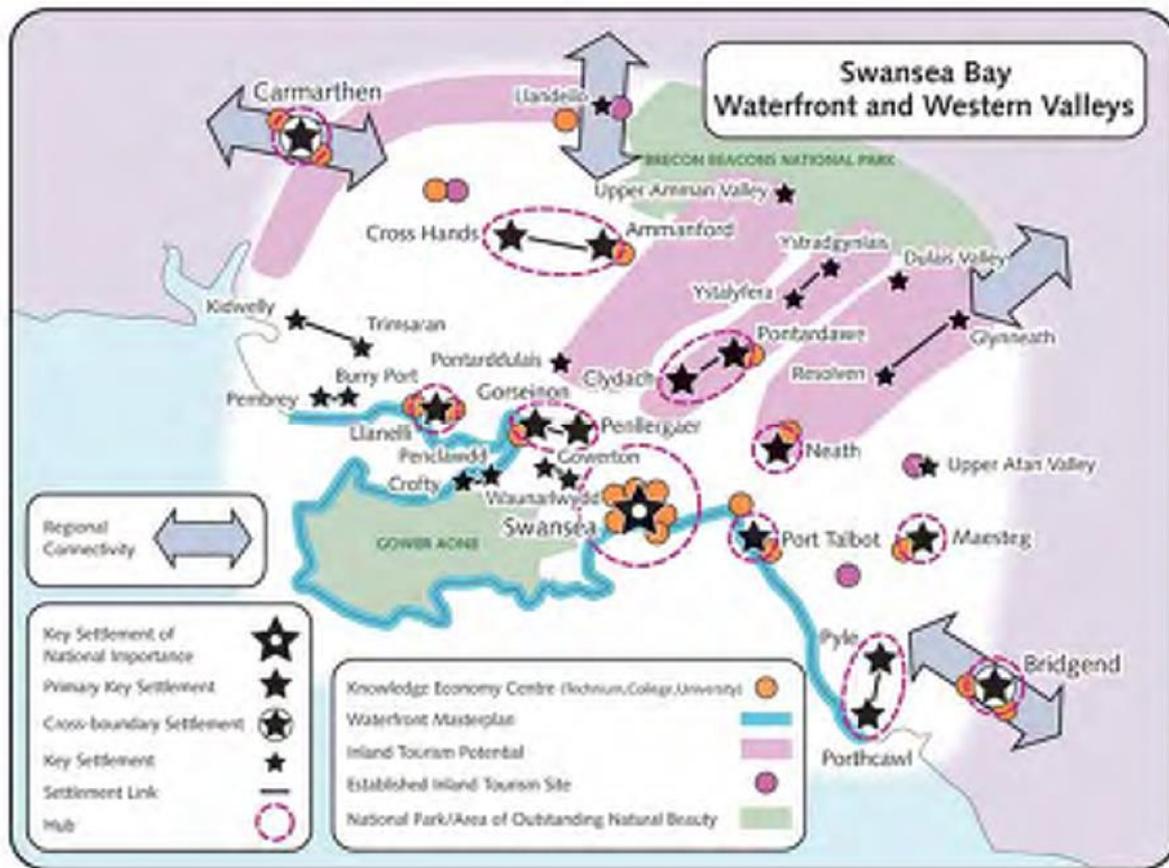
City regions, e.g. Swansea Bay

Map | Satellite
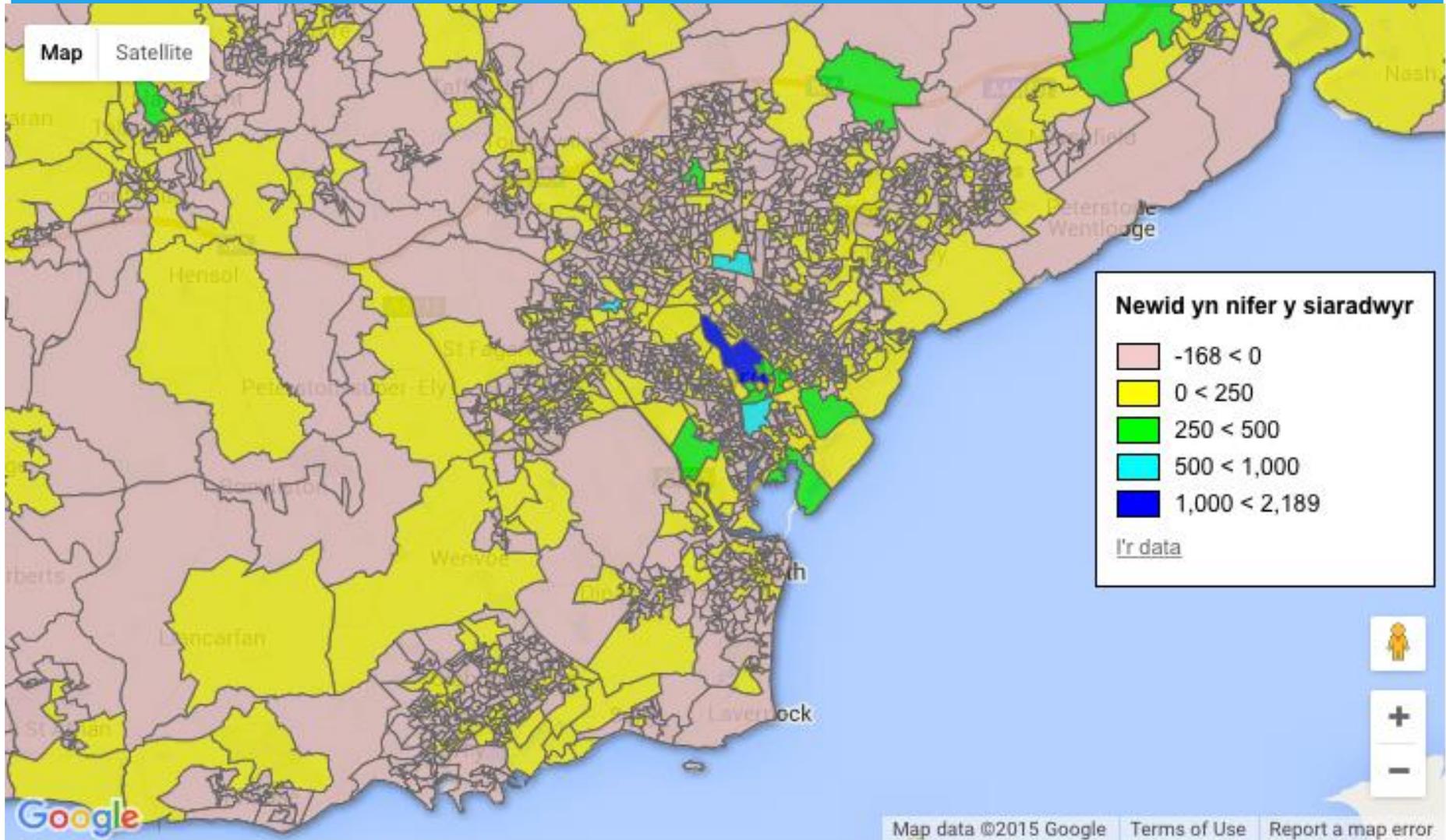
Newid yn nifer y siaradwyr

- ☐ -168 < 0
- ☐ 0 < 250
- ☐ 250 < 500
- ☐ 500 < 1,000
- ☐ 1,000 < 2,189

I'r data

Google

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The Welsh language in a post-territorial age?

* Everyday youth mobilities in Llangadog?
* Rugby and football in the town, swimming in Llandovery or Carmarthen, primary school in Llangadog, secondary in Llandeilo, any serious shopping in Carmarthen, Llanelli (Trostre) or Swansea

The Welsh language in a post-territorial age?

* **Thursday.** Wake up, prepare breakfast for the children. Take the children to school. Go to work just before 9. A meeting of the University's Appeal Panel, 9-11. Lecturing for two hours on Pobl a Lle, 11-1. Meeting students to discuss dissertation ideas, 1-3. Fetch the children from school, 3.30. Help the children with their homework and prepare supper until 5.30. Take my son to a swimming lession, and shop in Morrisons during the lession. Home, put the children to bed. Read work for the following day.

* What kind of language community do I live in?

The Welsh language in a post-territorial age?

Point Density Maps of Welsh and English Language tweets
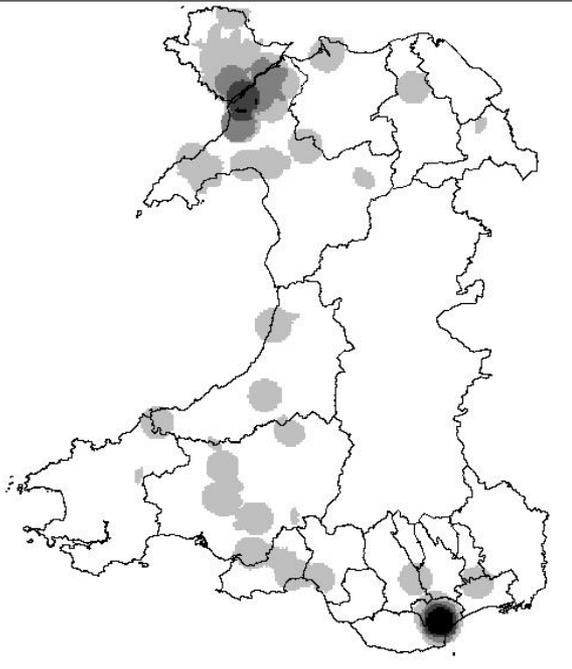
Welsh Language Tweets
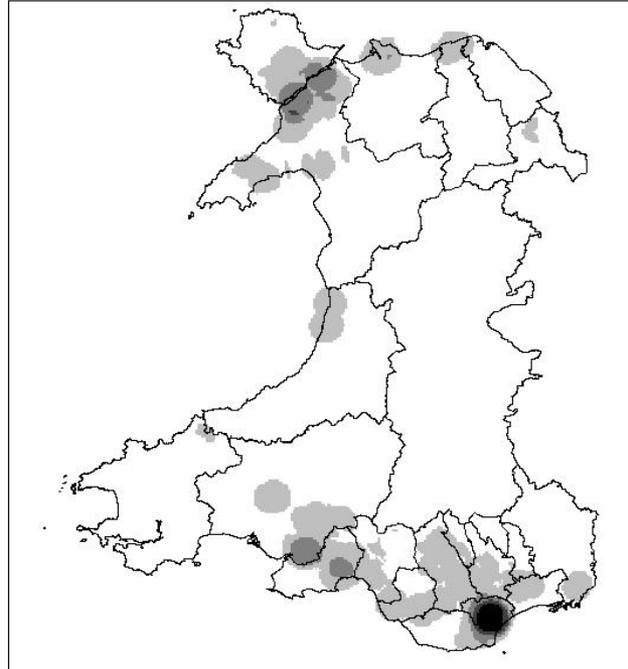
English Language Tweets

The geography of Welsh-medium tweeting

The Welsh language in a post-territorial age?

* 'We recognise that the meaning of "community" now includes networks of common interest and digital networks, which not only connect people scattered in cities or in the countryside, but which also bridge continents. That being so, we need to consider to what extent the emphasis on 'community' as a residential, geographical entity is still important? Is the density of speakers created as people travel to work more important than the neighbourhood where they live? Is the density of Welsh speakers on the ground as significant as it once was? Do we also need to continue to acknowledge the importance of communities in the traditional or historical sense?' (Welsh Government, 2016, *Consultation Document on a New Welsh Language Strategy*, p. 17).

The Welsh language in a post-territorial age?

* 'We recognise that what is considered a 'community' has now changed, expanded, and is a difficult concept to define, but care must be taken not to depreciate the value and significance of the 'geographical' community which brings people together through the medium of Welsh. This is where the foundations of Welsh speakers' identity and values are set and community leaders nurtured (Gwynedd Council)' (Welsh Government, 2016, *Summary of Responses to the Consultation Document on a New Welsh Language Strategy*, p. 12).

Conclusions: reimagining policy futures

* To what extent is it possible to reconcile territorial and more networked understandings of communities and territories?

* To what extent do we need a different geographical imagination to understand and support languages within particular places?

* Academic and policy debate with potentially serious repercussions

Conclusions: reimagining policy futures

* Gareth Ioan (2012) and the idea of *Local Action/Gweithredu'n Lleol*: neighbourhood not community

* 'A neighbourhood doesn't necessarily follow the administrator's boundaries. It can cross the boundaries of communities, wards and counties. It often follows the local geography, travel patterns or common economic history.' (p.7)

* 'Essentially, a neighbourhood is a network.' (p.8)

Conclusions: reimagining policy futures

* Can one also think of the Welsh heartland as a territory created out of different networks (a network nation, Jones and Merriman 2012)?
    * A focus on porous boundaries?
    * A focus on the networks that constitute the heartland, not on a uniform territory?
    * A series of heartlands, each with their own characteristics and challenges?