

Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) Annual Report 2010

1. Introduction

WISERD was established in October 2008 as a networked research institute, drawing together and building upon existing social science expertise at Cardiff, Aberystwyth, Bangor, Glamorgan and Swansea Universities.

WISERD has an innovative and ambitious programme which combines:

- development of the social science research infrastructure; and
- a substantive core research programme.

The Institute's infrastructural programme aims to develop social science research capacity within Wales and more widely. WISERD's infrastructural activities are focused on: training and capacity building, with a strong emphasis on quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods; the development of a series of online resources to improve access to research data on Wales and to facilitate collaborative research projects; and the development of a robust system of knowledge exchange and transfer, facilitated by WISERD's close relationships with the Welsh Assembly Government and other government organisations, such as the Office for National Statistics, as well as organisations in civil society.

WISERD's research programme combines basic science with a series of more applied projects. It is divided into five main sets of thematic activities: data integration and data management; qualitative methodological development; advanced quantitative methods; policy analysis and evaluation; and research into the experiences of those living in selected localities across Wales.

A major change that took place in September 2010 was the appointment of Professor Gareth Rees as WISERD Director, to replace Professor Huw Beynon, who remains a WISERD Senior Research Associate on a part-time basis. This transition was managed smoothly, albeit with some disruption to WISERD activities.

For further information on WISERD, visit: <http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/>

2. Impact and highlights

Progress on the resource/research activity

During 2010, WISERD's main focus was on the completion of primary data collection across the Institute's research programmes. However, analytical work has also proceeded in parallel. Two examples illustrate highlights of this latter work.

Example 1: Debates on locality

On the basis of the WISERD *Knowing Localities* research programme, Professor Martin Jones (WISERD Aberystwyth Co-Director) has led significant contributions to the debates over the conceptual status of 'locality' and its place within theoretical discussions of socio-spatial relations. WISERD's research is based on a multi-dimensional analysis organised around three strands. (i) Localities are seen as active and ongoing historical products of territories, places, scales, and networks (TPSN for short). A journal paper, in collaboration with Professor Bob Jessop (Lancaster University), has been published on this in *Antipode*. (ii) The possible forms a locality can take may be represented by a 'phase space' of possibilities. This innovation has contributed to the debates on 'thinking space relationally' and is represented in a publication in the *International Journal of Law in Context*. (iii) As not everything that is possible is 'compossible' (i.e. happens, drawing on debates in meta-physics), the research

has examined the coherence, stability and resilience of localities across Europe. This is being taken forward further in a special issue of the journal *Regional Studies* to be published during 2013.

Example 2: Measuring accessibility

WISERD has carried out a significant amount of research on the 'accessibility' of a range of public and private services. This research, led by Professor Gary Higgs (WISERD Glamorgan Co-Director), aims to improve understanding of how accessibility has widespread impacts on areas such as the labour market, health, education and leisure, and is likely to be of significant use to policy makers. Previous research on the topic has drawn attention to the importance of measuring accessibility to a range of public services for those most heavily reliant on public transport. However, existing measures have been criticised for their lack of sophistication and a reliance on simple operations such as straight-line (or 'as the crow flies') measures.

WISERD's research involves developing enhanced accessibility measures which have to date not been applied to measure access to public transport opportunities. Initial findings suggest that this approach yields a metric which captures many detailed aspects of accessibility. These include (i) proximity; (ii) the balance between service supply and demand; (iii) cumulative opportunity; and (iv) temporal availability. Using a case study in a local authority in South Wales, WISERD is in the process of integrating publicly available digital transport timetables and information on bus stop locations with geospatial analysis tools to provide a realistic appraisal of bus transit accessibility. Such measures could clearly form the basis for future studies of social exclusion and environmental injustice to public transport opportunities and will also provide a more detailed analysis of access to employment opportunities and public services in the education, health and leisure sectors. Such research is drawing attention to the potential for including more intelligent demand-side and supply-side modelling inputs in measuring access to services and will permit more accurate evaluations of the current and future state of the public transport network in Wales. Papers on this work have been published in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, and accepted by *Environment and Planning B* and the *International Journal of Geographical Information Science*.

Academic impact

WISERD has invested significantly in generating academic impact, both nationally and internationally, frequently combining different modes of communication and collaboration. The following examples illustrate this sort of work.

Example 1: Qualitative GIS (QGIS)

WISERD is developing QGIS as part of its emphasis on mixed methods approaches. WISERD hosted an international conference on QGIS in August 2010. Keynote speakers were Professor Mei-Po Kwan (Ohio State University, US), Associate Professor Marianna Pavloskaya (Hunter College, CUNY, US) and Dr Chris McDowall (Land Care Research, New Zealand). The conference attracted delegates from Europe, North America and Asia. The keynote speakers also helped deliver a one-day capacity building QGIS workshop and participated in three half-day meetings with WISERD researchers to develop further collaborative links.

A bid has been submitted to the NCRM call for Networks for Methodological Innovations 2010 to consolidate the research ideas developed during these meetings. This bid works with international and UK partners in England and Scotland to develop networks, discussion and collaboration around QGIS related issues. Related to this, WISERD researchers are investigating methodological, technical and ethical issues in relation to geo-tagging our qualitative data. A substantive research project is being developed around QGIS and

participatory mapping technologies with international colleagues in New Zealand (Chris McDowall, David Medyckyj-Scott).

A WISERD Methods Briefing Paper on Qualitative GIS is currently in development and two papers by WISERD Research Associates, Drs. Burgess and Orford on QGIS are currently in progress. Dr Burgess will present a paper titled *Qualitative GIS: defending a mixed-method approach to spatiotemporal analysis* at the Association of American Geographers Annual Conference in Seattle in April 2011. Drs. Burgess and Orford have also been invited to act as expert discussants on QGIS at a capacity building workshop run by the NCRM funded node *Qualitative Innovations in CAQDAS (QUIC)* in May 2011.

Example 2: Developments in Qualitative and Mixed Methods Approaches

WISERD has developed fruitful relationships with the NCRM, thereby accessing key networks for the communication of its research. WISERD Senior Research Associate, Professor Amanda Coffey, convened a successful session at the 4th. ESRC Research Methods Festival in July 2010. The focus was on *Researching Geographies and Mobilities*. WISERD Research Associate, Dr. Stephen Drinkwater presented results from his research on migration patterns, based on the Labour Force Survey. Dr. Stephen Burgess presented an overview analysis of the potential of QGIS to integrate qualitative and quantitative data in a spatial context.

WISERD also contributed significantly to the NCRM Autumn School, *Five Years of Qualitative Innovation: an NCRM show case*, in November 2010. WISERD Research Associate, Dr. Kate Moles, presented a paper on 'Time, Place and Understanding', drawing on her extensive empirical work within the WISERD *Knowing Localities* research programme. WISERD Senior Research Associate, Professor Amanda Coffey, presented an overview paper that reflected on the future development of qualitative research practice.

All of these presentations are currently being developed into publications that will consolidate the communication process, leading to enhanced academic impacts.

Economic and societal impact

WISERD has invested significantly in knowledge exchange and transfer activities. As WISERD is at a relatively early stage, it is difficult to demonstrate tangible evidence of economic and societal impact as yet. However, the examples below give an indication of the work that has been undertaken to this end,

Example 1: Collaborative Activities with Policy-makers

WISERD has collaborated with the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) to establish a series of *evidence symposia*, focused on key policy themes. The first of these joint WISERD/WAG events analysed 'Research into Behavioural Change' and was held in September 2010. It brought together academic researchers and senior policy-makers from WAG and beyond. It was intended to influence the development of WAG's approach to policies aimed at effecting behaviour change (and hence aligned with ESRC priorities too). The next symposium is scheduled for early 2011 and will focus on 'Beyond GDP: Measuring Well-being' and will involve collaboration with ONS, as well as WAG.

Example 2: Interactive Social Science

WISERD Research Associate, Dr. Scott Orford is engaged in a research project, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which has been designed and implemented in conjunction with Shelter Cymru. It focuses on the implications of the future dynamics of the housing market for the housing opportunities available to young people. It is intended not only to produce academic outputs, but also to feed directly into the development of housing policy, through the activities of Shelter and more widely. Initial findings have been widely reported in the media. This project can be argued to provide a rare example of 'interactive social science'.

3. Progress against objectives

In this section, a brief report of progress is provided in terms of the objectives set out in the *WISERD 2010 Forward Plan*. In general, progress has been satisfactory. However, where targets have been missed, these are duly noted and appropriate remedial strategies outlined.

Data Integration and Quantitative Analysis

WISERD GeoPortal

Research and development on meta-data and archiving standards has progressed satisfactorily. Work has commenced on populating the relational database with meta-data from government surveys and WISERD research. In autumn 2010, the WISERD thematic groups were invited to suggest relevant thematic datasets and grey data to be included in the meta-database. Those suggested are currently being reviewed for inclusion.

A priority during 2010 has been the development of the WISERD GeoPortal. A beta-version of the Geo-Portal was released internally for testing in August and will be rolled out for wider testing in April 2011. As part of the development of the GeoPortal, the team has completed a technical and literature review of GeoPortals, which has been submitted for publication.

Work on the bespoke WISERD collaborative web portal, WISCE, was completed.

Micro-level Data Linkages

Work on micro-level data linkages is ongoing, owing to difficulties experienced in accessing the data linking methodology pioneered by the Centre for Health Information, Research and Evaluation (CHIRAL) at Swansea University. Access has now been arranged to data held by the Cardiff and Glamorgan Universities Police Science Institute (UPSI) and work on this strand will progress in 2011.

GIS and Network Accessibility Modelling

Further work on network accessibility modelling has been completed and has produced a series of outputs (see **Progress on the resource/research activity** (above)).

Cartographic Spaces and Fuzzy Places

Work on cartographic spaces and fuzzy places has also progressed during 2010. A paper on this was presented at the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences WISERD Seminar Series. During 2011, this research will be developed further, using analysis of the WISERD localities stakeholder interviews (see below) to assess the importance of cartographic spaces.

Quantitative and Mixed Methods Research

Research on Welsh Economic and Social Issues

A key element here, led by WISERD Swansea Co-Director, Professor David Blackaby, has been the application of advanced quantitative methods to the analysis of key economic and social issues *within Wales*. These have included the impact of the recession on skills and training; and firm performance and survival in Wales. Research has also been carried out on the changing geography of work and skills in Wales, with an emphasis on levels of productivity. These studies have frequently been of concern to policy-makers in Wales and have been communicated widely through conference and seminar presentations and *WISERD Policy Briefings*.

A paper on economic inequality in Wales was given at the SERC Wales Annual Seminar Series, as well as the publication of a report on this issue in the Welsh Assembly Government economic research series. Further work on the gender pay gap has been carried out. Much of this work provided the basis for an important analysis of economic inequalities in Wales,

conducted on behalf of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and published in an EHRC report.

Comparisons of Wales with Other Parts of the UK

Of particular concern to the WISERD research programme is the particularity of Welsh social and economic relations. Hence, research has been undertaken *comparing Wales with the UK and other economic regions within the UK*. Research has included UK wide comparisons of GVA; earnings; unemployment; employment; inactivity; industrial structure; skills and overtime. In addition, analysis comparing Wales to other UK regions has also been undertaken on the gender pay gap; ethnic pay gap; public sector pay; and returns to education.

Wales in an International Context

Work completed on *placing Wales in an international context* includes research on the gender pay gap, making comparisons with France, Spain and a number of Latin American countries. More extensive research has also been undertaken on productivity and innovation, covering Wales, the UK and other European countries, including Germany and France. Research has also been undertaken on intangibles in an EU wide comparative context.

Mixed Methods

Work with a mixed methods focus has also continued to progress. In particular, migrant labour has provided an important focus, led by WISERD Senior Research Associate, Dr. Stephen Drinkwater. A paper on self-employment amongst ethnic minorities and immigrants in the UK was presented at an OECD conference in Paris. WISERD staff also edited and contributed two papers to a special issue of the *National Institute Economic Review* on 'Immigration and the Economy'. Research into patterns of social care in Wales has resulted in a paper being presented at the NIESR Employment Seminar Series. Research into patterns of trade union membership in Wales and the UK has resulted in several conference presentations being made.

No work has to date been undertaken on the Understanding Society dataset (as envisaged in the *2010 Forward Plan*), owing to the data not being available. However, following the recent (January 2011) deposit of first release data with the Economic and Social Data Service, work will commence on these data in 2011.

Knowing Localities

Stakeholder Interviews

Following the completion of the baseline audits in 2009, a series of 122 interviews across three localities within Wales were completed during 2010. These focused on senior and intermediate-level managers in public authorities, private-sector organisations and the third sector. The interviews were coded, using Atlas.ti, before being analysed collaboratively by researchers from across the WISERD universities. They provide a unique data-set that provides significant insights into the ways in which these key actors socially construct their localities, which have significant implications not only for understanding contemporary Welsh society, but also for theoretical debates about the nature of 'locality' (see **Progress on the resource/research activity** (above)). A series of papers on emergent findings from the interviews were presented at the 2010 WISERD Annual Conference and are currently being finalised for publication. A special edition of *Regional Studies* is being prepared for publication in 2013. A proposal for a research monograph that synthesises aspects of this work has been submitted to the University of Wales Press (although there have been delays here owing to changes in UWP's financing).

Ethnographic projects

The three ethnographic projects finished data collection during 2010 and are now focused on analysis, publication and dissemination activities. A series of conference presentations were given during 2010, including at the American Anthropological Association Conference, the European Conference of Social Work Research and the British Sociological Association Conference. A number of publications have appeared and others are in the process of publication. Innovative methodological approaches have also been an important part of this work.

Surveys

The localities surveys have not been conducted during 2010, as was planned. Despite protracted discussions, it has proved extremely difficult to conduct surveys that would generate meaningful data, within the constraints imposed by the WISERD budget allocation. In particular, insufficient funds are available to carry out face-to-face interviewing, thereby dictating a reliance on short, telephone interviews, with inevitable consequences for the scope and validity of the data collected. Accordingly – as discussed at meetings of the WISERD Advisory Board and the WISERD, ESRC, HEFCW Troika during 2010 – it has been decided to maximise high-quality data generation by supplementing the use of existing surveys. This clearly marks a significant departure from WISERD's planned strategy.

Hence, WAG funding enabled WISERD researchers to join a study of social identities and patterns of association, involving collaboration with the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute of Education, University of London and the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change at Manchester University. During 2010, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a Wales sample of members of the National Child Development Study (NCDS) panel. This will permit analysis of interview transcripts alongside the data from the main NCDS surveys. It will also permit comparisons between Wales, England and Scotland.

WISERD Research Associates, Drs. Robin Mann and Yvonne Tommis, initiated a research project on public sentiments towards immigrants and minorities (funded by the WAG), involving secondary analysis of the Citizenship Survey and the European Social Survey.

In addition, WISERD will be funding a Wales boost to the Skills and Employment Survey (partly funded by the ESRC) that is due to be conducted during 2011. This has the advantages of permitting comparison with other parts of Britain and analysis of changes over time within Wales. Limited comparison internationally will also be possible. Although more limited in its substantive focus than originally envisaged for the WISERD employer survey, this strategy will produce high-quality data on topics that are central to the understanding of contemporary Welsh economy and society and to people's experiences of the economic recession. It will build significantly on established elements of the WISERD research programme.

Policy Analysis and Evaluation

The Consequences of Devolution

Much of WISERD's policy analysis research has focused on the consequences of devolution in Wales and in comparative terms. For example, WISERD Research Associate, Dr. Ian Stafford has examined the implications of changes in the governance of transport policy. In addition, a number of events for the policy and academic communities have been held, including a research workshop entitled 'Exploring institutional and organisational boundaries across Wales'; and an event organised in collaboration with the Wales Governance Centre (WGC) and the Regional Studies Association entitled 'Funding Devolved Government in Wales: Challenges for the Future'. It is anticipated that these events will lead to a number of research grant bids being developed during 2011.

Policy Evaluation

WISERD researchers, led by Senior Research Associate, Rhys Davies, have worked on a number of evaluation projects during 2010, including: a large-scale study of leavers from ESF funded programmes in Wales (funded by WAG); an evaluation of the ESRC census programme; research into the quality of life in ethnic neighbourhoods in Europe (funded by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions); research into the role of intangible assets in UK economic performance (UK Commission for Employment and Skills); completion of a report on factors associated with the effective involvement of workers in health and safety management (European Agency for Health and Safety at Work); and completion of a report on analysis of the correlates of self reported work-related illness in the labour force survey (Health and Safety Executive).

WISERD has continued to develop its knowledge exchange programme in collaboration with the WAG and other organisations (see ***Economic and Social Impact*** (above)).

Work on the public policy forums has been delayed, owing to the time taken to complete data collection and analysis on the *Knowing Localities* programme. It is planned that these events will be organised during 2011.

Research-Capacity Building

WISERD has made a major investment in research-capacity building activities, led by WISERD Bangor Co-Director, Professor Howard Davis. A total of 22 workshops and training weekends were organised for academic and policy-maker participants during 2010, with a further 28 seminars, lectures and collaborative events also organised during the year. In addition, WISERD held its first Annual Conference in June 2010. It was inter-institutional and inter-disciplinary and brought together academic researchers, researchers from outside of academia and policy-makers. Sessions were led by policy-makers, as well as experts from across the economic and social sciences.

4. Investment specific indicators

WISERD has made good progress towards its investment specific indicators. 2010 marked the second year of WISERD's programme, with the emphasis being to consolidate the Institute's infrastructure and to continue data collection across the Institute's substantive research programmes. The focus during 2011 will be on increasing the production of published outputs and wider dissemination of research results.

A key venture in 2010 has been the establishment of the WISERD publications series. The series includes five separate publications; WISERD Working Papers; Research Reports; Policy Briefings; Methods Briefings; and Data Resources. During 2010, editorial teams were appointed and a number of papers and reports were published. However, it is recognised that further investment is required here, to increase publications during 2011.

An area in which WISERD has made notable strides during 2010 is in facilitating inter-disciplinary and cross-institutional working. A number of co-authored papers and collaborative bids for funding have been produced by colleagues from across the WISERD partner institutions and other institutions within Wales and UK wide. Again, however, it is recognised that these activities will require further support during 2011.