(Un)Just Coal Transitions: Community, Heritage, and Sacrifice Zones in South Wales, UK and Mitteldeutschland, Germany

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HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

Presentation Structure

- Research Projects

- **Conceptual Approaches**

- **Examples of Industrial Histories and Transitons:**

    - *Post-industrial South Wales*
    - *Deindustrialising Mitteldeutschland*

- Concluding Thoughts

Module Questions

- What are **conceptual approaches to understanding** and, if necessary, supporting spatial structural change and its management?

- What **empirical findings** are there on the **effects of structural change** in lignite mining regions and beyond?

- What practical approaches are there for shaping structural change? What **suggestions can experiences from abroad** provide?

Research Projects

- ## South Wales Coalfield, UK
  - Legacies of coal-mining in 40 years after closures.
  - Focus on community, memory and every day impacts.

- ## Mitteldeutschland, Germany
  - Ongoing research in context of 'coal phase-out' and Just Transitions.
  - Considering both historical legacies and contemporary transformations.

Enduring Industrial Pasts:
Affective geographies of
landscape, heritage and memory
in a South Wales ex-mining
community

Fieldwork and Data Collection

- Ethnographic Practices
  - Engaging in every day groups, gatherings, activities
  - Every day conversations as well as through formal interviews, especially with "non-experts"
  - Attentiveness to landscapes and material traces
  - Considering discourses, written resources and archival material

Coal-Mining and Sacrifice Zones

- "Sacrifice zones" (Lerner 2012; Scott and Smith 2017).
  - "...*spaces that have been contaminated with toxic pollutants and in which the environment and the population living in these spaces have been effectively abandoned by the state.*" (Stewart 2017: 33)

- Emphasis on pollution.

- Dangerous industries- everyday shared risk.

- Continuation of sacrificial expectations, and multi-directional slow violence.

Industrial Heritage and Transition

- Use of heritage as a transitional tool, commemoration as consolation- Smith (2006).
    - Critiques of such efforts from ex-mining communities (Emery 2019)
- Work on Eastern German nostalgia and the complex relationship to GDR past.
    - "Ostalgie" Berdahl (1999).
- Concerns of erasure if heritage isn't addressed.
    - Nixon (2011) and Pain (2019) on slow violence.

Deindustrial Histories

- Decades of industrial decline, from reunification and the shift to neoliberalism.

- Collective trauma of disruptive histories, and deindustrialisation (Emery 2022).
  - Situated in landscapes and places (Askland and Bunn 2018; Albrecht 2005) and *solastalgia* – the place-based disorientation

- How might energy transitions be a continuation of these trends of decline? And what does that mean for communities?
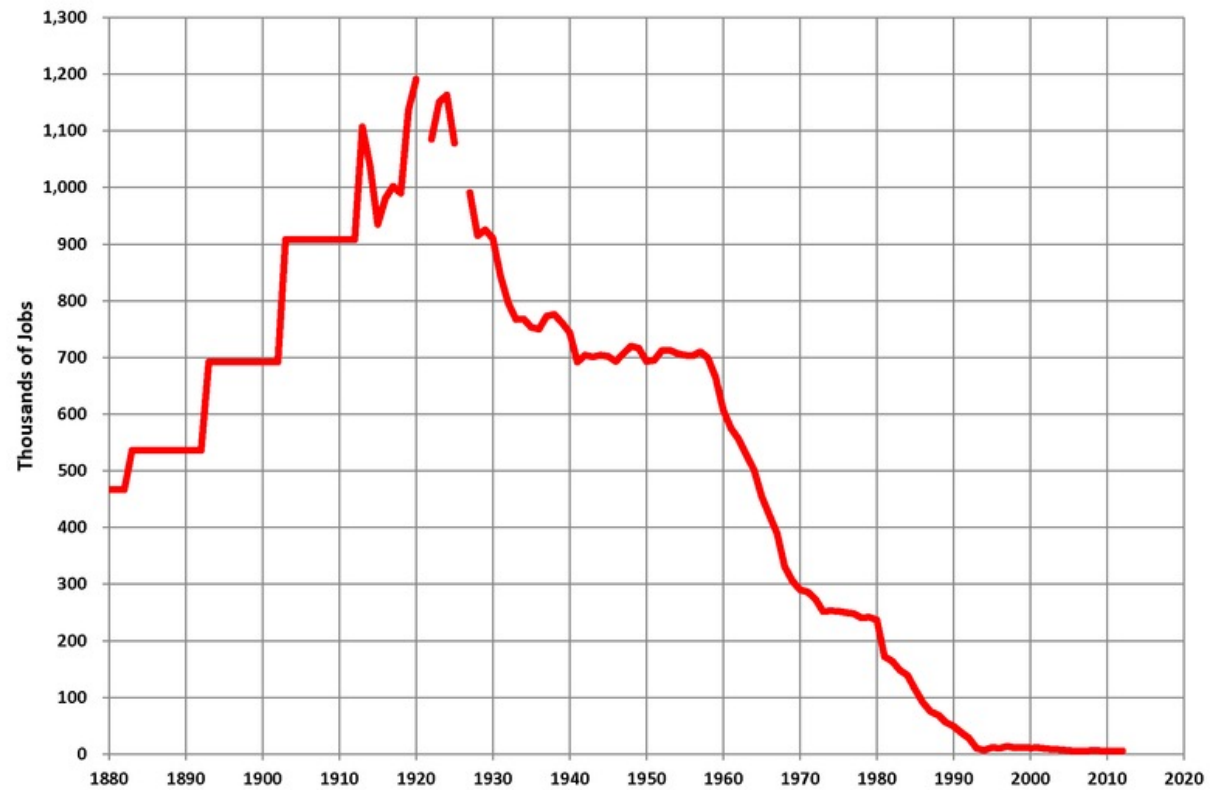
Research Context: Coalfields

- Mining Community as a construct
  - Different contexts but a shared imaginary of working-class resilient community.

- Miners as the most closely interwoven workforce with modern capitalism- Mumford (1934), see Clark and Szerszynski (2021).

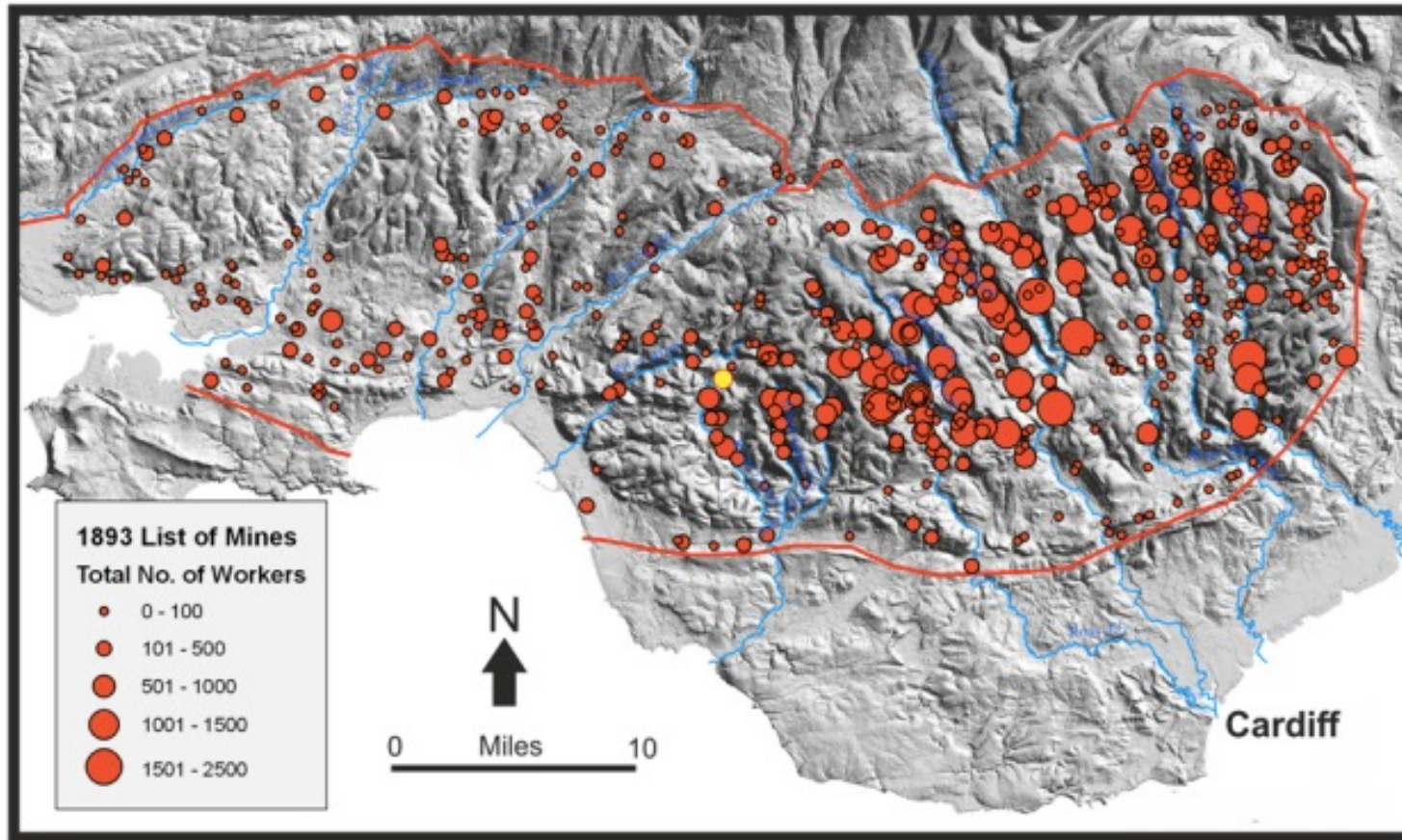- Miners as the "residual proletariat" (Arnold 2018).

The End of UK Coal Mining

Employment in Coal Mining in the UK (1880-2020) (Coal mining employment in the UK, 1880-2012 (DECC data) CC BY-DA 3.0

The South Wales Coalfield

1893 List of Mines
Total No. of Workers

- 0 - 100
- 101 - 500
- 501 - 1000
- 1001 - 1500
- 1501 - 2500

N

0   Miles   10

Cardiff

Fig. 1. Topographic map of the South Wales coalfield (outlined in red) showing the major rivers (blue), significant coal mines and their relative workforce in 1893. Caerau colliery is highlighted as a yellow circle (adapted from Preston 2010). Copyright LIDAR data topography Welsh Assembly Government
Caerau, Upper Llynfi valley, South Wales, UK. *Quarterly Journal of Engineering Geology and Hydrogeology*, 53(1), pp.145-158.

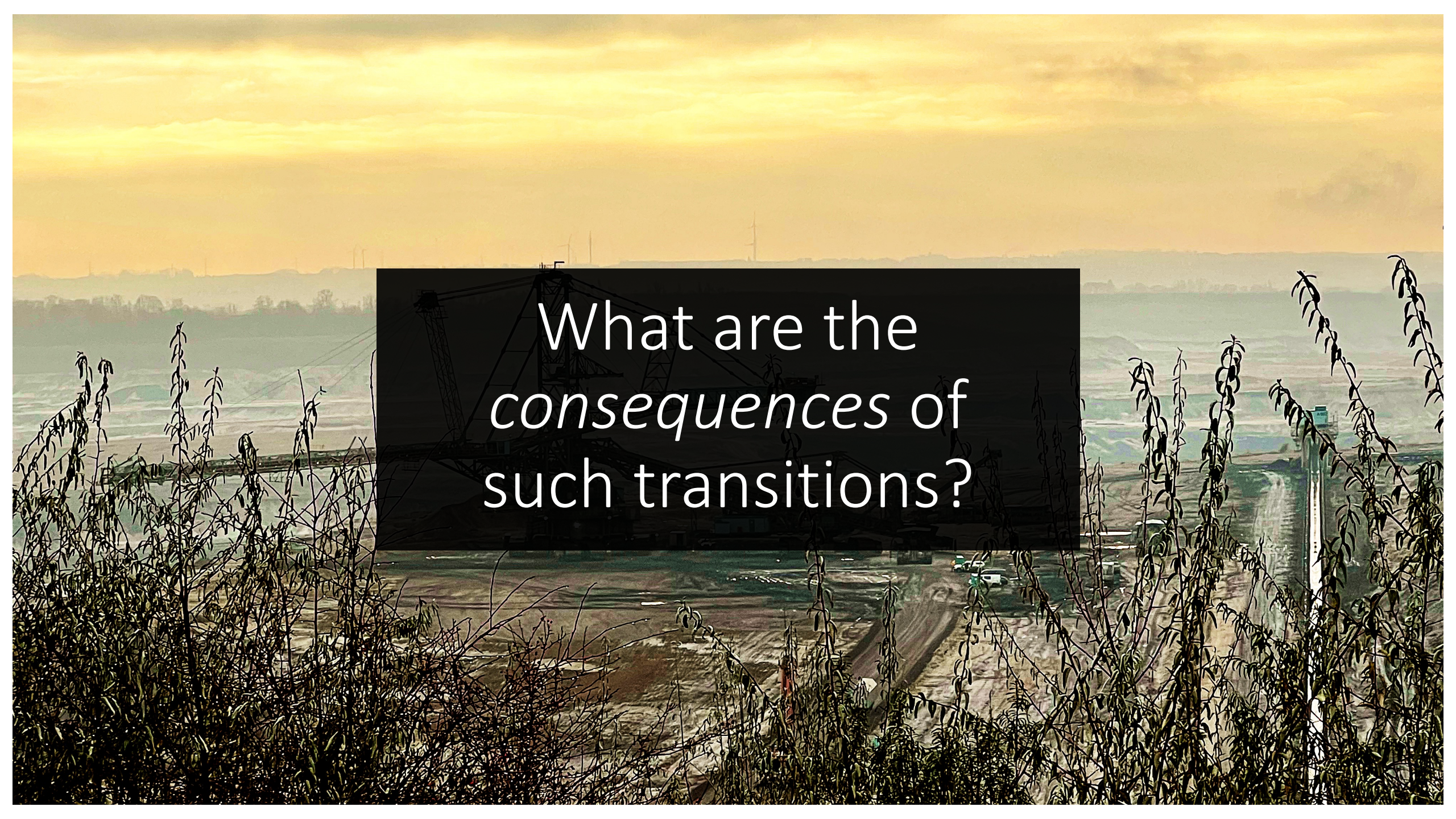- Largest UK coalfield, with largest coal-exporting docks in the world in Cardiff, Newport and Barry.

- Employing 232800 men in 1913.

Germany's Coal Phase Out

- 2038- Planned closure of coal-burning power plants and associated coal mines.

- Multi-level transition funds.

Mitteldeutschland's Coal Phase Out

"Since 2017, 48 projects have been funded in the Central German Region with a total of around 5.7 million euros."- Innovationsregion Mitteldeutschland.

What are the
consequences of
such transitions?

Legacies of Transitions

- Enduring industrial identities

- Heritage and pride

- Landscapes and infrastructures

- Economic hardships

- Political shifts

Enduring Industrial Identities

- Participants considering how it's "still a mining village".
- Belief in community support and self-reliance.
  - Deep kinship and social ties.
  - Who is excluded?

"I wouldn't live anywhere else...the people here are special."

Industrial Heritage and Pride

Industrial Heritage and Pride

"*Joe pauses and goes, 'Here, give us your hand', putting his hand out to me. I gingerly offer up mine, and he lifts it to his head. He's got his hair cut short all over, it's coarse and spikey. But I can feel notches in his head, contours and dents. I try not to flinch, but I'm surprised about the depth of the scars. I draw my hand away, as if I've crossed some sort of personal boundary. 'That's from where it [the mine roof] came down on me. I've got them all down my back as well.'*"

Joe, ex-miner, at his home, April 2018

Industrial Heritage and Pride

"*In order to maintain my self-esteem, I came up with the idea of continuing the tradition of mining and local history, and I am always pleased when people come [...] [to] thank me and [...] also partly to support me in my work*".

- Interview Claus, Regis-Breitingen, 2017, DOKMIT Research Project

Landscapes and Infrastructures

Economic Hardship

- Perception of general decline:
  - *"It's sad to see what it's become."*

"The town up there was thriving. There were all sorts of things. A vegetable shop, a co-op, many fish and chip shops, a library, a pharmacy, a hardware store, a café, a kind of... Diner. In the style of Happy Days... a butcher, a fishmonger, a textile shop, a nice tobacconist... you could buy nice gifts there, toy shops... all this was when the mine was open. The glory days are long gone."
Brenda, Chatting in Brenda's Kitchen, June 2018

Political Shifts

"The people who worked in the mines, a lot of them stopped working in their 40s and 50s, and they are kind of left-behind. People are still resentful about that...they're like a loitering generation. Even their kids, they feel the same way."

-Lloyd, fieldnotes

Interwoven Legacies

"The numbers tell a long and sad story of decline. 'We are top of every league you don't want to be top of,' a man tells me. Poverty, sickness, worklessness – Blaenau's name is always among the worst...the communities settled here [were] extinguished."

-Easton (2013), BBC

Interwoven Legacies

Cheapest place in England and Wales to buy a home	Second-lowest mean salary in Britain	GCSE results: worst in Wales	6 Trussell Trust Food Banks in 100km2	12% disability claims (national average 6%)	1 in 6 on antidepressants
Lowest disability-free life expectancy, only 51.3 years	Only place in Wales with decreasing population	4% on out-of work benefits (compared to 2.9% national average)	8.7% of people aged 18 to 21 on unemployment benefits (4.3% national average)	22% employed in manufacturing (national average 8.1%)	4.6% unemployed (4.1% national average)
37.2% long-term sick (23% national average)	19.9% workless households (14.3% national average)	14.8% no qualifications (7.8% national average)	£457.8 as Gross Weekly Pay (£587 national average)	62% Vote to Leave the EU (52.5% Average across Wales)	85.1% Most Deprived Neighbourhoods in Wales

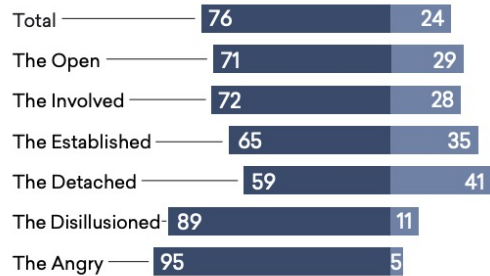# Coal Phase-Out: Contestation and Future-Making

Discourses and shared sentiments about wider politics as well as ongoing programmes of change.

Political problem-solving

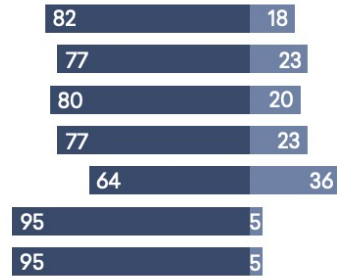|	Politicians do not care about the important problems in Germany	Politicians are tackling the important problems in Germany resolutely
	Agreement in %	
Total	76	24
The Open	71	29
The Involved	72	28
The Established	65	35
The Detached	59	41
The Disillusioned	89	11
The Angry	95	5

Political responsivity

	Most politicians do not care about what people like me think	Most politicians are interested in what people like me think
	Agreement in %	
Total	82	18
The Open	77	23
The Involved	80	20
The Established	77	23
The Detached	64	36
The Disillusioned	95	5
The Angry	95	5

Which of the following statements do you agree with more?
Source: More in Common (2019)

Conclusions and Further Questions

- Coal phase-out as a nuanced and social moment embedded in long-standing histories.

- Role of reunification and industrial decline.

- Embedded identities and wider politics invoked in such discussions.

- What do we risk by expecting further sacrifice from sacrifice zones?

- Do the "benevolent" motives change the perception of engineered decline?

Thank You

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