

Cardiff bay – a brief history

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The maritime history of the port of Cardiff dates back to Viking Times. At this stage it was only a small port which had a fairly constant flow of imports and exports.

In 1794 the construction of the Glamorgan ship canal which resulted from the development of the iron industry meant that the export of iron through Cardiff became huge (350, 000 tonnes a year).

During the second part of the nineteenth century the port continued to grow at a fast rate, this was Cardiff's heyday.

During the First World War Cardiff saw a dramatic decline in exports and the port and city. During the Second World War Cardiff had somewhat of a renaissance due to its key geographical location.

After being passed to and from the public and private sectors and with the continuing decline of the Wales coal fields Cardiff left large areas of Cardiff useless as it all depended on the coal flow.

Cardiff then diversified into activities such as oil, grain, frozen products and steel. This meant that there was no longer a demand for some of Cardiff's older dock facilities.

The Glamorgan ship canal, which prompted the growth and prosperity of Cardiff, was filled in, in 1955. Then in 1964 the Bute West Dock was closed and shortly afterwards the Bute East Dock in 1970.

It is this bleak history which prompted the plans for the transformation of Cardiff Docks into Cardiff Bay.

The Cardiff Bay Regeneration Project

The CBDC (Cardiff Bay Development Corporation) was set up in April 1987 by the then Secretary of State for Wales Nicholas Edwards. It was formed as part of the government's urban development program aiming to regenerate deprived and run - down inner city areas of Britain.

The CBDC was given the task of regenerating the old docklands area of the city. Because of the scaled of the problem (only two of the five docks remain operational) this means this is the second largest redevelopment scheme in Europe.

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The CBDC gave this mission statement;

" To put Cardiff on the international map as a superlative maritime city which will stand comparison with any such city in the world, thereby enhancing the image and economic well-being of Cardiff and Wales as a whole"

This was a brave statement and was followed up by these main objectives:

ï¿½ To promote development and provide a superb environment in which people would want to live, work and play.

ï¿½ To re-unite the city of Cardiff with its waterfront.

ï¿½ To bring forward a mix of development which would create a wide range of job opportunities and reflect the hopes and aspirations of communities of the area.

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To achieve the highest standards of design and quality in all types of investment.

To establish the area as a recognised centre of excellence and innovation in the Field of urban regeneration.

These objectives were to be met by introducing businesses into the local area and building shops and amenities basically all achieved through huge amounts of government funding.

Strategies (what has been done?)

Some large companies have also decided to locate in Cardiff and are providing new jobs. One such company is NCM which is a Dutch insurance company, with large companies like this being based in Cardiff a sense of confidence will be built up and other businesses will also relocate.

The transport system is now referred to as an " Utlasystem". Basically there has been a huge improvement in public transport with regular busses taking you all round the city. The City is also connected via water fronts and you can travel by water around Cardiff if you want to. The traffic is also not as bad as in a lot of modern cities which leads to less pollution and a nicer atmosphere.

There is a vast difference in the public and private residential areas. The public residential areas are rather ugly and drab, the surroundings are poorly kept and there is a lack of variety. However the newer private residential area is much nicer. Both in its appearance and its atmosphere rather than cramped it is spacious with well maintained surroundings. There are also

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many local amenities in the private areas. Full details can be seen in the table attached.

The locals don't seem to like the newcomers that much but tolerate them all the same. It may be a long time before there is a sense of community spirit between the different fractions. But this said it is very hard to measure something like a sense of community and the relationship between neighbours because it is often the minority which is seen and heard whereas the majority don't have a problem with it.

The job opportunities are quite good in the area. There are both low skilled jobs in which most people could get a job and also large employers such as NCM who offer a wide range of jobs and promotional opportunities. Having said that there is still quite a lot of unemployment around Cardiff but this is true in Wales as a whole and not a localised problem. But the employment situation locally has vastly improved since the CBDC have taken action.

There has also been massive redevelopment. The Millennium waterfront provides entertainment which pubs and bars. From private investors there is also a sports village with many very good sporting facilities. There are also conservation areas. These all provide entertainment for the people living in Cardiff and also provide a nicer environment, keeping people happy.

Cardiff Bays past can be seen all around, from older buildings with interesting architecture to disused warehouses. The main clue to Cardiff's historical past lies in museums and the design of buildings, indicating a rich and diverse past in which the port played a major role in the city. There is also a castle in Cardiff which somehow seems out of place in a port city.

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Most of the original buildings in the area now have different purposes. For example the Norwegian Church has now been converted into an art gallery and coffee shop, complete with a tourist shop. This is symbolic of how Cardiff has had to adapt, now relying on new business and tourism rather than on a single source (coal).

I think the old buildings at first detract from the maritime environment until you realise that buildings like these were only built here because of all the different cultures coming in from the port. When you view them in that context you can plainly see that they stand as monuments to Cardiff's past as one of the major ports of the world.

Evaluation

There is strong evidence to suggest that this has not worked. One prime example is that of the emptiness in the shopping centre, most of the shops are up for rent and empty and the ones that are there are mostly coffee shops and aimed at tourists. This means that little has been done to the actual people of Cardiff apart from disguising the bay as a good place to visit for tourists.

However I don't believe this is the case.

The real question that has to be asked in any evaluation is, have the objectives been met? Well here are the objectives that were laid down by the CBDC:

• To promote development and provide a superb environment in which people would want to live, work and play.

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There are many local amenities which have been built including educational facilities such as "techniquest" which promote a better environment for children. People that were interviewed did like it where they were living, it was also evident that people were proud of their heritage, in my opinion this object has been met, perhaps not fully but at least a vast improvement.

ï¿½To re-unite the city of Cardiff with its waterfront.

This is perhaps a harder task because it relies more on the people of Cardiff rather than any government schemes. But there has been a start regular ferries go along the water front to different parts of Cardiff establishing an important link.

ï¿½To bring forward a mix of development which would create a wide range of job opportunities and reflect the hopes and aspirations of communities of the area.

There is not so much of a mix of jobs going as perhaps the CBDC wanted but there are certainly some good opportunities for jobs now. A good example are jobs large companies such as NCM provide. However the work is limited to a small amount of industrial work, tourism work and some small scale commercial work. So for people with skills outside those professions there is not so much of a scope for work. However this is still a great improvement and with growing confidence from other companies Cardiff's employment future is looking good.

ï¿½To achieve the highest standards of design and quality in all types of investment.

This can't really be argued with; all the new buildings are well designed and colourful. The quality is good and a lot of work goes into maintaining them. But although buildings look good, as always it's what's on the inside that truly counts (which isn't a lot in the shopping centre!) But the objective has been met.

To establish the area as a recognised centre of excellence and innovation in the field of urban regeneration.

I think people can clearly see that there has been definite improvement. This is the second largest urban renewal in the whole of Europe so it's going to take a little longer to achieve this objective fully, but the CBDC is well on its way.

Conclusion

To conclude I believe that the regeneration of Cardiff Docks into Cardiff Bay has been a success. But a limited success. This is because there is still a lot of work to be done. The CBDC now needs to look to the future and decide where it has made mistakes in the past, learn from them, and draw up some more defined objectives, as the last were not specific enough. Once it has obtained these objectives it should try to meet one at a time, not all at once which is what I feel they have done. With so much going on at once it would have been hard to manage and keep a clear view of the renewal situation as a whole, which led to problems such as lack of interest in the shopping centre.

They now have a strong foothold and from this they can continue to improve Cardiff bay and eventually realise their dream-like statement.

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