Positive but Limited: The Impacts of the European Cohesion Policy and Relative Decline in Wakefield, West Yorkshire on the EU Referendum

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Abstract

This thesis set out to answer the question as to what impact had the European Cohesion Policy [ECP] had on “left-behind” areas. This research used Wakefield in West Yorkshire as a typical “left-behind” area for a single case study research using a mixed method approach. Critical Realism [CR] underpins the project as its philosophical framework to ensure cohesion, and the direction of the research derived from a more ethnographical approach. To trace the origins of how Wakefield became “left-behind” and how their socio-economic problems became entrenched, this thesis analysed impact of the Thatcher-era policies as a starting point. Through an analysis of interview data, archival data, and socio-economic indicators, findings from this research contributes to the three main strands of literature related to this thesis – namely Brexit, Euroscepticism, and the ECP. The main contribution this thesis makes to the Brexit literature is that the concept of relative decline helps bridge gap between the economic and cultural arguments behind the Brexit vote. In terms of the Euroscepticism literature, this thesis finds that the passive promotion of the ECP was unable to compete with the prevailing sense of Euroscepticism in the UK. This thesis finds that although the ECP has helped to create legacies of a virtuous cycle, the impact of the ECP is best described as positive yet limited. Combined, these three arguments are the main unique contribution this thesis makes to the growing literature on Euroscepticism, Brexit, and the ECP, respectively. This thesis concludes by arguing that further decentralisation is key if lessons are to be learned from Brexit.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Table

Abbreviations

BCE	British Coal Enterprise
BP	The British Petroleum Company
CCMI	Consultative Commission on Industrial Change
CEECs	Central Eastern European Countries
CF	Cohesion Fund
CLLD	Community Led Local Development
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CR	Critical Realism
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
ECP	European Cohesion Policy
EEC	European Economic Community
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDHI	Gross Disposable Household Income
GNI	Gross National Income
GVA	Gross Value Added
GWU	General Workers Union
HE	Higher Education
HM	His Majesty's
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
JAM	Just About Managing
LAG	Local Action Group
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
MEP	Members of European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament

NCB	National Coal Board
NHS	National Health Service
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PEAT	People Enabling Area Transformation
PERCEIVE	Perception and evaluation of Regional and Cohesion Policies by Europeans and Identification with the values of Europe
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
QGIS	Quantum Geographical Information System
R&D	Research and Development
RDA	Regional Development Agency
RECHAR	EU Programme of Support for Coal-mining Areas
SME	Small to Medium Sized Enterprise
SNP	Scottish National Party
TUC	Trade Union Congress
UDM	Union of Democratic Mineworkers
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	UK Independence Party
US	United States
XPLOR	Business in Wakefield specialising in research in entertainment and technology
YTS	Youth Training Scheme

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.0 Introduction

"I believe that this Thursday can be our country's independence day" former Prime Minister and then London Mayor Boris Johnson claimed triumphantly as a closing remark for the BBC Great Debate in 2016, just before the EU referendum day which was held on 21 June 2016 (BBC News, 2016a). This was repeated by Nigel Farage, the then leader of the UK Independence Party [UKIP], "dawn is breaking on an independent United Kingdom" right after the announcement of the Leave victory (BBC News, 2016b).

These statements encapsulated how Brexit, the decision of the UK to leave the European Union [EU], was seen by those who supported Leave to be more than just a vote. In a close result, 48.1 per cent supported Remain and 51.9 per cent supported Leave (The Electoral Commission, 2016). However, as a report by the UK in a Changing Europe stated, "[a]lthough the referendum gave a popular mandate for leaving the EU, it provided no guidance over when Brexit should occur or what form future UK-EU relations should take" (Dhingra and Sampson, 2022, p.6). The lack of any clear vision as to what Brexit would look like in reality led to a nation divided.

Emotions ran high with people identifying with each side more than they did with a political party (Carl et al., 2019; Ipsos MORI, 2021). Remain and Leave support started to signal ones' social as well as political beliefs with many choosing to interact with only their own side. The debate over Brexit went on for years, claiming the political lives of not only MPs but also Prime Ministers. It also decided general elections (Curtice, 2020), even though the influence of Brexit is declining in recent years as the former Prime Minister Boris Johnson claimed to have got Brexit done (Reuters Staff, 2019). Brexit was finally completed on 31 January 2020, but this did not mean that all of the future UK-EU relations were finalised.

However, the story of Brexit continues as people realise that the impact of decoupling from an economic block after half a century has consequences. To just give one example, it was only recently announced that the CE symbol on products will be continued (Department for Business and Trade and Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2023), a legacy from the UK's membership to the EU emblazoned

onto almost every product produced and sold in the UK. Such examples reflect the fact that in the coming years discussions over Brexit is likely to continue.

The story of this thesis is not about the impact of Brexit in terms of legal issues, the manufacturing sector (The UK in a Changing Europe, 2020), the unity of the country (McEwen and Murphy, 2022), or party politics (Hayton, 2022). Instead, the focus of this thesis is on the forgotten places in the UK which found renewed political and academic interests – namely the "left-behind" places. Why these places voted in support of Brexit, and what was the impact of the European Cohesion Policy [ECP] in such areas. This thesis will not be the first to attempt to understand why "left-behind" places voted in support of Brexit as there is already a growing literature on the topic (Goodwin and Heath, 2016a; Wood et al., 2023). However, as will be further discussed in this chapter, this thesis will contribute to such literature by providing a more holistic analysis of Brexit by adopting a mixed methods approach.

This chapter provides the background to the research question of this research project, the unique contribution this thesis makes to the existing literature, and a brief summary of each chapter and how they are linked to each other. This chapter will conclude by presenting a summary of the main findings from this thesis.

1.1 Background of the research questions

The journey of this thesis started with a rather simple question of "why did the Leave side win in the 2016 EU referendum?". This initial curiosity was formulated back in 2016 when it was announced that the UK voted to leave the EU. This further developed into an interest towards understanding the role of the EU in addressing regional development issues. This ultimately led to researching the ECP which was an EU-level policy tasked with addressing regional development issues, a problem that works such as Goodwin and Heath (2016a) and Los et al. (2017) among others that had already identified as a key issue behind the Brexit vote. This broad initial interest towards Brexit developed into a further interest in analysing regional development issues in relation to Brexit, and the role played by the ECP.

This thesis divides the current Brexit literature, particularly the ones that discuss the reason behind the Brexit vote into two, economic explanations and cultural explanations

of Brexit. It argues that these two camps, which has so far developed in isolation, have strengths as well as limitations. The economic explanation finds that there is a link between Brexit with educational attainment and regional development levels (Hobolt, 2016; Clarke et al., 2017b). However, the economic explanation falls short of explaining how these issues were linked to Brexit or Euroscepticism. The cultural explanation, on the other hand, provides a better explanation of the link between economic hardships and the Brexit vote such as nationalism and identity (Wellings, 2019; Chan and Kawalerowicz, 2022). Cultural explanations for Brexit showed how the socio-economic condition of a place then informs the emotional response. However, the cultural explanations do not discuss how such socio-economic conditions are formed. Thus, the economic explanations are better at identifying indicators, but cultural explanations are better at explaining how the issues are then linked to the Brexit vote. This thesis attempts to bridge the gap between the two strands of literature by using the concept of relative decline as a potentially new approach to analysing Brexit from a political position. It argues that it is this sense of relative decline and the unmet needs stemming from it that explains the strong support for Brexit in "left-behind" areas.

This in turn formed the interest towards the ECP as it was made with the specific purpose of addressing the problems related to spatial inequality which is ultimately the source of the sense of relative decline. With the ECP, this paper is interested in its impact to both the public opinion towards it and the EU as well as the multi-level governance structure. The literature on Euroscepticism shows that there is nothing natural or organic about its developments and allude to the need to trace the root of how Euroscepticism is formed through politicisation, links to identity, and the role of the media.

These are the background to the research question of this thesis. The main research question of this thesis is presented in Chapter 3 which explains the methodology adopted in this thesis. The main research question is "[w]hat was the impact of the ECP in "left-behind" areas?". This question combines two questions as to why people supported Brexit on the one hand, and what kind of impact the ECP had in the local area on the other hand. This is further followed by two sub-research questions. The first sub-research question asks "[w]hy did "left-behind" areas such as Wakefield vote Leave?"

and “[w]hat, if any, were the positive impacts of the ECP in Wakefield?”. While this thesis does not claim that its findings to be the only answer to all of these questions, it does argue that by approaching the question using an interdisciplinary approach it is able to tackle the question from a different perspective. Since much of the literature on Brexit, Euroscepticism, and the ECP used large N analysis, this thesis will be one of the few to approach this question from a single case study approach. By adopting a more interdisciplinary approach on a single case study, Wakefield in West Yorkshire, this thesis places “place” and its history at the centre of how Brexit has roots to a growing sense of relative decline that was unaddressed.

1.2 Contribution to the literature

This thesis contributes to the existing literature on Brexit and the ECP in several ways. One, as noted in the previous section, the method used in this thesis is one of interdisciplinary approach which is unique within the literature. It collects data from archival data, government papers, newspaper articles collected through Google Advance Search, socio-economic indicators from the Office for National Statistics [ONS], legislation, interview data, and use of geographical software to visualise geographical data. The philosophical framework that underpins this varied data collection method will be Critical Realism [CR]. Following CR’s argument regarding structure and agency, this thesis where appropriate sets the structure or context first, followed by an analysis of the interventions or actors’ responses to the structure. It is this philosophical framework that also allows for the use of interdisciplinary method in this thesis. This also means that this thesis will be contributing to the literature on CR by providing an application of the theory to policy-related case studies.

Two, as the previous section alluded to, by focusing on the concept of relative decline, this thesis attempts to bridge the gap in the two separate literature of economic and cultural explanation to Brexit. By taking arguments from both, and linking them together through this concept, it attempts to introduce a third strand in the Brexit literature, which argues that Brexit is best understood through a political explanation. Similarly, it retraces some of the older discussions such as that of the Thatcher government response to the closure of the coal mines, and bring new perspective by utilising declassified data and an analysis of the policies after the coal mine which is relatively

underexplored. In the current discussions of the “left-behind”, historical and long-term discussions as to how the regions experienced relative decline is lacking significant presence. This thesis addresses this issue by tracing back the current socio-economic issues faced in Wakefield to its development of the coal mining industry, policy response during the Thatcher government, and the role played by local authorities in using the funding available from the ECP. Thus, it adds a context-specific appraoch to the analysis of Brexit as well as the ECP.

Three, the case study selected is a relatively “ordinary” region which lacks academic interest in terms of research. One of the problems faced in the academic sphere is the propensity for research to focus on the “extremes”. Whether that be places that are doing exceptionally well such as Cambridge in terms of R&D, or exceptionally poorly such as Blackpool which frequently make it to the top list of regions with the lowest development scores. In the study of the ECP, regions that receive high levels of funding are the focus of research, understandably so due to the higher proportion of influence the ECP would have in such regions. However, this means that places that are not outliers tend to suffer from lack of research focus. The results of Brexit as well as the 2019 general election in which Wakefield overwhelmingly voted for Leave (The Electoral Commission, 2016) and voted for the first time in eight decades for the Conservative Party (BBC News, 2019) are testament to how such “left-behind” places with hitherto little academic interest could suddenly come to the forefront of British political interest. Thus, by using a region that would have been considered “ordinary” in the past, this thesis hopes to renew interest in the non-extreme regions as case studies.

In sum, the contributions this thesis aims to make are methodological by adopting an interdisciplinary approach and critical realist framework, use of the concept of relative decline in the Brexit and ECP literature, and to use an “ordinary” place as its case study. These are the main unique contributions this thesis will make to the existing literature on Brexit and the ECP. The next section explores how focusing on Wakefield presents another question underlying this research project.

1.3 How do we solve a problem like Wakefield?

While this is not a research question of this thesis, it is one potential question that may be posed as a result of the findings from this thesis that deals with the socio-economic

problems faced in Wakefield. At a time of increasing and seemingly never-ending pressures on local government finances, growing regional divide, and a sense that solutions to these problems may be beyond the scope of the local, national, and even the supranational government, it is valid to ask whether the kind of socio-economic issues in Wakefield mentioned in this thesis could be solved. Nick O'Donovan's (2022) book, "*Pursuing the Knowledge Economy: A Sympathetic History of High-Skill, High-Wage Hubris*" had powerfully argued that the UK entered a phase of the knowledge economy, a new form of economy that promised a knowledge based economy will mean those with higher skills and higher qualifications will increasingly earn higher wages. This came with it the idea a push to increase the skills level of the population, whether that was through increasing the number of the population with a higher education qualification, or to skill-up the population by encouraging training. However, with the stagnation in wages, increasing regional inequalities, at a time when two thirds of young people pursue tertiary education, the government is finding it increasingly difficult to keep this promise.

Wakefield in West Yorkshire has many of the problems that are typical for a "left-behind" region. It does not perform especially poorly compared to other regions in the UK in terms of employment, unemployment, wage, and wealth. However, it suffers from long-term relative decline since the closure of its main industry, the coal mines. Like many of the other "left-behind" areas, it has struggled to reinvent itself, find a new purpose and position in the UK economy. Local authorities have been told to use their local knowledge to find their local strength by EU, the UK government, and consultants. However, in reality, finding such local strength is a time-consuming task that rarely produces a simple answer. For example, Wakefield had tried to harness its good transportation links to attract the logistics sector. This has brought some success with large multi-national companies such as the fashion brand NEXT establishing distribution sites in the local area. Locally, it has taken on what the coal mining industry provided, an easy source of employment which requires little to no skill in their local area.

However, there have been growing concerns that employment in the logistics sector is poorly paid, difficult to access due to lack of local public transportation, has heightened competition with migrant workers from Central Eastern European Countries [CEECs],

and is in danger of automation and loss of work in the future. While Wakefield grapples with this problem, the same advice of investing in logistics in former industrial areas continue to be presented as a solution for regional decline in other parts of Europe by consultants (Reuters, 2018). Turning back to some of the rebranding efforts local authorities attempted in the 1990s, places like Bradford insist that they are the new centre for science (Bennett et al., 2000). What these cases of rebranding the local area as a science hub, logistics hub, or even the new Silicon Valley shows is that creativity is sorely lacking. This is not the sole fault of local authorities. Since government and EU funding come with themes to tie the projects to a wider UK or EU level agenda, funding bids naturally needs to be tailored to funding calls if the local authority wants to receive additional funding. In other words, local authorities are simultaneously required to find its own unique strengths while also being constrained by what they could focus on by the funding that is available to them.

The socio-economic problems faced by Wakefield will be discussed in Chapter 5, followed by further discussions on problems related to decentralisation in Chapter 7, and Chapter 8 will explore how a pivot towards the arts was one of the solutions that Wakefield reached in an attempt to rebrand itself and access funds made available through the UK as well as the EU, resulting in a virtuous cycle of funding. The next section will explain how this thesis is structured.

1.4 Thesis structure

This section will lay out the thesis structure and present a summary of what each chapter will present. Chapters two and three will have a dedicated sub-section on their own as it sets the course of this thesis. Body chapters four to eight will be summarised in a single sub-section as the main findings will be explored in Chapter 9, which is the conclusion. The next sub-section will discuss what the main three literatures this thesis aims to contribute to – namely the literature on Brexit, Euroscepticism, and the ECP.

1.4-1 Chapter 2 Discussions Within the Literature

The next chapter provides a literature review of three strands of the literature that this thesis is aligned to and aims to contribute to – Euroscepticism, Brexit, and ECP. The literature on Euroscepticism provides insight to the buildup before Brexit. The main lesson drawn from this literature is that Euroscepticism is not natural, and that it

requires some trigger for genuine grievances to be linked to anti-EU sentiment for Euroscepticism to develop. This provides insight to Chapters 6 and 8 which discuss how public opinion may have turned against the EU using coverage in the British media as the link.

The Brexit literature is divided into economic and cultural explanations as to why Brexit happened. As discussed in previous sections, the unique contribution this thesis makes to this literature is by arguing that relative decline overcomes the limitations of both strands of literature and presents political explanations as an alternative position. What this thesis aims to do is to understand the reason behind the Leave vote. One of the challenges dealing with Brexit is that it is entirely too easy to disregard some of the reasoning provided by Leave voters as incorrect. For example, the idea that EU immigrants are taking jobs away from British workers is not necessarily true. Research on Brexit thus requires an untangling of such claims into what is real (that local job opportunities are becoming more difficult to access), and why they were linked (why do Leave voters believe it is the EU immigrants that are taking those jobs). This need to untangle issues is a crucial process that is undertaken in subsequent chapters by focusing on each issue individually. Chapter 4 focuses on how historical factors such as the way in which coal mines closed as a potential source of the sense of relative decline, Chapter 5 analyses the current vocational system, Chapter 6 on the relationship between media portrayals and the ECP, Chapter 7 on local authorities and their ability to use ECP, and finally Chapter 8 which looks more closely at the case of Wakefield.

The ECP literature provides a brief summary of the main discourses surrounding the ECP – the discussions over public perception towards the ECP, the cost-benefit analysis, and the multi-level governance theory. These topics will be further unpacked in the subsequent chapters. For example, Chapter 6 will focus on the relationship between the ECP and public perception and touch upon the cost-benefit analysis, in particular the concept of “value for money”. Chapter 7 will explore how the multi-level governance theory is applied in the UK. Briefly, the public opinion literature is the least explored of the three, and interest towards this spike *after* the 2016 EU referendum. The value for money discussion perhaps unsurprisingly has been a major focus of study. The overall verdict is mixed, but the focus of this thesis will be on the legacy of the ECP. How the

ECP has helped create a virtuous cycle of funding. The multi-level governance theory will be linked to the wider discussions on decentralisation process in the UK. This thesis interacts with each topic within the literature, while also presenting a unique approach by focusing on a single case study and analysing why the ECP failed to make a positive yet limited impact in the case of Wakefield.

1.4-2 Chapter 3 Methodology

The literature review will be followed by a chapter on the methodology for this thesis. It will first list the main research question, "What was the impact of the ECP in 'left-behind' areas?". This will be followed by two sub-research questions that further expands on the main research question by asking why "left-behind" areas such as Wakefield voted Leave and what if any were the positive impacts of the ECP in Wakefield. To answer these research questions, the philosophical framework for this thesis will be that of CR. This chapter will outline what CR is not by contrasting to Realism and Constructivism. CR is used to ensure consistency while adopting an interdisciplinary approach. It will also discuss how Wakefield was chosen as the case study for this research for simultaneously being an "ordinary" place as well as a typical "left-behind" area. The chapter will also detail the data used for the research which is a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data. The chapter will link the data used to each chapter to provide some of the thought process behind the data gathered for each chapter. Ethical considerations are also included in this chapter, outlining how this thesis has mitigated risks.

1.4-3 Body Chapters four to eight

The body chapters are designed in an order following the CR approach to structure and agency (see Chapter 3 for further explanation) by starting the thesis from the 1980s, when the miners' strike was taking place which will be a focus of Chapter 4 as the origin for the sense of relative decline. Discussions of this period are predominantly focused on the violent nature of the clash in mining communities and the police. Chapter 4 will turn the focus on the rather less explored topic of the actual policy response from the then Thatcher government. Utilising declassified documents of the Thatcher government which were made available on the Margaret Thatcher Foundation website as well as legislation at the time, this chapter will analyse what was the Thatcher government's

policy response towards the coal mining communities after the closure of the mines. Following a literature review on Thatcherism, it finds three main strands of argument within the literature which is on electoral gain, personal antagonism, and political ideology. The chapter focuses on political ideology, mainly Thatcherism as the ideology that underpinned the policy response. On the one hand, findings from Chapter 4 questions the argument that the coal mine closure was part of a wider attack on trade unions. However, on the other hand, it finds how Thatcherism and its neoliberal assumptions that was at the root of the underestimation of the influence of place and the need for a stronger place-based response. Once more, this is the reason why a sense of relative decline took hold.

Following on from the effects of Thatcherism, Chapter 5 will focus on the socio-economic position of Wakefield. Once again, it traces its socio-economic strengths as well as weaknesses to that of its historical development. The development of the traditional industries such as coal and textile, it is argued, endowed the region with relatively good transport networks. However, the coal industry also contributed to the isolated nature of the community as well as the persistent issue with lack of skills. This chapter will use apprenticeship as one example of what successive governments have viewed as a way for social mobility in "left-behind" places, but in reality the current system of apprenticeship continues to face problems related to increasing financial pressure on apprentices. The chapter concludes that apprenticeships are increasingly not a viable route for disadvantaged locals from "left-behind" areas in starting their careers.

Chapter 6 turns to the second main topic of this thesis, which is the ECP. It traces some of the main discussion points of the ECP within the academic literature, focusing on the concept of democratic deficit, value for money, and public opinion. The main argument in this chapter is that the reason why Euro myths took hold among the public was not because they are lies, but because they hold a grain of truth. The ECP and the EU more generally were complicated and difficult for the general public to understand precisely because of the way in which it developed. This is not to detract from the fact that the ECP played an important role in providing additional funding to local authorities in the UK. However, analysing the media coverage of the ECP in the British media, this chapter

concludes that one of the key issues with the ECP in relation to its public image was its passive promotion.

The following chapter focuses on another topic that is well-discussed within the ECP literature and that is the concept of multi-level governance. Chapter 7 argues that the academic literature was initially optimistic of the influence of the ECP in facilitating the development of a new governance structure which allowed close cooperation between local, national, and supranational governments, and thus decentralisation. This is contrasted from the UK governance structure which continues to be highly centralised. This is despite efforts of successive governments from the New Labour years to the present to strengthen local governments by establishing the Regional Development Agencies, Local Economic Partnerships, and Combined Authorities as well as mayors. The main critique of this chapter echoes arguments made in the work by Rodríguez-Pose and Vidal-Bover (2022) that local authorities are unable to deliver regional policies without both political and financial decentralisation.

The final body chapter, Chapter 8 will bring the focus to Wakefield. It takes the lessons from each chapter, and takes it forward by discussing the importance of future visions for a local area. The sense of relative decline stemming from its coal mining past and the current socio-economic difficulties especially related to skills have all contributed to Euroscepticism. The main focus of this chapter stems from the interview data which found that the pivot towards the arts had allowed Wakefield to reinvent itself and attract further investment by making use of the virtuous cycle created by the ECP.

In sum, the body chapters will explore several different themes from historical factors, skills-based issues, public opinion, governance structure, and the local efforts. Such interdisciplinary approach on a single case study allows a more in-depth analysis of the impact of the ECP in “left-behind” areas and explain why such areas may have voted for Brexit. Following the CR approach, the analysis starts with the wider socio-economic and historical background followed by an analysis of policy responses and its result.

1.5 Contributions

This thesis aims to contribute to mainly three strands of literature, namely the Brexit, Euroscepticism, and ECP literatures. Findings from this research project is expected to

simultaneously support some of the previous findings as well as bring unique contributions. For example, one unique contribution this thesis makes to the Brexit literature is using the concept of relative decline to bridge the gap between the well-established economic and cultural explanations for Brexit. In the Euroscepticism literature, this thesis will further contribute to the idea that Euroscepticism requires political and media representation to establish itself, debunking the idea that Euroscepticism is ingrained in the UK. This position will follow the footsteps of Forster (2002), Usherwood (2002), and Ford and Goodwin (2014a). However, the unique contribution this thesis makes is by arguing that equally the EU did not make it easy to make clear the benefit of its actions and this failure was perhaps most evident in the ECP. This thesis will call this the passive promotion, and argue that this was further exacerbated by the complexity of the ECP owing much to its historical development. The lesson here is that in the future, development of the ECP should also more seriously consider how it will translate the benefits of the ECP and EU membership to the wider public. In terms of the ECP, the key ideas this thesis will contribute would be the idea of a virtuous cycle as a legacy of the ECP and the importance of both financial and political decentralisation which echoes arguments made by Rodríguez-Pose and Vidal-Bover (2022).

Another contribution this thesis aims to make is to the methodological literature. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach using CR as a framework to maintain consistency throughout the thesis, this thesis aims to add to the growing literature that use CR in policy analysis. Arguably, the fact that the author lived in Wakefield for the duration of the research project also further contributed to a more immersive research method as promoted by the work by Denton et al. (2021, p.4) who coined the “novel swim-along method”. While no data was directly gathered through the lived experience of the author, the conversations had with local residents helped set the direction of the research. For example, viewing coal mining as a high-paying and well-respected job was initiated through discussions with a former coal miner in Wakefield. The decision to analyse the vocational sector was motivated by knowing a local resident who struggled to stay on their apprenticeship programme due to financial difficulties. Discussions with a local resident on local job opportunities led to analysing the logistics sector. Thus, the

direction this thesis took owed much to the insights from local residents even if the actual analysis were based on publicly available data, interview data, and analysis of existing academic research.

1.6 Conclusion

Seven years since the EU referendum, much has been discussed as to why Leave won. Despite it being three years since Brexit was "completed", it continues to shape and influence British politics of today. It would not be controversial to state that benefits of Brexit still allude most of the public. This thesis attempts to understand as to why the "left-behind" areas supported Brexit using an interdisciplinary approach to a single case study, Wakefield, West Yorkshire. The thesis contributes to the growing literature on Euroscepticism, Brexit, and the ECP by arguing that relative decline forms a key to understanding why "left-behind" areas supported Brexit. It also aims to contribute to each literature individually, but the concept of relative decline will be the theme that underpins this entire research project. Through tracing the origins of the sense of relative decline to the coal mine closures, this thesis tells the story of how mistakes were made along the way which ultimately led to the failure of the root of the problem to this sentiment from being addressed, leading to the Brexit vote. It on the one hand questions the efficacy of the neoliberal policies of the Thatcher government, problems with the vocational sector, and the failure of the new logistics sector in replacing the loss of good work, and limitations of the ECP in making a tangible difference. However, on the other hand it argues that the failures were not the result of lack of trying on the supranational, national, and local government. Each had tried to address the problem, but as this thesis argues, still left with problems. Indeed, there are some success stories to be made from the example of Wakefield, which was a result of risks being taken by local authorities that were made possible by the support of decentralisation from the national government and funding from the EU in the form of the ECP. Thus, this thesis will be a mix of success and failures, with some generalisable findings to be explored. It is hoped that findings from this thesis will help support further academic discussions on how to shape regional development policy and the roles of the supranational, national, and local government in its pursuit. The next chapter will provide a literature review of

the three main literatures on Euroscepticism, Brexit, and the ECP that this thesis aims to contribute to.

Chapter 2 Literature Review on Euroscepticism, Brexit and the European Cohesion Policy

2.0 Introduction

This chapter sets out an ambitious attempt at presenting a literature review for three key topics which has informed the research questions of this thesis – Euroscepticism, Brexit, and the ECP. As a result, this is by no means the most comprehensive literature review for each strand of literature. However, by synthesising the findings and gaps in each literature, this thesis aims to make contributions to each, as well as contributing to the development of a more inter-disciplinary approach. While this is not the first to explicitly analyse Brexit using an inter-disciplinary approach (see for instance Netto and Craig (2017)), this thesis will be to the best of the knowledge of the author, the first to combine Euroscepticism, Brexit, and the ECP into one analysis.

The Euroscepticism literature has a long history, with discussions dating back to the 1970s. While the main focus of this thesis will be on Brexit and ECP, the literature on Euroscepticism is important to retrace as it provides one key insight that has the danger of being forgotten – that there is nothing natural or organic about the development of Euroscepticism in the UK. The literature review will highlight how the maturity of the concept from a niche to the mainstream did not happen overnight. Politicisation of Euroscepticism was a conscious effort that catapulted into the forefront of British politics from some of the least important problems for the British public. The British media also played a central role in helping maintain Eurosceptic coverage which proved difficult to overcome by the time the referendum was called (Oliver, 2016).

In terms of the literature review on Brexit, this thesis will focus on the 2016 EU referendum. Meaning that it will not be discussing more recent literature which focuses on the impact of Brexit in manufacturing (The UK in a Changing Europe, 2020), law (Barnard, 2017), and British politics (The UK in a Changing Europe, 2022). The Brexit literature will be divided into two, one focused on the economy and the other on cultural explanations for the Leave vote. The literature review of both economic and cultural explanations presents the concept of the "left-behind" as the missing link between the two strands of literature. This chapter will also offer its own definition of the concept of the "left-behind" which builds on an existing definition of relative decline

(Hasse et al., 2014). The main take away is that both place and its past is key to understanding Brexit.

The literature on the ECP introduces three main strands of literature in the field, namely the public perception of the ECP, the cost-benefit calculation of the ECP, and the multi-level governance theory. The three strands are some of the most discussed topics in the field, pertinent to this thesis. However, the literature review on the ECP will not include the historical development of the ECP as this will be a key argument as to why the ECP did not lead to positive views among the public, a point that will be covered in Chapter 6. This section will argue that interest towards the perception of the ECP is relatively recent and that it has an indirect link to Brexit, that the cost-benefit analysis of the ECP indicates towards the importance of the local context, and finally as of multi-level governance this thesis will link its findings with more broader questions over decentralisation in the UK. This chapter will bring in a seemingly eclectic mix of different strands to illustrate how this thesis will make contributions to each as well as push for a more inter-disciplinary approach towards understanding Brexit and the ECP. The next section will explore how Euroscepticism was developed intentionally.

2.1 Euroscepticism, all natural and organic?

In the seminal of work of Taggart (1998, p.366), Euroscepticism is simply defined as a sense of "opposition" towards the European project. Forster (2002, p.2) goes a little further by describing Euroscepticism as some people's beliefs that is focused on "sovereignty, national identity and the need for economic and political independence" from the EU. While others such as Bulpitt (1992) coined five different approaches to Euroscepticism against the Conservative Party, it was the work by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004) which incorporated the nuance that exists in attitudes of Euroscepticism by distinguishing between hard and soft Eurosceptics. Under their definition, hard Eurosceptics refer to individuals and organisations that are completely opposed to the idea of the European project such as single-issue political parties (ex: UKIP) (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004, p.3). Soft Eurosceptics on the other hand mainly disagree with the EU on policy level and show lukewarm support towards the EU (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004, p.4). Whether one views Euroscepticism as a simple opposition to the EU, as a desire for independence borne out of nationalism and need for control, or indicate

varying degrees of Euroscepticism, the current Brexit literature has shown how, as pointed out by Usherwood and Startin (2013), its persistence. In the following sections, this chapter will explore the rich literature of Euroscepticism starting from how it developed in the UK from the niche to mainstream, its infiltration in the political sphere, and its relationship with identity and portrayal in the British media. The aim here is to extract some of the key findings in the Euroscepticism literature that informs the more recent Brexit literature, namely that its development and consolidation through political party representation and the media shows that there was nothing natural or organic about Euroscepticism or Brexit.

2.1-1 Development of Euroscepticism, from the niche to mainstream

Looking back to how Euroscepticism developed in the UK, its development was not one of a linear process, nor was it for the longest time a central concern for the British public. The idea of the European project was mostly confined to debates among the political elite of the country, and far from being a main discussion topic among the general public. Inglehart (1977) had argued in his influential book *The silent revolution: changing values and political styles among Western publics* of the correlation between higher education qualifications and pro-European sentiment. In trying to explain the causation between education levels and support for Europe he (1977, pp.9–10, 97, 336–337) argued that perhaps one of the reasons why those with higher qualifications were more likely to support the European project was due to them being more likely to have the necessary knowledge to understand abstract notions such as a supranational institution, and more likely to have connections with people who equally shared such knowledge. Thus, at the point of which the UK joined the European Economic Community [EEC] in 1973, and held a referendum on whether to continue its membership in 1975, divisions existed in terms of support for the EU (then the EEC) on the lines of age and education. At the time, it was optimistically viewed that with time, the British public will become accustomed to the idea of being part of Europe and support will naturally grow as the younger more pro-European generation took over (Slater, 1983, p.72). There were also some powerful and articulate support for the European project from Winston Churchill who passionately advocated for a United Europe (Churchill, 1946). Thus, it was not necessarily natural for Euroscepticism to take

root in the UK. For a time, this narrative seemed logical. With a new generation of the British public unshackled from the horrors of the Second World War, they were also better educated than the previous generation. From just a third of 15 year olds in full-time education, by 2010 close to 90 per cent of 16 year olds were studying full-time (Bolton, 2012, p.4). However, in contrast to early optimism (Inglehart, 1977; Slater, 1983), pro-European sentiment failed to grow in the UK with the passage of time despite both generational change and higher educational attainments. While the idea of a natural transition into a pro-EU state was one that failed to materialise (Slater, 1983), this presents an interesting puzzle as to how Euroscepticism grew in the UK. At this point, the argument put forward by Inglehart (1977) of the relationship between education, knowledge and support for the EU requires further analysis. However, before delving into how education levels may affect one's view of the EU. It is pertinent to reassess this idea that Euroscepticism is a natural part of the British identity. Politics play a central role in the formation and dissemination of Euroscepticism.

The European question, namely the discussions over whether the UK should strengthen its ties with the European continent, what levels of integration the UK is willing to support at the EU-level, and implications over sovereignty was hardly a major concern for the general public. Thus, the growth of Euroscepticism and how it linked the EU with other wider socio-economic problems in the UK was done consciously through political campaigns. The general public was rarely interested in the European question. In particular, when compared with other pressing issues facing the British public, the EU was hardly ever at the forefront of people's concerns (Usherwood, 2002, pp.218–219). YouGov (2021) survey on "the most important issues facing the country" from 2011 found that the public were more concerned over issues such as pensions, housing, and welfare benefits over the EU until 2014 and interest only became widespread *after* the EU referendum was held in June 2016 . The idea of leaving the EU (hard Euroscepticism) remained an unpopular option with support at 30 per cent, while soft Euroscepticism made up 65 per cent of respondents in a study by the British Social Attitudes (Curtice, 2016a). Thus, hard Euroscepticism as well as the European question as a whole was hardly at the forefront of people's consciousness right up to the EU referendum in 2016. It was mostly a debate at the elite-level, the ponderings of politicians and academics

alike. For the question of Europe to become a main political issue, it needed to be made into one and this is where political parties such as UKIP comes in.

2.1-2 The politicisation of Euroscepticism

The history of Euroscepticism as a political movement was relatively recent. In the 1960s and 1970s, Euroscepticism was initially formed as a political tool to influence MPs over the question of EEC membership as well as a way to indicate discontent against party leadership (Forster, 2002, pp.130–131). Thus, far from being a popular discourse, it was mainly confined to a small niche within inter-party politics. However, progressively discussions over Europe came to public consciousness with the 1975 referendum as well as the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Forster, 2002, pp.133–134). With it brought organisations to form outside of Parliament that formed the basis of anti-EU movement (Forster, 2002), a key outlet for political party members to express their views on the EU without worrying about party lines (Usherwood, 2002, p.227). It was the signing of the Maastricht Treaty that resulted in Nigel Farage leaving the Conservative Party and join UKIP (BBC News, 2006). UKIP at this point was still "a largely unknown and disorganised fringe group of Eurosceptics", which lacked sufficient levels of funds and manpower, as well as being a single-issue party showing little interest in broadening their base by adopting other political causes according to Ford and Goodwin (2014a, pp.20, 26–27, 29). As UKIP evolved into a more serious political party, encouraging defections from more successful rival political parties such as the Referendum Party and the Conservative Party, developing their party brand, and receiving external campaigning advice, the party gained electoral successes in both European elections as well as UK elections (Ford and Goodwin, 2014b). Similarly, EU-wide research on Euroscepticism started to show the representation of Eurosceptic positions in radical non-mainstream political parties (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012). In the case of UKIP, its messaging became more sophisticated as it linked other socio-economic issues faced by the British public such as heightened competition in the skilled manual labour sector from the EU (Ford et al., 2012), fear against cultural threats more generally (McLaren, 2002), and concern over immigration.

While hard Euroscepticism was represented by UKIP, soft Euroscepticism was represented by the Conservative Party. Once again, hard Eurosceptic views remained a

minority in the Conservative Party with the most identifying as a soft Eurosceptic (Alexandre-Collier, 2015, p.109). However, this distinction between the soft and hard Eurosceptics was a significant problem for the Conservative Party as it created a wedge between its MPs and membership, defection and vote loss to UKIP strong, leaving Cameron to complain that the party needed to "stop banging on about Europe". On the other hand, pro-EU views found little political representation within British political parties. Europhiles, similar to Eurosceptics held diverse views – some supported the EU due to economic reasons while others supported based on cultural reasons (Scherer, 2015, p.893). The economic arguments in support of the EU could be categorised as soft Europhiles, who support economic integration but not necessarily a strong proponent of the whole idea of the European project or advocate for greater political integration. Those who support the EU on cultural basis may be considered hard Europhiles who identify as a European, and for whom economic calculation is not the be-all and end-all to their views on the EU. While it was possible to find politicians expressing either soft or hard Europhile views in most political parties, it also lacked a political party which was expressly a hard Europhile. Political parties in the left such as the Labour Party, while may at first glance an ideal political party to represent soft and hard Europhile positions nevertheless found it difficult to present themselves as one. This was because the party always had the anti-Europe tradition in particular among the left-wing of its party, opposing the EU based on its perceived closeness to large business, and as a result the party provided weak support during the referendum campaign (Guinan and Hanna, 2017, p.17; Hayton, 2022, p.352). In addition, smaller left-wing political parties such as the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party [SNP] were not necessarily hard Europhiles. The Liberal Democrats did not oppose the idea of the EU referendum while in coalition (Wintour and Watt, 2015), and the SNP's position towards the EU was not always positive and showed soft Eurosceptic tendencies (Clements, 2011). Thus, the politicisation of Euroscepticism in the UK provides a key countenance to the prevalent argument especially in the cultural explanation of Brexit that Euroscepticism was somehow organic and part of the British identity. Instead, it shows the critical role politics play in the development of Euroscepticism as a key political currency.

2.1-3 The European identity

Ironically, considering how it was the Conservative government that called for the EU referendum and "got Brexit done", arguably one of the most vocal and eloquent hard Europhiles who wholeheartedly bought into the idea of the European project was Winston Churchill. Among his many speeches, none describes what it means to be a European better than the one he gave at a European rally in Amsterdam: "We hope to see a Europe where men of every country will think as much of being a European as of belonging to their native land, and that without losing any of their love and loyalty of their birthplace. We hope wherever they go in this wide domain, to which we set no limits in the European Continent, they will truly feel: 'Here I am at home, I am a citizen of this country too.'" (Churchill and Churchill, 1950, p.320). This idea of straddling more than one national identity was precisely what differentiated those between the hard Europhiles and Eurosceptics.

Researchers have argued that the European identity is not one that replaces national identity, but one that exists alongside national identity (Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Fligstein et al., 2012). This ability of an individual to hold multiple national identities simultaneously was argued as one of the reasons why the Scottish people in particular showed stronger support for EU membership in the EU referendum in 2016 (Clarke et al., 2017b, p.435). However, rather than cultivating such European identity as a way to increase support for the EU, there was greater reliance on purely economic calculations to rationalise EU membership and cultural or identity-based rationales were played down (Glencross, 2016, p.8). During the 2016 EU referendum campaign, the Remain campaign relied on the argument of the economic costs as a result of Brexit, which was left open to criticism from the Leave side as "Project Fear" (a term originally coined inadvertently during the 2014 Scottish referendum by the "Better Together" campaign's communication director, Rob Shorthouse (Gordon, 2014)). In short, in the UK and in particular in England, there was little evidence to suggest people were able to simultaneously hold different national identities as was envisioned by Churchill himself and without the political space for hard Europhiles, it led to the secession of the discourse to be taken over by Eurosceptics.

The prevalence of soft Euroscepticism abound and lack of hard Europhile representation among political parties have led to the UK to be described as an “awkward partner” (George, 1990, p.41), the UK’s position was not necessarily unique in the context of the EU. As was pointed out by Hopkin (2017, p.47), anti-EU sentiments were generally shared with other EU member states. In an attempt to understand what fuels Eurosceptic attitudes in the EU, a study by Boomgaarden et al. (2011) attempted to identify key factors that resulted in an increase in Eurosceptic attitudes. The findings were rather multi-faceted with concern over immigration, trust in their own national government, a European identity, perceived competencies of the EU, and evaluations of future prospects of the EU all having an impact upon public attitude towards the EU (Boomgaarden et al., 2011). In other words, the root cause of Eurosceptic attitudes are not necessarily specific to country context. The difference is that in the UK, English nationalism was able to better link themselves with commonly Eurosceptic attitudes such as anti-immigration sentiment and mistrust towards EU policies. While Eurosceptics found representation in the British political party system, this was further made possible by the presence of the Eurosceptic media.

2.1-4 The Eurosceptic media

In a similar vein to the lack of hard Europhile representation in political parties, support for the EU was sorely lacking in the media. The prevalence of Euroscepticism represented in the British media which generally lean more towards the right of the political spectrum (Smith, 2017) has been a cause of headache in the 2016 EU referendum campaign (Oliver, 2016). As exemplified by Boris Johnson’s penchant to make up Euro myths in his journalistic career (Witen, 2021, p.159), Euroscepticism was profitable, an easy news source that engaged readers as it played into pre-conceptions people had of the EU. For instance, as the BBC (2007) aptly described as “those whose memories are not razor sharp are by now starting to get confused between art and reality”. They used the example of how the1980's satirical portrayal of government in the BBC programme *Yes Minister* had first introduced the idea that the EU would force sausages to be called "emulsified high-fat offal tube", and how this biting joke has now become difficult to distinguish from the more deliberate Euromyths that has been pedalled by Eurosceptics. Even in the print media generally regarded as more supportive

of the EU overall such as *The Guardian*, strong support was limited (Anderson and Weymouth, 1999). The Eurosceptic media also linked together questions regarding sovereignty and xenophobic coverage with the EU (Anderson and Weymouth, 1999) illustrating further the point made by David Cameron's communications director, Craig Oliver (2016) that the Eurosceptic media coverage has a long history and as Daddow (2012, p.1224) argued, increasingly prevalent. This speaks to the caution that Inglehart (1977, p.338) had made by arguing that "the *content* of the message one receives is vitally important". If the predominant media cues the public were receiving were one of Euroscepticism both soft and hard, it normalises the idea of Euroscepticism further in the eyes of the public, making Europhile positions even harder to make. This relationship between the media and its Eurosceptic coverage will be further explored in Chapter 6. For now, the argument here is that alongside the prevalence of Euroscepticism among and within political parties, there was also a tendency in the British media to favour Eurosceptic coverage over that of Europhile ones. In short, the discourse on Euroscepticism shows that the groundwork for Brexit, the linkage between the EU with domestic issues (Vasilopoulou, 2016, p.223) was one that has a long history. Thus, this section on Euroscepticism literature has revealed that far from being organic, it required a long time to develop and become mainstream, find political representation, and promoted through the media. The next section turns towards the economic explanation for the Leave vote and argue that one of the missing links it provides is the concept of relative decline.

2.2 Economic explanation for the Leave vote: The missing link?

The previous section explored how prevalent Eurosceptic attitudes were being represented and disseminated in the UK. This section turns its attention to the 2016 EU referendum, and attempt to further flesh out the economic explanation as to why people voted for Brexit. Brooks (2019) had argued that the current literature on Brexit could be divided into two – one of economic and cultural explanations. It is worth noting that the existing Brexit literature does not neatly fall into such binary distinctions. However, such categorisation offers a useful starting point in outlining the rich and diverse Brexit literature. In line with the literature on Euroscepticism, studies found a strong correlation between educational qualification and support for Brexit. Critically,

education levels were *the* dividing line between Remain and Leave supporters. Other factors such as geography was also found to have played a central role in the Brexit vote with the support for Brexit predominantly found in former industrial places with high concentration of those with low to no formal qualifications. Or in other words, the "left-behind" areas. Before delving into the discussion on the "left-behind" and a similar concept "relative decline", this section will explore the current literature on the economic explanations of Brexit. The main argument presented in this section is that the economic argument brings together the structural context of the vote and affirming the importance of place in understanding the vote for Leave. However, the literature struggles to explain how other more ideational factors influenced the vote, which this thesis argues is better explained by the cultural explanations of Brexit.

2.2-1 It's the economy, stupid!

Perhaps one of the most relevant policy implications of Brexit was the sudden interest in the idea that the country remains deeply divided in terms of its economy, fuelled by policy choices from the central government. The austerity policy of cutting back on public spending championed by then Chancellor George Osborne has been widely criticised for having a disproportionately higher impact on local authorities that rely more heavily on central government funds (Smith et al., 2016; Gray and Barford, 2018), and thus leading to places with already weak economic performances to fare worse. This was a challenge to accept for the public (Bennett and Kottasz, 2012) with the knowledge that the banking sector largely responsible for the crisis was provided Government support to the tune of £1.1 trillion at its peak (National Audit Office, 2020) at a time when public services were cut, and the welfare benefits tightened. Setting aside arguments over the efficacy or even the necessity of austerity, it is undeniable that it has had a lasting impact on regional economies. While disagreements exist over whether one could argue that the vote for Brexit was a popular backlash against the elite and austerity measures (Fetzer, 2019; Carl, 2020), some of the reasoning behind the vote such as concern over NHS funding and fear over immigrants accessing welfare benefits (Lord Ashcroft, 2016) are arguably symptoms of the public spending cuts. The focus was thus on people and places facing socio-economic deprivation (Glencross, 2016; Antonucci et al., 2017).

One of the problems researchers quickly encountered was the divide between perception and reality. On the one hand, Leave voters were right to argue against concerns over the strain over welfare benefits, deterioration of the healthcare services, and general feeling that the status quo was not working for them and that drastic change was necessary. Or the fact that former industrial areas were performing poorly was hard to refute. However, the issues arise from how these genuine concerns are then attributed to the EU. For example, the idea that immigrants create pressure on the UK is simultaneously true and false. If we are talking about contributions to the UK economy, immigrants have been found to take on jobs that are undesirable among the British natives, and help create more jobs (Wadsworth et al., 2016). However, in terms of public services, this depends on the capacity on the local authorities and the type of immigrant (are they students, workers, or asylum seekers) (Poppleton et al., 2013). For example, a diverse local authority with long-term experience working with immigrant population will find it easier to deal with managing higher levels of immigration compared with less diverse local authorities with little prior experience supporting such communities and are facing a new sudden rise in the number of immigrants. Furthermore, if the additional influx of people are students or workers, they will require less support compared to asylum seekers who will often have complex needs. Furthermore, so far there is no evidence to suggest that the British economy has gained any advantage as a direct result of Brexit with the "benefits" amounting to free trade agreements that either already existed or made with much smaller economies, bringing in more red tape, or little divergence from the EU to begin with (HM Government, 2022; Hunsaker and Howe, 2023). Meanwhile, the negative impact of Brexit has been not only well-documented, but in some cases ironic with heavily Leave voting areas being more reliant on trade with the EU (Los et al., 2017; McCann, 2018; Bloom et al., 2019). In short, while the concerns over the economic problems the UK faced which were raised by Leave voters were valid, so far there is little evidence to suggest these problems would be solved now that the UK left the EU. Despite such conflation, the link between place and the state of the local economy in people's perception have been an important component in the Brexit literature. The concept of "left-behind" – which will be a key focus of this thesis requires some clarification. The following section will explore what this thesis means by "left-

behind", and explore in greater depth a concept that relates closely to this term, relative decline.

2.2-2 The "left-behind" and the concept of relative decline

The "left-behind" areas were already identified as being unique characteristics in the Euroscepticism literature with Ford and Goodwin (2014a) already using the term to describe the types of people who supported UKIP. The economic explanation of Brexit, this section will argue, provides critical understanding of the structural context of the vote for Brexit. Re-assessing the "left-behind" discourse is important as the phrase has increasingly been used in discussing policies such as "levelling up" (Newman, 2021), identified once again as places where the Labour Party lost their support in the 2019 general election. The aim of this section is to return to the literature on the economic explanation for Brexit in relation to the concept of the "left-behind" and try to untangle the literature to draw out its strengths and weaknesses as an analysis. The section will conclude by arguing that the current literature on the economic explanation of Brexit has a critical missing link – that while it explains much of the structural context of the Leave vote, it falls short of explaining why socio-economic decline led to the vote. This missing link will be something this thesis argues is better explained by the literature on the cultural explanations of Brexit.

2.2-3 Left-behind, from what?

The word "left-behind", while common in use have evaded a clear definition. If one were to attempt to describe the concept, the closest would be the idea of a group of people or place which saw a long-term steady decline in their wealth (Watson, 2017, p.20). The phrase has nuance as it does not refer to those who are at the bottom, the poorest who scores the lowest in terms of income, wealth, or GDP of an area. It is also conceptually different from the Just About Managing [JAMs], which was a group of people Theresa May had expressed wanted to represent as Prime Minister. The JAMs and the "left-behind" share the fact that neither are at the bottom of any metric. They exist somewhere in the middle, too well-off to benefit from government support, but priced out from climbing further up and therefore they are stuck in the social mobility ladder (Citizens advice, 2016). However, the "left-behind" are also different from that of JAMs – namely due to geography. JAMs exist regardless of geography, they can exist anywhere

in the country, as the only defining feature is that they are the squeezed middle who find it increasingly difficult to afford basic services (education and health for instance) and thus they are defined by their income and wealth. The “left-behind” on the other hand, has a strong geographical component. They exist in the former industrial areas, predominantly from the North of England as the left-behind are not just groups of people, but represent places that have undergone decline. The focus on the North of England has given the impression that the “left-behind” are working-class. However, it is also not precisely accurate to describe the “left-behind” as working-class.

It is worth taking time to clarify why this thesis does not interpret the "left-behind" as synonymous with working-class, and why the thesis does not adopt a Marxist class-based analytical approach. The definition of working-class is rather out-dated with the current definition of class dating back almost half a century ago, defined by the National Readership Survey (2020). Since then, the nature of socio-economic context surrounding class has changed drastically. Home ownership spread, people tend to stay longer in education, and with the shift from manufacturing to services, people’s occupations are increasingly in the service sector. For example, now 84 per cent of the British public are working in the service sector as opposed to just 16 per cent who are in traditional working-class occupations (Chiripanhura and Wolf, 2019). These changes have direct impact on class as the National Readership Survey (2020) categorised the majority of the population (55 per cent) as falling in the category of the higher social class grades (A, B, and C1), while only 25 per cent were categorised as working-class (D and E). Dorling (2016) had argued that there were more middle-class Leave voters in an attempt to dispel the idea that Leave voters equated to working-class. In Dorling’s (2016, p.1) study, 59 per cent of Leave voters were categorised as middle-class while 24 per cent were categorised as working-class, closely mirroring the nationwide class structure as presented in the National Readership Survey (2020) mentioned above.

Additionally, in Lord Ashcroft’s (2016) survey, the difference in support for Brexit did exist, but presented questions as to how reliable a variable social class was. Lord Ashcroft’s (2016, p.5) survey reports that 57 per cent of those in social class A and B voted for Remain, and this was the only social class to have greater support for Remain with C1 a near even split (49 per cent voted for Remain and 51 per cent voted for Leave),

and the majority (64 per cent) of those from lower social class (C2, D, and E) supporting Leave. Furthermore, a study by Antonucci et al. (2017) made a similar point by arguing that income was not a significant indicator of the Brexit vote, and instead as was argued by Goodwin and Heath (2016b) that education was the most significant factor. Thus, one could argue that class tells us relatively little about the Leave vote as the social class of Leave voters simply reflect the makeup of the class divide of the country. Viewed differently, this may indicate a need for a new kind of class grades that better reflect the current occupation trends (Office for National Statistics, 2010, p.8). There has been attempts in the past to recreate class to better reflect the realities of today by incorporating more of the divides in non-economic activities such as recreational activities and one's acquaintances (Savage et al., 2013, p.223). While discussions over a new definition of social class is beyond the scope of this paper, it does present limitation in analysing the Leave vote and the "left-behind" through the prism of class. In short, to echo the argument by Antonucci et al. (2017), we need to be cautious about describing Leave voters and the "left-behind" as working-class.

To return to the initial question, who exactly are the "left-behind", this thesis argues that perhaps a relevant question to ask here is "left-behind, from what?". Summarising the previous sections, the "left-behind" are a group of people whose socio-economic conditions have seen a long-term relative decline, commonly found in the former industrial heartland in the North of England, and not quite working-class (Watson, 2017; Antonucci et al., 2017). What exactly are these people being left-behind from? The current literature is focused on one popular variable, which is the national average. Compared to the trajectory of the national average, the "left-behind" are doing relatively worse. This brings us to another broader literature on the topic of relative decline. The definition of relative decline as it exists at present may not be wholly applicable to this thesis. This is because one of the definitions that exists according to Hasse et al. (2014, pp.1524–1525) describes relative decline as an area seeing both a population decline and increase in the number of brownfields as a result of short-term changes in the area which is created by policy decisions at three levels of governance – local, national, and international. This definition finds its roots in urban studies and while useful in terms of acknowledging the cause of the socio-economic change in three

governance levels, it is also constraining as it implies that relative decline can be assessed by population decline and number of brownfields.

However, while this is an admirable effort in developing an identifiable definition to the term, it is rather ill-suited or at least does not reflect the way in which it is used in the British context. There are relatively few places in the UK currently undergoing population decline. According to the Office for National Statistics (2021d), between 2014 and 2019, just 24 local authorities out of 317[1] faced this issue. The list includes local authorities that are remote and thus have small population size to begin with which makes the decline perhaps more predictable, such as the Isles of Scilly and the Shetland Islands. Other places are small and wealthy areas that do not conjure an image of decline such as Oxford and Kensington and Chelsea. Not areas one would imagine when they hear "relative decline". Furthermore, there were only two parliamentary constituencies out of the 42 identified as "Red Wall" seats which is typically understood to be "left-behind" areas to face population decline which was Blackpool and North East Lincolnshire (Kanagasooriam and Simon, 2021, p.11; Office for National Statistics, 2021d). In short, population decline alone may not be a reliable indicator for relative decline. In terms of brownfields, according to The Countryside Charity (2022) as of 2022, the top five councils with what they term "brownfield land housing capacity" were located in urban areas such as Southwark Borough Council (London), Birmingham City Council, Wandsworth Borough Council (London), Manchester City Council, and Brent Borough Council (London). There seems to be little crossover when it comes to places facing population decline and places with large numbers of brownfields, with a clear divide between the definition and the way the term "relative decline" has been used in both academia and in the media (Crafts, 2012; Inman, 2022).

Relative decline thus requires a clarification as to relative to *what*, similar to the question over "left-behind" from what. Some have used relative decline to refer to the decline in Britain's standing at the international stage, and thus the decline is relative to

[1] The 24 local authorities that faced population decline are as follows: Ceredigion, Isles of Scilly, Inverclyde, Copeland, Argyll and Bute, Na h-Eileanan Siar, Oxford, Shetland Islands, North Ayrshire, Kensington and Chelsea, Barrow-in-Furness, Blackpool, West Dunbartonshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Rushmoor, Angus, Ealing, North East Lincolnshire, Powys, Isle of Anglesey, Aberdeen City, East Ayrshire, and Cheltenham (Office for National Statistics, 2021d).

the performance of other comparable high-income liberal democracies (Friedberg, 1987; Crafts, 1998; Pemberton, 2004; Crafts, 2012). The cause of the decline is also multiple with some focusing on technological advancement (David and Wright, 1997), lack of a unified economic growth policy (Pemberton, 2004, p.1001), and the over-reliance upon the financial sector (Kitson and Michie, 1996, pp.204–205). However, the focus of this paper will be less on decline relative compared to other countries and within the country.

Following on from the work by Pike et al. (2016, pp.4–5), this thesis argues that it is important to look at decline relative to the national average. In other words, a place that is seeing slower rates of growth, preforming badly in terms of skills level and productivity levels compared to the national average are important indicators in understanding relative decline. Another important point once again presented by Pike et al. (2016) is that the decline is not necessarily constrained to real decline, and should include *perception* of decline. In accordance with the approach to reality by critical realists, this thesis argues that a sense of relative decline on the one has real world impact and is a truth that can be identified. However, it also accepts that the need to incorporate how people interpret reality and while treating this perception as separate from reality, it is nevertheless necessary to analyse what this perception is.

When we discuss the perception of relative decline, the timeframe becomes equally important to the comparison with the national average. In their work analysing the relative decline of former industrial regions compared to other regions in the UK, Beatty and Fothergill (2020, p.1248) finds "*persistence* in the longer term labour market problems" in the former industrial regions. Thus, relative decline needs to be assessed in terms of comparison to the region's past how persistent the issues have been. By incorporating these different insights into the existing definition by Hasse et al. (2014, pp.1524–1525) concept of relative decline, this thesis adopts the following definition:

Relative decline refers to a place which is experiencing both real and perceived economic and social decline in relation to its past and the national average, which is persistent.

Now that we have a definition of relative decline, how is this relevant to the Brexit debate? This section began by arguing that the economic explanations are good at explaining the structural context of Brexit, but that there is a missing link in terms of

how such socio-economic context led to the Brexit vote. The concept of the "left-behind" emerged as a key to understanding the Brexit vote. By adopting this definition of relative decline, the "left-behind" could be understood as follows:

The left-behind refers to a place and its people who are facing relative decline, predominantly in the former industrial areas in the North of England.

What this definition suggests is that in order to understand the Brexit vote, and in particular why "left behind" areas and people living in such areas supported Brexit, there needs to be considerations of both the present socio-economic conditions of an area as well as historical factors. The historical considerations of an area, analysing how an area came to face "relative decline" and how the current socio-economic conditions compared to the past are, this thesis argues, important in an analysis of "left-behind" areas. The next section explores the missing link in the economic explanation for the Brexit result, which is the rather less discussed topic of the cultural explanation for Brexit.

2.3 Cultural explanation for the Leave vote

The previous sections explored the economic explanation for Brexit, arguing that it was not necessarily the poorest areas or people that supported Brexit, and that to understand this phenomenon, the concept of the "left-behind" and "relative decline" becomes key. However, it has also argued that there is a clear distinction between the socio-economic issues identified by Leave voters, and whether they would be resolved by voting for Leave. The missing link between the genuine concerns over the problem of relative decline and the Brexit vote, this thesis argues, may be found in the cultural explanation of Brexit. Similar to the debate over public opinion over the EU (Scherer, 2015, p.893), the Brexit debate is also generally divided between economic explanations and cultural explanations (Brooks, 2019, p.3). Cultural explanations here broadly refer to explanations of Brexit that has links to identities and sentiments that are difficult to quantify, but nevertheless observable through surveys, interviews, and focus group studies. Here, this thesis is not trying to claim that everyone who voted Brexit did so due to the same thought process, accounting for the considerable diversity that exists in terms of people's attitudes towards Brexit among both Leave and Remain supporters (Ipsos MORI, 2021; Surridge, 2021). Thus, the discussion here is a mere snapshot of the

possibilities of how the public felt emotionally towards the decision towards leaving the EU. This is described short-hand as cultural explanations of Brexit and this thesis believes this to be the missing link that explains why the genuine concerns over relative decline led to the Brexit vote. This section is divided into two further sub-sections, discussing the literature on nationalism and identity, the two arguably main discussions in the cultural explanations for Brexit. This thesis will argue that while the literature on nationalism supports the argument made in the Euroscepticism literature – that those who can hold multiple national identities simultaneously are less likely to be Eurosceptic and thus less likely to vote Leave. However, nationalism alone does not explain variations within England. This is where the identity of the "somewheres" and "anywheres" as advocated by Goodhart (2017) becomes important. The next section will first focus on the influence of nationalism, mainly English nationalism on Brexit.

2.3-1 Nationalism

Nationalism, in particular English nationalism, was found to have strong links to the Brexit vote. Referring back to the earlier section of this chapter, the literature on Euroscepticism equally found that those who were unable to hold multiple national identities were more likely to be Eurosceptic. Nationalism is rather complex in the UK as there is distinction between nationalism based on the country (British nationalism), and the four nations (English, Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish nationalism), English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish nationalism. These different sources of nationalism differ considerably in terms of their strength, closeness to British nationalism, and relationship with Euroscepticism. In particular, studies have focused on the relationship between English nationalism and Brexit (Henderson et al., 2017; Dorling and Tomlinson, 2019; Wellings, 2019; Wellings et al., 2022) following from initial findings that those who identified as English were more likely than those that identified as British to vote for Brexit (Lord Ashcroft, 2016).

Among all the national identities that exist, English nationalism was found to have the strongest link to the Brexit vote with those identifying exclusively as English and not British being the most likely to vote for Brexit (Goodwin and Heath, 2016a). While the correlation is clear, the causation is rather harder to identify. What makes people having an English identity more likely to vote Brexit? Some studies attempted to explain this by

linking Brexit with the Empire and colonialism, arguing that the reason why people who had strong national identities were more likely to be Eurosceptic was because they more strongly viewed those without British citizenship as the "other" which was further fuelled by British exceptionalism (Bhambra, 2017; Dorling and Tomlinson, 2019). The idea of the British Empire conjured an image of the country that was simultaneously superior to others and different from that of Europe. Those who were not part of the British Empire (the Europeans) were thus perceived as somehow different and not part of British history which may have resulted in Euroscepticism. This was thought to hold true the other way around with the British generally having a considerably weaker European identity, and thus fail to feel part of a wider Europe (Kohli, 2000).

That being said, this idea that British exceptionalism and its link to the Empire is rather tenuous not because colonialism does not play a role in Brexit, but because the kind of populism that are discussed in the literature can be found in other countries as well. The kind of strong ethnonationalism which helped link together a populist backlash and its roots to history is not new, and could be found in other countries which saw a populist rise such as the US (Trump), and France (Le Pen) (Schertzer and Woods, 2022). Despite similar ethnonationalism discourse, relatively little signs exist of France leaving the EU or at least no serious attempts are being made. Furthermore, the relationship between the Empire and Brexit is, as Saunders (2020) put it, rather complex. In his work, Saunders (2020, pp.1141–1142) provided four reasons as to why it was dangerous to conflate Brexit with "imperial nostalgia". He argued that this was 1) an argument presented mostly by Remain supporters, 2) tended to ignore colonial influence on Remain voters, 3) sidelined the strong support for the Commonwealth mostly among the ethnic minorities who did not vote Leave, and 4) the risk of mistaking amnesia for nostalgia for the Empire (Saunders, 2020, pp.1141–1142).

Turning to the first point, there is no evidence to suggest that the idea of the revival of the Empire was at the forefront of Leave voters' decision to vote Brexit (Lord Ashcroft, 2016; Carl, 2020). Remain voters tend to not have a strong understanding of Leave voters (Carl, 2018), and thus there is indeed a valid question to be made as to what degree the Empire played a significant role in voters' decision. The second point is equally valid as sources of the Empire tends to be far reaching with some pointing to the

media (Daddow, 2006, p.319) and others on education (McCulloch, 2009), which has a far reach that would have influenced both Remain and Leave voters alike.

On the third point, it is important to consider the existence of ethnic minority Leave voters (while few, they do exist), for whom the reason for supporting Brexit was not too dissimilar to that of White Leave voters – namely to do with European immigration and sovereignty (Begum, 2018). On the fourth and final point, as was argued by Saunders (2020, p.1160), when Leave voters talk of returning to Global Britain, it refers to a "narrative of *greatness*" and little to do with its more negative history of colonialism that reflects on more of cherry-picking Britain's history than a nostalgia of its Empire. In short, the cultural explanation of Brexit which hinges on Empire has some flaws. However, what can be drawn from such cultural explanations of Brexit is that the past matters, and perceptions matter. This point on the importance of the past and perception will, this thesis argues, be crucial in understanding why people voted Brexit.

2.3-2 Identity

Identity became an important focal point in the Brexit debate. Studies have attempted to capture this rather evasive concept by arguing that there are distinct cultural characteristics, or identities of Leave and Remain voters that can be identified and analysed. It was also suggested that Remain and Leave identities became durable as well as distinct, allowing it to overtake political party identities to become one of the most important ideational factors for British voters (Evans and Schaffner, 2019, p.19). This Brexit identity subsequently played a crucial role in the 2019 general election result as voters generally leaned towards the Labour Party in the so-called "Red Wall" seats voted in support of the Conservative Party which promised simply to "get Brexit done" (Curtice, 2020). In any case, this demonstrates that the Brexit vote is something more than a simple cost benefit calculation, but one that has a clear identity. Since referendum questions tend to be topical and opinions may be split within political parties themselves (as was the case for the EU referendum), voters may need to rely on non-political party related cues to make voting choices (Leduc, 2002, pp.712–714). In order to understand why people were persuaded to vote Brexit, the Brexit identity may be a useful point of call.

However, while it is possible to point at general election results (Curtice, 2020) and survey results (Evans and Schaffner, 2019) as proof of the existence of a Brexit identity, it is harder to pin down what exactly they are. This will perhaps remain evasive as identities are fluid, temperamental, and open to interpretation. Regardless, some have attempted to take on this mantle. Goodhart (2017) attempted to describe the divide between Remain and Leave as the "anywheres" and "somewheres". They were divided over not just their respective human capital, but also whether or not one displayed cosmopolitan views or traditional views. The idea that values can influence voting behaviour is not new with works by Schwartz (1996) and Leimgruber (2011) discussing exactly this point. Despite some push back against such binary categorisation (Bromley-Davenport et al., 2018, p.796) and the assertion that the "anywheres" have less attachment to an area than the "somwheres" (Chan and Kawalerowicz, 2022), it was also found that those who lived in the same country in which they were born in were more likely to support Leave (Chan and Kawalerowicz, 2022). Furthermore, a study (Lee et al., 2018, p.155) which looked at survey data from Understanding Society, incidentally the same data source as the study by Chan and Kawalerowicz (2022), found that those who continued to live in the same country they were born in, had a seven per cent higher likelihood of voting for Leave. In other words, place and social mobility matters in understanding the Brexit vote. People who were less mobile, the "somewheres" were indeed found to have a higher likelihood of supporting Leave than their more mobile, cosmopolitan counterparts, the "anywheres". Thus, those who voted Leave, are more likely to be immobile partially due to attachment to the place, but perhaps more likely because they are stuck and have little alternative means to move out from where they are born in. Add to this the fact that most former industrial areas such as former coal mining communities were more likely to rely on highly specialised, place-based work, it may explain why people living in such areas were more likely to be "somewheres". In short, identities did play a role in the Brexit vote and the identities have connection to place in that it manifests differently depending on an area one lives in.

When one is attached or even stuck in a place, the decline is arguably felt more acutely and the impact of the decline harder to avoid. This is because options such as moving out from an area is severely diminished if one lacks transferable skills, qualifications, or

the financial means to move. Once again, this is a greater issue in “left-behind” areas. For example, a study by Hollywood (2002) which analysed subset data from the Census data dating back to 1971, 1981, and 1991 found that higher skilled workers such as those working in research and development were more likely to move location and move further away than those working in the coal mining industry who tended to move within coalfields. The paper argued against the assumption that demand and supply for labour will be naturally adjusted by market forces and instead presented evidence to suggest the stickiness of structural barriers against place-based occupations such as coal miners (Hollywood, 2002). In other words, conditions of a place may have an influence on individual identities. In turn, this link between identity and place supports the need for the focus on place when analysing Brexit.

The relationship between the socio-economic conditions of a local area and its impact on the people is a field of study that has attracted much attention in recent years. For example, a study by McNeil et al. (2023) found that the unemployment rates of a local area of an individual’s birthplace impact their political and social attitudes later in life. In other words, the conditions of a place matters when trying to understand an individual’s political and social views. Furthermore, study by Dijkstra et al. (2020, pp.747–748) finds that the influence of the change in fortunes of a local area has an impact in political attitudes, with richer places undergoing relative decline more likely to support anti-EU political parties. In a special issue analysing different referendum results in Australia, Canada, the US, and Europe, Leduc (2002, p.729) concluded that while voters may cast their vote based on their position over the issues at hand, the issues “are not always the most important one in determining the outcome of a referendum”. Thus, while Leave voters may have voted for Brexit, wider socio-economic issues of their local area may have played a vital role in the outcome of the EU referendum.

Furthermore, a study by Liberini et al. (2019) had found that perception or “unhappy feelings” had influenced the Brexit vote rather than real issues. In sum, place and identity are likely to be intertwined and the result of this could have shaped the 2016 EU referendum result. This chapter has emphasised the importance of place in relation to the economic and cultural explanation of Brexit. Another key literature in relation to place-based issues and the EU is the ECP. The following section will explore the literature

surrounding the ECP. This thesis builds on the existing literature and argue that it has a positive but limited impact. It also provides a unique contribution to the ECP literature which is dominated by large N comparisons and substantive recipient of the ECP by in contrast presenting a single local authority case study that does not fall under either extreme in terms of amount of ECP received.

2.4 European Cohesion Policy

The ECP is a flagship policy of the EU aimed at reducing regional inequality among EU member states. It aims to deliver on the EU legislation Article 174 which states that the EU "shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social, and territorial cohesion" (Official Journal, 2012, p.127). With three funds[2] – the European Regional Development Fund [ERDF], European Social Fund [ESF], the Cohesion Fund [CF], targeted at different problems in relation to regional inequality (European Commission, 2023a).[3] The funds are then distributed to EU member state regions following a territorial criteria that divides the regions into three – the least developed, transition, and most developed regions. The categorisation is based on GDP per capita in relation to the EU average and different measurement criteria to ensure targeted support. The oldest fund is the ERDF which was introduced in 1975 (Council Regulation (EEC) No 724/75 of 18 March, 1975), which means that the ECP literature has a long and rich history. Broadly speaking there are three strands of literature: cost-benefit analysis, multi-level governance theory, and public perception of the ECP. The historical development of the ECP will be discussed in Chapter 6 as this thesis argues its long history has contributed to the complexity of the funds. The findings of this thesis will contribute to the three strands of literature, and while they will be discussed in further detail in Chapters six and seven, the following sections will briefly outline the arguments presented in each strand of literature.

[2] In the programme period of 2014-2020, there was an additional Youth Employment Initiative (European Commission, 2023a), but this made up just 2.0 per cent of the total Cohesion Policy budget and has been dropped in the subsequent 2021-2027 programme period and thus will be omitted for simplicity. This follows the common practice in the field of ECP studies which predominantly focuses on the ERDF, ESF, and CF.

[3] Furthermore, the more recent 2021-2027 programme period has added the Just Transition Fund [JTF] and renamed ESF to European Social Fund Plus [ESF+]. However, this thesis will be focusing on programme periods pre-2021-2027 and thus will continue to focus on the three funds (ERDF, ESF and CF).

2.4-1 Public perception of the ECP

Both the cost-benefit calculation and the multi-level governance theory have a long history, but the focus on public perception of the ECP is relatively recent (Borz et al., 2018; Mendez et al., 2020; Mendez and Bachtler, 2020). Although once described as the visible hand of the EU (Farole et al., 2011, p.1099), compared to the literature on the cost-benefit analysis of the ECP, public perception of the ECP has attracted less interest in the academic sphere. A quick Advanced Search on Google Scholar for the keyword "cost-benefit" in relation to the ECP yielded 4,100 results (Advanced Search Google, 2023a) while the keyword "public opinion" yielded 2,860 results (Advanced Search Google, 2023b). This lack of engagement may be down to the relatively greater importance of ensuring the "value for money" of the ECP as the cost-benefit analysis is a necessary part of co-financing (European Commission, 2015a). but may also mirror concerns over creating a sense of indebtedness towards the EU especially among the smaller EU member states.

However, post-Brexit, there was renewed interest in understanding how people viewed the ECP (see for instance works under the project COHESIFY (Borz et al., 2018; Mendez et al., 2020; Mendez and Bachtler, 2020)). Afterall, the main aim of the ECP was reducing regional inequality, the very thing that presented a strong influence over the Brexit vote. The implication was thus that the ECP may have failed in its purpose of reducing regional inequality that may have been a contributing factor of the Leave vote. Initial research failed to find evidence to suggest any relationship between Brexit and the ECP. In general, the public understood little of the EU (Carl, 2019), and due to the large scale of the EU policy, citizens were rarely able to keep track of specific policies (van den Hoogen et al., 2022). Studies have further found that knowledge of the ECP was weak among even the recipients and direct beneficiaries.

Furthermore, if they had knowledge of the ECP, it did not factor in their voting behaviour (Willett et al., 2019). A quantitative study that tried to tease out public perception towards the EU by analysing the relationship between EU funds and UKIP support was work by Crescenzi et al. (2018, p.128) which concluded that "areas which

received a larger share of EU structural funds[4] were, indeed, neither more nor less likely to vote for the EU". They make further argument that "EU funds had no influence on voting outcomes simply because of large sections of UK voters were entirely unaware of the contribution or scale of EU financial support to their regions" (Crescenzi et al., 2018, p.128). A more qualitative approach taken in the work by Bromley-Davenport et al. (2018, p.800) which used focus groups and interviews with working-class men in Sunderland found that EU funding was perceived to have been unable to mitigate rising unemployment in the area and there was a sense that even projects that received funding in the wider North East did not lead to economic growth.

In short, the literature has so far found that ECP either did not have an impact in public perception towards the EU (Crescenzi et al., 2018) or was seen as limited in terms of making real change in the local area (Bromley-Davenport et al., 2018). The aim of this thesis is to make further contribution to this growing literature which looks to the relationship between public perception and the ECP. To do so, it will not be making wider cross-country comparisons such as that by Mendez and Bachtler (2020). Instead, inspired by the work by Dellmuth and Chalmers (2018), this thesis will take on a single case study approach, and reflecting the findings by Capello and Perucca (2018), it will focus on the importance of the local context. This thesis argues that the positive yet limited impact the ECP had was outweighed by the Eurosceptic coverage by the British media that exacerbated the sense that the EU had done little for "left-behind" regions. Thus, while it is difficult to establish a direct link between Brexit and the ECP, this thesis argues that indirectly, there is a link to be made between the coverage of the ECP in the British media and Brexit.

2.4-2 Cost-benefit analysis of the ECP

Unsurprisingly, for a policy that is the second largest in the EU budget (Darvas et al., 2019), much of the academic interest has been focused on the cost-benefit calculation. In other words, the focus was on whether the policy delivered for the money that is being spent? Contrary to the simple question, the answer provided by the current

[4] To be technical, EU structural funds refer to ERDF, ESF, CF and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development [EAFRD] and European Maritime and Fisheries Fund [EMFF]. EAFRD and EMFF will not be discussed in this thesis as they are not part of the ECP.

literature is almost from the civil service playbook – yes and no. Some studies found a positive effect of the ECP (Basile et al., 2008, p.336), promoting the argument that it provides a net benefit to recipient regions. Others found conditional impact, meaning that the positive impact was only traced in specific projects such as those focused on developing human capital (Rodríguez-Pose and Fratesi, 2004). Some argued that the ECP benefited larger and wealthier EU member states as they were able to have larger public expenditure as a result (Šlander and Wostner, 2018). While others argued that it was precisely such large and developed EU member states that struggled to effectively absorb funding (Tosun, 2014). Further others argued that the benefit of the ECP was not just to the additional funding but in increasing administrative capacity in recipient countries, in particular those in CEECs (Bachtler et al., 2014). In short, the impact of the ECP has proven difficult and the different approaches listed above indicate towards a diverse range of ways to demonstrate impact.

In the case of the UK, studies mainly focused on regions that received high levels of ECP funding. For example, Wales had the highest ECP expenditure per capita due to its low population density and small population overall. The work by Di Cataldo (2017) used a comparative analysis between Cornwall and South Yorkshire which both received high levels of ECP funding in the past, but diverged post-2007-2013 programme period as Cornwall was still categorised as less developed (previously known as Objective 1[5]) while South Yorkshire was elevated to transition region (previously known as Objective 2). Di Cataldo (2017) finds that the positive impact of the ECP failed to lead to long-term changes to the socio-economic trajectory of the recipient region. In other words, while the region benefits from the extra funding available, once the funding ends it does not leave the region in a stronger socio-economic standing (Di Cataldo, 2017). This finding leaves some important questions for the ECP – what the legacy of the ECP will be now that the UK regions are no longer recipients. This thesis attempts to add on to this discussion by arguing that through the example of the arts industry in Wakefield, the ECP can bring in a virtuous cycle of funding bringing in new sources of funding. While the cost-benefit calculations are important, researchers also debated over the impact of the

[5] The definition of less developed, transition, and more developed regions were previously known as Objective 1, 2, 3 respectively. However, the methodology of the categorisation of the regions remained the same.

funds to the governance system itself, resulting in the development of the multi-level governance theory.

2.4-3 Multi-level governance theory

One of the key theories to come out of the ECP literature was the multi-level governance theory. Introduced by seminal works by Marks (1992), the idea was that the ECP could help create a multi-level governance structure within recipient countries in which local authorities, national governments, and the EU work together. Far from being straightforward, multi-level governance structure had developed to be "uneven, unequal, and unstable" (Hooghe, 1996, p.122). The literature has not been static. A literature review of the theory by Stephenson (2013, p.832) identified at least five different stages in the development of the literature as it grew to encompass global comparisons and in line with the expansion of the ECP. The literature also relates to strengthening administrative capacity at each level building as a result of handling the ECP (Becker et al., 2013; Bachtler et al., 2014; Surubaru, 2017; Kersan-Škabić and Tijanić, 2017). The study on administrative capacity of CEECs in handling ECP found that the administrative government developed relatively quickly and there was a strong impetus to Europeanise (Bachtler et al., 2014). The local context is once again found to be important in terms of ECP absorption rates with stable governance, fiscal decentralisation, and local labour profile all being contributing factors (Becker et al., 2013, p.59; Surubaru, 2017; Kersan-Škabić and Tijanić, 2017). Thus, local context or the UK governance structure will be a central focus of this thesis in relation to multi-level governance.

What does this mean for the UK, notoriously one of the most centralised governments in the developed world (McCann, 2016)? While much of the literature focused on CEECs as they needed to develop the governance structure as a result of joining the EU, research has found that this does not mean that they perform worse than the older member states including the UK (Bachtler et al., 2014). Perhaps one of the most comprehensive studies conducted in analysing the relationship between multi-level governance theory and the UK was that by Ian Bache (2008) in his seminal work *Europeanization and Multilevel Governance: Cohesion Policy in the European Union and Britain*. Using interview data, Bache (2008) analysed the different ways in which the different layers of

the governance structure responded to the ECP. However, much of the recent debates concerning governance structure in the UK developed in the decentralisation literature.

This thesis attempts to make a novel contribution to the existing literature on multi-level governance theory by linking it with the wider discussion on decentralisation in the UK. The literature review of the multi-level governance theory has argued the importance of the local context. To understand the local context in terms of the UK governance structure, one must look at how the decentralisation process has developed and how this could have had an impact on the delivery of the ECP. UK decentralisation has received much criticism for being patchy with different devolution deals reached in different regions (O'Brien and Pike, 2019; Thomas, 2020), a pendulum swing as the focus of decentralisation has shifted from regions to towns with the change in government (Pike et al., 2016, p.10). More recently, the question of decentralisation has evolved from simply referring to political decentralisation to include financial decentralisation in conjunction (Rodríguez-Pose and Vidal-Bover, 2022).

This thesis will analyse both academic papers written on the subject of decentralisation to flesh out how it developed in the UK from the Regional Development Agencies [RDAs] to the more recent City Deals (Pearce and Ayres, 2009; O'Brien and Pike, 2019). Using interview data collected for one local authority, Wakefield, it will argue that in line with the call from Rodríguez-Pose and Vidal-Bover (2022), this paper will argue that further decentralisation should include both political and the financial decentralisation to make the most of available funds such as the ECP. The case study of Wakefield aims to promote greater decentralisation in the UK by arguing that one of the key benefits of decentralisation was the ability of local authorities to take risks.

2.5 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has analysed the existing literature on Euroscepticism, Brexit, and the ECP. It has shown how the literature on Euroscepticism reveals the complex history of the development of Euroscepticism. There was nothing organic about Euroscepticism, and instead it was let to strengthen and fester through political representation and coverage by the British media. The literature on Brexit is widely divided into economic and cultural explanations, but this thesis argues that the two literatures could be linked together using the concept of relative decline as a missing

link. This chapter has also offered a new definition of the “left-behind” by arguing that it is refers to places in former industrial areas in the North of England experiencing both real and perceived economic and social decline in relation to its past and the national average, which is persistent.

In relation to the ECP, the literature has revealed the importance of the local context in understanding the impact of the ECP. One novel contribution this thesis makes to the existing literature is to combine it with the literature on UK decentralisation. Using a single-case study of Wakefield, this thesis will argue that the socio-economic context of the local area as well as media coverage pertinent to Wakefield had an impact on its perception. This thesis finds that the ECP has had a positive but limited impact, and the positive impact was made possible by the risks taken by the local authority, which in turn relied on financial as well as political decentralisation. The negative coverage of the ECP in the British media broadly explains the indirect impact the ECP has had on Brexit. In the next chapter, this thesis will focus on the past as well as the local context by dialling back the time to the 1980s and analyse the impact of the coal mine closures in the emergence of the “left-behind” areas and an enusing sense of relative decline.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter identified the links as well as gaps in the current literature on the topics of Euroscepticism, Brexit and the ECP, concluding by stating that this thesis aims to contribute to the existing literature by focusing on the importance of the local context in understanding both Brexit and the impact of the ECP. This chapter presents the research questions formed based on the links and gaps in the existing literature, and outline the philosophy that underpins the mixed method approach adopted in analysing a single case study of Wakefield. The philosophical position adopted in this thesis is one of CR, which has provided an ontological and epistemological rationale for the research questions, and a framework that allows cohesion within the mixed method approach. This chapter will also discuss in detail the rationale as to why Wakefield was chosen as a case study as well as why this thesis has decided to conduct a single case study approach. While the method adopted in this thesis has strived to adopt a methodology that best answers the research question as well as maintain cohesion, there are some key limitations to this approach that this chapter will discuss. However, the limitations of the current research approach also provide a blueprint for improvement in future research.

This chapter is structured as follows. The first section will outline the research questions, drawing on from the links and gaps identified in the previous chapter on literature review. The second will explain what CR is and apply its philosophical standpoint as a loose framework for the thesis as well as provide the rationale for the mixed method approach. The third section will explain why Wakefield was chosen as a single case study, exploring how its “ordinality” has limited academic discussion of similar places as well as outline how it stands out as a unique case study. The fourth section will provide a rationale as to why this thesis has adopted a mixed method approach, linking back to how it is in line with CR and aids the single case study approach. The fifth and final section will explore the ethical considerations of this research method as well as its limitations. This chapter will conclude by arguing that by making explicit the philosophical positions as well as the limitations in the data collection method it allows

for better understanding to the methods adopted and the rationale behind the arguments presented.

The methodology also provides a distinct contribution to the existing literature. First, it provides real application of the CR perspective, thus adding on to the works of Yeung (1997) and more recently Newman (2023) who also applied this theory in their own research (the former in business in Hong Kong and the latter in the welfare system of the UK). Second, it addresses the issue of the tendency of "ordinary" places being overlooked in the academic literature by using Wakefield as its case study, a region that was neither the highest Leave voting area nor the highest recipient of the ECP. Third, the mixed method approach was, while theoretically informed by CR, practically a result of the impact of COVID-19. The research was conducted between October 2019 and September 2023, in the middle of the pandemic and the restrictions that ensued in the UK where the research was conducted. The mixed method approach was on the one hand a response to restrictions that emerged, and taking advantage of the opportunities of the different methods that became possible as a result. In sum, this chapter both contributes to the existing literature and presents a blueprint for future research. Before delving into the frameworks and methods of this research, this thesis will provide a more detailed explanation on the research questions.

3.1 Research Questions

This section will explore the research questions that attempts to both fill in the gaps and contribute to the existing literature as was outlined in the previous chapter. In addition to the main research question, this section will introduce two sub-research questions that are related to the main research question but also expands the scope of analysis. The research questions will be listed in italics and will be followed by a brief explanation as to why they were formed as well as where the answers will be found in this thesis. Since this thesis deploys an inter-disciplinary approach with three distinct literatures, in particular the sub-research questions will be linked to specific chapters that focus on each literature.

3.1-1 Main Research Question

The main research question of this thesis is as follows.

What was the impact of the ECP in "left-behind" areas?

This question was formed stemming from an initial broader question over "why did the Leave side win in the 2016 EU referendum?". The initial question was, as discussed in the previous chapter, well-discussed in the existing Brexit literature (Goodwin and Heath, 2016b; Hobolt, 2016). The concept of relative decline was found to help bridge the gap between the economic and cultural explanation to Brexit, but as to how relative decline of a place could be linked to the Leave vote was less clear. Additionally, while there were studies that looked to the influence of the ECP in the context of Brexit (Willett et al., 2019; Crescenzi et al., 2019), there were relatively underexplored in the current academic literature and fewer still focused on its relation to the "left-behind" areas. This research question was developed to address this gap in literature.

In terms of how the ECP may be linked to Brexit, the reason for this lies in the fact that the ECP was designed with the specific purpose of alleviating regional inequality. Incidentally, regional inequality was precisely what was linked to the Brexit vote especially for "left-behind" areas. Another key difference this thesis presents compared to previous studies on the topic of the ECP is that it uses Wakefield as its case study. While there has been research conducted in Cornwall and Wales, the two regions that received higher levels of ECP funding due to being the only regions in the UK to be categorised as less developed regions (Willett et al., 2019), overall research in other more developed regiosn that received ECP funding was lacking in the present literature.

To clarify some points, here, the "impact of the ECP" does not exclusively refer to its effect on the local economy such as job creation and growth levels, data that are quantifiable. Instead, it includes more qualitative data such as public perception of the ECP. In other words, it looks at both real and perceived impact. Using a single case study approach, this thesis will use Wakefield in West Yorkshire as an example of a typical "left-behind" area. Discussions over how Wakefield was chosen will be reserved for a later section in this chapter. While "What was the impact of the ECP in "left-behind" areas?" is the main research question, this has also created several sub-research questions which are related, yet slightly different from the main point of this research.

3.1-2 Sub-research questions

There are two sub-research questions that expands on some of the key topics in relation to the main research question. The first sub-question asks:

Why did "left-behind" areas such as Wakefield vote Leave?

While not the main research question, this is one question that has seen multiple attempts at answering (Goodwin and Heath, 2016b; Nurse and Sykes, 2019). This thesis does not seek to claim that it has found a definitive explanation for the Leave vote. However, it argues that a focus on the local context, especially its past helps bridge the gap between the economic and cultural explanation for Brexit as argued in the previous chapter. While the local context and the influence of the past will be a key theme throughout this thesis, in particular Chapter 4 of this thesis will directly address the topic of the past, and Chapters 5 and 8 will explore the present local context. Chapter 6 will focus as to why public perception of the ECP may not have been positive, and thus relates to the broader question as to why people supported Brexit. The other sub-question that emerges is:

What, if any, were the positive impacts of the ECP in Wakefield?

Acknowledging the potential diversity of the impact of the ECP in "left-behind" areas and the differences this present in terms of what could be identified as positive impacts, this sub-question will only focus on Wakefield, not "left-behind" areas. This sub-question at its core seeks to understand what had enabled the positive impact. It is worth asking this question as the answers to this question may present a generalisable finding for other "left-behind" areas. This will have implications for not only the ECP, but also funds such as the Shared Prosperity Fund and Levelling Up Fund which were introduced to fill the gap left by the lack of the ECP post-Brexit. It also links to the interest shown by both the Conservative government and the opposition (Labour Party) in addressing regional inequality. Chapters seven and eight will directly address this sub-research question.

While this thesis will answer the three research questions (one main research question and two sub-research questions), it is also aware that the answers presented will not be exhaustive. Conclusions are reached based on the specific method that will be used in this thesis, and other methods may reach a different conclusion. In particular, to answer

the main research question, this thesis will focus on Wakefield as case study. Other studies that look at different "left-behind" regions are likely to reach different conclusions as well. This thesis does not claim that the findings from Wakefield speaks to the realities of all "left-behind" regions. This is why it is important to distinguish between findings that are more broadly applicable to all "left-behind" regions in general, and findings that are applicable to Wakefield more specifically. The next section will clarify the epistemological and ontological position of this thesis.

3.2 Philosophical position

Having a clear philosophical position and theoretical framework is crucial for this thesis as it tries to answer the three research questions outlined in the previous section using a mixed method approach. Ensuring cohesion between the different methodologies that are inter-disciplinary in nature will be made possible by clarifying the ontological and epistemological position of this thesis. Ontology asks what a researcher believes reality to be. If it exists, it will mean the researcher can collect data to find what this reality looks like. On the other hand, if an objective reality does not exist, then it means it is impossible to collect data in search of this. Epistemology is the "knowledge" that researchers need to extract to make sense of reality in the social world (Sayer, 1992, p.5). Halperin and Heath (2017, pp.7–9) argued that having a well-defined philosophical position is important as it enables the researcher to address what they presume to be the truth, what knowledge will be necessary to obtain this truth, and how to obtain said knowledge. These concepts can be summarised respectively as ontology, epistemology, and methodology. This thesis will make a clear statement of its ontological, epistemological, and methodological positions. As noted previously, CR was chosen as the philosophical basis of this research, but before explaining what this philosophy entails, this thesis will explain what other philosophical positions were available and why they were rejected for the purpose of this thesis. While the main reason for rejecting these philosophical positions was due to the incompatibility of their ontological and epistemological positions for the specific approach adopted in this thesis, it is also useful to illustrate why they were not chosen as CR itself was developed in response to these philosophies.

3.2-1 Critical Realism, what it is not

Arguably one of the best ways of explaining what CR *is*, it is useful to see what it *is not*. In the current literature of the ECP and Brexit, much of the contributions take on a positivist approach. The positivist's ontological position is that there is a real world (or truth) that is knowable, and thus it is possible to derive causation from observable events (Marsh et al., 2018, p.186). Such focus on empiricism has been criticised for presenting knowledge as "value-free" (McAnulla, 2006, p.114), and resulting in an overtly narrow focus on methodological tool set, especially in the field of economics (Moses and Knutsen, 2012, p.6). Few papers make explicit their philosophical position, but in general, papers that evaluate the economic impact of the ECP (Rodríguez-Pose and Fratesi, 2004; Puigcerver-Peñalver, 2007; Dall' Erba and Fang, 2017; Darvas et al., 2019) are by its design take on a positivist position as it has roots to the economics tradition. These studies were conducted with the assumption that people's socio-economic conditions and the economic situation of the place they inhabit will be reflected in their vote or attitude towards the EU.

In the Brexit literature, studies have consistently found strong correlation between age group and education levels with Brexit with those older and with lower educational qualifications more likely to vote Leave (Hobolt, 2016; Goodwin and Heath, 2016b). However, as expressed in the previous chapter, such quantitative focus in the ECP and Brexit literature is weaker at explaining why such correlation exists. This question over the "why" is better served by qualitative research that generally takes on a more constructivist approach such as bringing the focus on less tangible factors such as ideology and norms. Constructivists hold distinct ontological and epistemological position which argues that there is no objective reality (ontology) and therefore the "reality" that can be researched is ultimately a reflection of the ideology and norm of society or the "social construction of reality" (epistemology) (Barnett, 2014, p.158). In other words, from its ontological and epistemological position, it is possible to have different "realities" according to constructivism.

Closely linked to this idea is the constructivists' questioning of the rationality of agents. Constructivists have pushed back against the idea prevalent among positivists that individual action is, by nature, rational (Hindmoor and Taylor, 2018, p.48), instead

arguing that choices are made based on ideology (Parsons, 2017, p.75). This was a major puzzle in analysing Brexit as various research have found that both Leave and Remain voters lacked understanding of the EU and their decisions were often biased towards arguments prevalent among their respective camps (Carl, 2018; Carl, 2020). Furthermore, surveys and interviews make clear that people tended to make decisions that were seemingly contrary to their own personal interests (Los et al., 2017). Additionally, people had widely different views in terms of what they thought Brexit would look like with outcome options of Brexit numerous from a "hard Brexit" which entailed a no-deal to a "soft Brexit" which kept much of the EU rules and remained part of the Single Market (Fella, 2019). Survey by Curtice (2023b) on the topic revealed high levels of inconsistencies in terms of the attitudes towards the different Brexit outcomes with 45 per cent of respondents offering consistent views towards UK and EU regulation. Thus, voters have been found to be far from rational, their views susceptible to the different ways in which the questions were framed (Curtice, 2023b). In short, the positivist approach of assuming rationality has limitations when it comes to analysing Brexit.

Additionally, although the case study of this thesis is one of a historically working-class area, class discussions will not take a central role in the analysis for two reasons, one to do with changes to the British society, and two based on incompatibility with CR approaches. Class in this thesis treated in line with a reflection of occupational characteristics as well as educational characteristics, rather than one of Marxist approach. Generally speaking, working-class in this paper refers to places and people with a high proportion of manual labour and those with their highest educational attainment being around GCSE-level. Chapter 2 discussed how the historical definition of class based on the National Readership Survey (2020) is no longer a useful categorisation. The UK society underwent drastic change with occupational division between manual and service sector jobs to be clear and reflecting political alignment, to one where the majority (84 per cent) of British workers working in the service sector (Chiripanhura and Wolf, 2019). This change has made class distinctions more granular, unclear (Savage et al., 2013), and increasingly does not reflect political positions (Curtice, 2023a). Thus, societal change in the UK has made class less of a determinant for

politics. The CR position would also push back against using class as the focus of research as it will be too structural and deterministic, an approach that reduces the role of agency. Thus, for these reasons, class will not be the focus of this research, but will be used to describe the socio-economic dispositions of an area and place.

To provide a brief summary of positivists' and constructivists' positions, the former's ontological and epistemological position which accepts reality as existing independent of society naturally leads to the adoption of more quantitative research methods. On the other hand, the latter's ontological and epistemological position argues that reality is too intrinsically linked to society and therefore objective reality is impossible to find, leading to the adoption of more qualitative research methods. CR is neither of these positions and neither does it focus on class, instead it takes aspects of the positivist and constructivist approach, creating a more nuanced ontological and epistemological position which allows for the adoption of a mixed method approach.

3.2-2 Critical Realism

CR provides a unique flexibility and nuance. According to Sayer (1992, p.4), it is content with researchers adopting methods that they see fit to answer the research question rather than imposing a set of tools to analyse an event just to maintain the illusion of philosophical purity. While some may argue that this shows a lack of methodological clarity (Yeung, 1997, p.57), such weakness is well suited for a mixed method approach such as the one adopted for this thesis. The main reason why it is possible to adopt a mixed method approach is also tied closely to CR's ontological and epistemological positions.

The ontology, or in simpler terms the question on what we think "the nature of the social world" (reality) is like (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p.26), the approach of CR is distinct. According to Bhaskar (2008, p.21), who developed the field of CR, there is a distinction between knowledge in the social world and the natural world. This is further explored by Sayer (1992, pp.6 & 14) and Newman (2019, p.108) who maintains that the "truths" of the social world is fundamentally "context-dependent" or emerges from the social context and therefore cannot be separated from society. Put together, what CR is saying is that there needs to be a distinction between "knowledge" that is a social construct and constrained within the social structure (transitive knowledge) and

knowledge that is not of a social construct and therefore would not change (intransitive knowledge).

This directly contrasts with the position of positivism or constructivism. Positivists do not make such distinctions and believes it possible to understand the truth/real world as it is (Marsh et al., 2018, p.186), while constructivists view all knowledge as socially constructed, and thus rejects the idea that there is a truly knowable truth/real world (Barnett, 2014, p.158; Marsh et al., 2018, p.190). Perhaps the criticism of the ontology and epistemology of the other two from a CR perspective is most aptly described by Sayer (1992, p.20) that people "live neither on bread alone nor on ideas and symbols alone". The ontological and epistemological position of CR, in the context of this thesis thus allows for the use of both quantitative methods to identify socio-economic correlations, and also using qualitative methods to contextualise the former with the perceptions and views that are harder to quantify.

The ontological and epistemological position of CR provides the philosophical consistency within a mixed method approach. Furthermore, CR also provides a framework in which to structure the process of this thesis. In other words, CR has informed the chaptalisation of this thesis. The key to this was CR's position within the structure and agency debate. The CR's view on this matter was first developed by Roy Bhaskar. In his book titled *A Realist Theory of Science*, he makes important distinctions, such as how "real structure exist[s] independently of "events" (Bhaskar, 2008, p.13). This led to the position that under CR, structure exists prior to the individual, and individuals, on the one hand, have their own agency, but continue to be subject to structural constraints (Yeung, 1997, p.53). CR thus rejects both the idea that events are destined to occur and that actors could make decisions completely independent of the structure in which they live in.

This idea was perhaps the most deeply explored by Archer (1995, pp.90–91) who developed a system called the morphogenetic cycle which provides an explanation of how the pre-existing structure influences the actors within it, and yet actors maintains the choice of either supporting the continued existence of this structure or decide to change it. Following on from this view on structure and agency, this thesis organised the chapters so that the first thesis body (Chapter four) is focused on the history of

Thatcherism and coal mining as a way of setting the structural context for Wakefield while also treating such historical context independent to the vote for Brexit. In other words, while the historical legacy of Thatcher-era policies has contributed to the current socio-economic condition of Wakefield, it does not treat the historical factors as what determined the relative decline of the place. The following chapter on Wakefield (Chapter 5) is once again strongly focused on the socio-economic context of present Wakefield, drawing elements of the legacy of coal mining history from the previous chapter. Chapter 6 and seven are more focused on the ECP, which also acts as providing some of the structural context. Chapter 8 is focused on how the agency has set to change the structure while still subjected to its constraints, exploring how things have changed but also explaining some of the more remaining problems.

Within chapters, the structure and agency position of CR has also helped formulate the arguments presented. For example, according to Pawson and Tilley (1997, p.417), the success or failure of any policy relies on the structure context they inhabit. Following this position, the chapters are structured so that the structural context is presented before delving into the impact of agency.

This section has touched on some of the implications to the data collection and the research method adopted in this thesis as well as the structure of the thesis itself using CR. For this reason, CR should be viewed more as an undercurrent providing a rationale for the methods used and arguments presented in this thesis rather than running front and centre of this thesis. By offering a clear ontological and epistemological position, this thesis aims to address calls for research to have a stronger philosophical consistency as advocated by Halperin and Heath (2017). Now that the ontological and epistemological position of this thesis has been explored, the following section will explain why Wakefield was chosen as the case study.

3.3 Wakefield as a case study

This section sets out to provide a rationale as to why Wakefield was chosen as the case study of this thesis. Located in roughly the middle of the country, it is one of the local authorities that make up West Yorkshire. In addition to a surprise win of the

Conservatives in the 2019 general election[6], it is also politically represented by the West Yorkshire Mayor who was elected in 2019, which was part of a wider city deal that created the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. This section will be split into two, the first will explore the district as an "ordinary" space that suffers from a lack of academic and (for the longest time) political interest. It will argue that by choosing Wakefield as its case study, this thesis attempts to bring in much needed academic attention towards researching such "ordinary" places.

The second section will conversely argue why Wakefield stands out within West Yorkshire as a key "left behind" area. The argument will mainly focus on how as a result of the 2016 EU referendum, 2019 general election, and focus on Levelling Up, places like Wakefield has suddenly come under the spotlight with increased media attention as one of the "Red Wall" seats. As a typical "left behind" area, a study of Wakefield is hoped to present a building block of better understanding of "left-behind" areas, in particular in relation to the ECP and Brexit. Thus, this section is intended to provide a rational as to why Wakefield was chosen as a case study by exploring how it is simultaneously "ordinary" and a typical "left-behind" area.

3.3-1 Wakefield as an "ordinary" space

In the literature of the ECP, most focus on the extremes, meaning that the focus has predominantly been in regions which received the most funding from the ECP such as Cornwall, Wales, and more historically South Yorkshire (Di Cataldo, 2017; Crescenzi et al., 2019). Others focus on comparisons at national scale (Le Gallo et al., 2011) which allows for generalisation of findings, but leaves out the complexities and divergence between regions within the same country. While it is logical to focus on places such as Cornwall, Wales, and South Yorkshire as the impact of the ECP is expected to be largest, there has been a tendency to over-focus on regions that received the highest levels of ECP, namely places categorised as less developed (formerly Objective 1) regions. While there has been research conducted in transition (formerly Objective 2) regions (Bondonio and Greenbaum, 2006; da Cunha et al., 2017), overall there has been little academic attention given to non-less developed regions in the study of the ECP. This

[6] The Labour Party won a by-election in 2022.

thesis attempts to bridge this gap in literature by focusing on Wakefield, which is categorised as a more developed region, rather than less developed.

Beyond the ECP, Wakefield arguably suffers from being what Hadjimichalis and Hudson (2014, p.215) terms "'ordinary' places" which fails to attract the same level of interest from academics due to lack of extreme performance (whether positive or negative). For instance, in terms of English Indices of Deprivation, Wakefield does not make it to the top 20 local authorities (Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, 2019b). In terms of GDP per capita, in 2021 Wakefield was ranked 175th out of 376 local authorities (Office for National Statistics, 2023a). Thus, hardly the worst performing local authority in the UK. However, this lack of interest in such "ordinary places" (Hadjimichalis and Hudson, 2014, p.215) face arguably results in unexpected surprises such as the results of the 2016 EU referendum and the 2019 general election result in which Wakefield voted for the Conservatives for the first time in eight decades.

Furthermore, while in the above measures Wakefield is not performing poorly, this does not mean that it has no problems. For example, in terms of social mobility, Wakefield scored considerably poorly, ranked 292th out of 324 local authorities in England while the other local authorities in West Yorkshire such as Kirklees and Calderdale scored relatively higher (129th and 119th respectively) (Social Mobility Commission, 2017, pp.170 & 174). The perceived "ordinality" of Wakefield should not be grounds to not research the area. In recent years, interest towards places like Wakefield has increased as a result of it having voted strongly for Leave during the 2016 EU referendum and the surprise Conservative win during the 2019 general election. As much of the studies related to Brexit (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020) as well as the 2019 general election (Curtice, 2020) result has argued, problems related to such electoral results do not suddenly emerge as a result of the votes cast. Instead, they are symptoms of a long-term transition in the fortunes of socio-economic conditions in the UK (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020) which has had an acute impact in former industrial areas such as Wakefield. In reflection of this, Wakefield is at once an "ordinary place" as well as a typical "left-behind" area.

3.3-2 Wakefield as a typical "left-behind" area

The previous section argued how "ordinary places" like Wakefield has the danger of being overlooked in the academic literature. This section will in contrast argue how researching Wakefield can aid in a better understanding of "left-behind" areas. For instance, according to the Regional Human Poverty Index [RHPI] developed by Weziak-Bialowolska (2015, pp.116 & 130) which use life expectancy, educational background, long-term unemployment and risk of poverty in measuring this index, West Yorkshire (which Wakefield is part of) performs worse than South Yorkshire, ranking at 203rd place out of 270 regions (South Yorkshire ranked 198th).[7] Thus, while in general West Yorkshire is considered more affluent and thus not qualifying for funding schemes available for neighbouring regions such as South Yorkshire, this does not mean that it does not suffer from deprivation.

Additionally, as noted previously, recent political developments have increased interest in the region. First, the 2016 EU referendum result indicates Wakefield had similarly high levels of support for Brexit which is closer to the result of South Yorkshire. In the 2016 EU referendum, Wakefield stood out within West Yorkshire with its high proportion of Leave voters (66.4 per cent) was much higher than that of the rest of West Yorkshire (The Electoral Commission, 2016).[8] The high number of Leave voter was closer to the result of South Yorkshire in general where most constituencies voted for Leave by over 60 per cent (The Electoral Commission, 2016).[9] This is perhaps because Wakefield shared some economic traits of that of South Yorkshire as noted previously. The extra financial support required in Wakefield due to containing former coalfields similar to that of South Yorkshire was in fact pointed out by the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber (2004, p.43) in the past. After the Brexit result, Wakefield attracted greater academic attention as it was defined as a "left-behind" areas under, among others the

[7] South Yorkshire ranked 198th, and the worst region in the UK was the West Midlands which was in 236th place out of 270 Nomenclature of Territorial Units of Statistics level 2 [NUTS-2] regions in the EU (Weziak-Bialowolska, 2015, pp.130–131). The variables considered in this analysis were life expectancy, educational background of working aged people, long-term unemployment rates, and "risk of poverty" (Weziak-Bialowolska, 2015, p.116). Note how none of these variables include income, GDP per capita or GVA which are the more common ways of measurement.

[8] The share of Leave vote in West Yorkshire: Bradford (54.2 per cent); Calderdale (55.7 per cent); Kirklees (54.7 per cent); Leeds (49.7 per cent) (The Electoral Commission, 2016)

[9] The share of Leave vote in South Yorkshire: Barnsley (68.3 per cent); Doncaster (69.0 per cent); Rotherham (67.9 per cent); Sheffield (51.0 per cent) (The Electoral Commission, 2016)

definition developed by the Local Trust (2018) in collaboration with Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion. They used a combination of data from the Community Needs Index and Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 to identify “left-behind” areas at ward level (Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, 2022). Out of 21 wards in Wakefield, five were identified under this definition as “left-behind” (Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, 2022).

Beyond the quantifiable definition of “left-behind” areas from the Local Trust and Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, this thesis will be using its own more normative definition of “left-behind” areas as was introduced in the previous chapter. To reiterate, the definition of “left-behind” was “a place and its people who are facing relative decline” with the concept of “relative decline” defined as “a place which is experiencing both real and perceived economic and social decline in relation to its past and the national average, which is persistent”. Under both quantifiable and qualifiable definition, Wakefield is a typical “left-behind” area. One other reason behind the choice of Wakefield as a case study is the fact that the author lived in the Wakefield District between September 2018 and August 2023. While this research does not involve an ethnographical approach, living in the area during the research process has allowed access to physical archival data using public libraries in the local district such as the Wakefield library, Pontefract library, and South Elmsall library.

The author not being originally from the local area also meant that by living in the area it presented an opportunity to build trust and network with key gatekeepers who helped with accessing some of the interviewees. Finally, living in the district has informed some of the less tangible aspects of this research project such as forming the direction of the research, and make more qualifiable decisions of the data collected as part of the research. For example, the section on apprenticeship and skills in Chapter 5 made use of publicly available data such as the number of residents with level 3 qualification. However, having personally known local residents undergoing apprenticeships, and hearing about the risks and challenges involved in taking up such qualifications was what informed this thesis to then ask the question of how viable apprenticeship was in reality as a tool for social mobility. Thus, while the research is predominantly data-led, the lived

experience of the author has also given more insight to the first-hand experiences of the effects of current policy in the local area.

While Wakefield is a typical "left-behind" area, it is worth noting that this does not mean that change has not happened in the area – a point which will be picked up in Chapter 8 when this thesis explores the new pivot towards the arts. In areas such as Wakefield in the North of England, the area is almost synonymous with that of working-class community due to its history as a manufacturing hub (Tönnies, 2007, p.375). However, in the post-industrial economy, fewer workers are in manual labour occupations leading to cities in the country re-imagining themselves to fit the wider cultural and economic shifts (Tönnies, 2007, p.305; Ehland, 2007, p.19). The North has not been immune to such changes with just 11 per cent of its workers in the manufacturing sector in the Yorkshire and the Humber region, with overall employment in the manufacturing sector halving since 1980s (Rhodes, 2020, pp.8 & 10). Despite such rapid change, things like culture and related socio-economic issues take more time to change. For instance, educational attainment levels remain low and Wakefield among other Northern cities had one of the lowest percentages of degree holders (20.0 per cent in 2011 and bottom fifth among 74 cities in the UK) (Pike et al., 2016, p.12). Thus, the educational attainment gap continues to be a persistent issue in formerly working-class communities. Although this may give rise to the idea that one way to tackling this issue is by encouraging people without formal skills into an apprenticeship programme, this thesis argues in Chapter 5, that this is an increasingly difficult route for the left-behind people in Wakefield. Thus, change is happening, but old issues persist and becomes entrenched, a point which will be discussed in detail in this thesis.

In short, Wakefield was chosen as a case study as an "ordinary" place which has hitherto attracted little academic interest, and also as a typical "left-behind" area which makes it a relevant case study in understanding such areas. Combined, Wakefield as case study offers a contribution to the growing literature on "left-behind" areas (Goodwin and Heath, 2016b; Wood et al., 2023) as well as bringing new insight in an area which struggles to attract academic attention. Before discussing the data used for this research project, the following section will clarify how the direction of the research was heavily influenced by conversations and lived experience of the author.

3.4 Direction of the research

Before discussing the data collected for this research project, this section will explain how the direction of the research was based on a mixture of conversations and lived experience of the author. For the duration of the research project, the author lived in a small former coal mining community in Wakefield District. The conversations with local residents and sharing the lived experience by living in Wakefield builds on the work by Denton et al. (2021, p.4) who developed a "novel swim-along method" which entailed the researcher to be part of a group and share activities with the interviewee to gather unique interview data. To clarify, an ethnographical approach does not compose a part of the main methodology of this thesis. The main reason it does not constitute part of the main research method is because no direct data was collected as part of living in Wakefield. Additionally, the original work by Denton et al. (2021, p.6) mention how the comparison of interview data on the ground and during a swim differs and indicate "the ephemeral nature of some knowledge and the slippery form that 'truth' can take". This epistemological position is closer to a constructivist position as explained by Barnett (2014, p.158) mentioned earlier in this chapter. Since this thesis adopts a CR position and not a constructivist's position, this method was not fully adopted in the data collection method which will be outlined in the next section.

However, admittedly, the discussions and lived experience the author had in Wakefield did inform the direction this research took even if they did not form empirical data collected. For example, in Chapter four and five the thesis argues that working as a coal miner were well-paid job that garnered respect and the comradery among the miners is hard to be replicated. While evidence to support these claims were found in other academic work (Turner, 2000; Strangleman, 2001) and through data from the Office for National Statistics (2016b), the initial reason this thesis decided to explore this route was based on conversations with a former coal miner in Wakefield. The motivation to look into the vocational sector and question whether it was still a viable route for working-class residents in Wakefield began when a local Wakefield resident the author knew struggled financially to stay on an apprenticeship programme. This is once again what gave direction to Chapter 5 of this thesis. In Chapter 5 and 8 this thesis discusses the logistics sector and its influence in Wakefield. The original incentive to research the

logistics sector stemmed from discussions with another local resident and their colleagues who sought employment at the *NEXT* factory. Thus, living in Wakefield presented valuable insight that helped direct the research in the right direction. While this does not mean that all future research must entail the researcher living in the local area, it does support the importance of at least some input from local residents even if they do not make the main evidence for the research. The next section will explore the what, how, and why in terms of data collection for this thesis.

3.5 Research Data

This section will explain three things pertaining to the data used in this thesis. One, what data was collected to answer the research questions. Two, how the data was collected including the sources as well as the method where relevant. Three, why the data was collected, providing both the rationale behind the data chosen and the limitation of the data. The first section will explain the main data gathered for this thesis, elite interview data. It will discuss why elite interviewing was chosen as the method for this thesis, the limitation of the interview data, and how by combining both original and publicly available interview data this thesis has overcome some of the limitations. The second section includes all other data collected for this thesis and provide information of the what, how, and why they were chosen. In line with this thesis deploying a mixed method approach, the data include sources from different disciplines such as geographical data, historical data, survey data, socio-economic indicators, and legal texts. While it may at first glance seem like an eclectic mix of different types of data, the second section will explain how they are relevant to answering the research questions. The data will be listed in the order of the chapters of this thesis. In short, the aim of this section is to explain the data gathered, but also explore the potential limitations of them.

3.5.1 Elite Interviews

Similar to previous studies conducted on the ECP such as one by Willett et al. (2019, p.1349), this thesis will also conducted elite interviews. The reason to conduct elite interviews is because elites are considered to be more knowledgeable of the topic and thus would require less structured questions (Burnham et al., 2008, pp.231-232) and thus the research will benefit from obtaining knowledge that will be unlikely to be obtained otherwise. In particular, the ECP is a complex policy that has spanned several

decades, and while there are publicly available sources such as other academic papers, European Commission reports, and Hansard data to obtain understanding of how it works, the experience is likely to differ depending on local authority in question. This is why this thesis conducted elite interviews with individuals who were likely to have knowledge of the ECP.

One of the key challenges that this research faced that echoes that of others was the difficulty in finding participants. The response rate of calls for elite interviews was low at below 30 per cent. The limitation of this as well as the reason for the low response rate will be discussed further in the next section (3.5 Ethical considerations) of this chapter. The low response rate was partially expected as this was raised by both the supervisors and the literature as a potential limitation to the research.

In order to mitigate such risks, this paper collected interview data through two avenues. First was to conduct the elite interview. The strategy involved in this method was to make use of publicly available contact details on relevant websites and send the interview invite via email. The contact details were collected from Wakefield Council website, Gov.UK website, and websites of projects and organisations in operation in Wakefield and West Yorkshire that received ECP funding. Another strategy employed was to attend academic workshops and conferences in which local authority staff were involved. This networking method yielded 0 participants during the pandemic when the events were held online. However, post-lock down restrictions this method yielded two elite interviews indicating the importance of face-to-face networking in building rapport. Additionally, the researcher living in Wakefield provided another avenue to build rapport as having a shared understanding of the local area proved useful in building personal relations with interviewees and key gatekeepers. Despite some success, this method still had less than 30 per cent response rate. Thus, while this method allowed the researcher to conduct elite interviews that were directly relevant to the research, the total number of interviewees who provided interview data was five.

The second strategy was to make use of existing publicly available interview data from documentaries with heavy involvement of Wakefield Council (BBC Radio 4, 2021), think tanks (Mattinson, 2020), journalists (Payne, 2021), and academics (Dennis et al., 1956; Turner, 2000) that were relevant to the research question. In relation to this, archival

data became useful as it provided access to the views expressed by historical key figures relevant to the research question (Scargill, 1975; Anon, 1975; Thatcher, 1993). By utilising publicly available interview data, it reduced the duplication of data being generated as well as better access to individuals or groups that would have otherwise been hard to reach. In other words, utilising networks of more established journalists and academics. This allowed the researcher to overcome the issue of access. Despite best efforts, this thesis is aware of potential limitations stemming from such data gathering method and this will be discussed in greater detail in section 3.4 Ethical considerations of this chapter.

Expected outcomes from interviewing individuals with experience of handling ECP was twofold. One, it was expected that the elite interviewees would have unique insight to the impact of the ECP on both the local economy and the governance structure, both key focus of this research. It was also expected that some, especially those working in customer facing positions of the ECP funded project would have a first-hand understanding of how the ECP would be received by locals who relied on services being funded by the ECP. Overall, elite interviews are intended to gather information on what people who were directly involved in the ECP thought of the project as well as draw insight into what local residents who directly accessed the services think of the ECP. This was the reason why elite interviews were conducted.

In sum, the interview data obtained through elite interviews consist of both interviews conducted by the researcher herself as well as publicly available interview data that the researcher collected through online search. Increasing participation numbers proved a challenge, and it also showcased the importance of personal rapport building through face-to-face interaction as well as the benefit of being familiar with the local context. The following section will discuss the data gathering method of this research consisting of archival data, geographic data, and data gathered through Google Advanced Search.

3.5.2 Other Data

Interview data collected through elite interviews using two main avenues (researcher's own interviews and publicly available interview data) presented the main primary data gathered for this research. This section will provide an explanation of the other data gathered to answer the research questions and explore the what, how, and why in terms

of the data collected. This section will provide explanation of the data collected in the order of the thesis chapters. This is because the data gathered are mostly relevant within the chapter and the purpose of each chapter with limited cross over between the different chapters. This section will thus discuss the data gathered for Chapters 4-8.

Chapter 4 has a strong historical focus, and thus made extensive use of archival data. This included official historical data on coal production, coal mine numbers, and employment figures from the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (2021). Data on earnings was extracted from the ONS which had released in 2016 the recording of the New Earnings Survey data between 1970 to 1996 (Office for National Statistics, 2016a; Office for National Statistics, 2016b). The combination of the two datasets allowed to flesh out the socio-economic conditions of mining communities in general. To understand the impact of the coal mine closures at the individual level, this chapter used a combination of primary and secondary data. For primary data, it used The Redundant Mineworkers (Payments Scheme) Order (Anon, 1968) which is a legal document stipulating the amount of redundancy pay former miners were eligible for. This was then cross referenced with secondary data collected from academic journal articles (Turner, 1995; Turner, 2000; Strangleman, 2001) which conducted interviews to former miners to understand the experience of the miners in terms of pay and occupation after the mine closures. This has allowed for an analysis of the intent of policy post coal mine closures and the actual impact. To further understand the intent behind the policy choices, this chapter used declassified information made available from 2014 and made available online by the Margaret Thatcher Foundation (1985c). Thus, archival data was the primary focus of Chapter four. In terms of limitations, finding data for Wakefield proved difficult and that is why the data on earnings were collected at industry level rather than local authority level.

Chapter 5 discusses briefly the past of Wakefield such as how it developed historically to focus on coal and textile as well as how politically speaking it is one of the typical “Red Wall” seats. However, much of the focus is on the present and analysing whether improving apprenticeship could improve the future prospects of the region. Similar to Chapter four, it makes extensive use of ONS data in fleshing out the socio-economic conditions of present-day Wakefield. Apprenticeship data was once again mainly

national-level data and extensively used data from the Social Mobility Commission (2020) as apprenticeship has been linked strongly to the concept of social mobility. While much of the historical development of apprenticeship relied on mostly academic journal articles and books, to illustrate the comparatively high personal financial costs for an apprentice while they work and study for the qualification used a combination of government data on the minimum apprentice wage (Gov.UK, 2023a), and housing prices in Wakefield (Home.co.uk, 2023). While this is a crude measure to analyse the affordability of apprenticeship, this does illustrate how an apprenticeship route is not necessarily a valid route for some people in Wakefield. This further reveals the gap between policy intention and policy in practice.

Chapter 6 will focus on the development of the ECP and how its complex nature and passive promotion combined may explain lukewarm public support towards the ECP. To discuss the historical development of the ECP, the chapter makes use of both academic articles (secondary sources) and legal documents (Council Regulation (EEC) No 724/75 of 18 March, 1975; Council Regulation (EEC) No 2052/88 of 24 June, 1988; Council Regulation (EC) No 1164/94 of 16 May, 1994) similar to the method used in Chapter four. To conduct a systematic analysis of media coverage of the ECP, this chapter used Google Advanced Search to find data on the British media coverage of the ECP. This was used to comb through a large number of publications from five publication sources (the *Wakefield Express*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Express*, *BBC News*, and *The Guardian*) to ensure balance between local/national coverage as well as left/right divide of the political position of the editorial board. Use of Google Advanced Search, like any other research method comes with certain limitations. This data collection method while useful, comes with certain limitations such as the biases that exist in the search engine itself (Goldman, 2008) and the context optimisation which results in different search output depending on the location of the researcher (Google Search, 2023). Thus, while the exact phrases used in the Boolean search is explained in Chapter 6, it should be kept in mind that an exact reproduction of the data may not be possible because of this.

Chapter 7 analyses the impact of the ECP on the multi-governance structure in the UK. It analyses the governance structure of the UK with what the multi-level governance theory had predicted. Thus, in order to do this, the chapter focused on both the

academic journal articles which developed the multi-level governance theory and 18 government documents (supranational, government, and local level) to assess its impact. In addition, the chapter brought in academic journal articles which discussed the decentralisation process in the UK. To ensure the relevance of the journal articles, this chapter also used literature searching tools such as Connected Papers and Web of Science. While this was used in previous chapters such as the literature review chapter (Chapter 2), it was of particular importance in this chapter as the decentralisation literature was a new field of research for the researcher. Thus, to overcome the limitation of the researcher's familiarity in the subject field this thesis used such literature searching tools to ensure the relevance of the articles used in the analysis.

Chapter 8 focused on the impact of the ECP on Wakefield by utilising geographic data, business cases, and EU migration data as well as public opinion. Geographical data was used to illustrate how the coal mining industry had an impact on the second nature development of Wakefield. To do this, the paper used a mixture of data from the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (2019b), ONS Geography (2022a; 2022b), Northern Mine Research Society (n.d.), the Hudson Institute of Mineralogy (2023), and data from University of Edinburgh (McGarva, 2017). To create the map, this thesis used QGIS. Some of the business cases used in Chapter 8 also relied on the information provided by the business websites such as those from Screen Yorkshire (2023), the Art House (n.d.), Langthwaite Business Association (2022), and Konect 62 (2023). Funding information pertaining to the ECP relied on a combination of press releases from Wakefield Council (2020) and West Yorkshire Combined Authority (2018; 2021b), as well as the Cohesion Data (2023). One of the key challenges posed was to find data of ECP that included the local authority-level information as much of the data was presented as either UK-wide or as England. Press releases (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2018; Wakefield Council, 2020; West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2021b) as well as media coverage by local papers (Drysdale, 2015) were important sources to keep track of ECP funded projects in Wakefield.

For primary data on public attitudes, the chapter relied on polling conducted by YouGov (2021), and World Values Survey (Haerpfer et al., 2022). While these data do not provide a specific survey data of Wakefield, it provided insight into general trends throughout

the UK from which some facts could be deduced. Take the example of attitudes towards EU migrants. Studies have found that the British public are capable of making distinctions between different immigrant groups with more favourable views towards those with higher skills, from higher income countries, and work in sectors facing acute labour shortage such as healthcare. This is what we know of the general attitude towards immigration. We also know that EU migrants from CEECs tend to be perceived as a threat compared to those from Western European countries. The ONS has data on the number of immigrants from CEECs at local authority level, and thus we know that there is a particularly high representation of Polish immigrants in the case of Wakefield. Secondary data also suggests that immigrants from CEECs tend to be working in low-skilled occupation. Triangulating this data with media coverage of immigrants from CEECs and how they are taking jobs from locals, one could link together how "concerns" over immigration from CEECs could be linked back to the socio-economic conditions in Wakefield (see Chapter 8 for further detail). Thus, primary data are predominantly at national level, but by triangulating the data with other secondary data, this thesis can draw insights specific to Wakefield. This method of triangulation of multiple data sources provides a blueprint for future research conducted in the local authority-level analysis.

In sum, this section has laid out how the data for this thesis was collected focusing on the what, how, and why as well as the limitations of each chapter. The aim here was to illustrate how the mixed method approach has allowed for the thesis to answer the research questions. The limitations also show how attempts at replicating this research can be conducted. The following section further provides the ethical considerations of this thesis referring to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic in the research design and how this thesis attempted to avoid stereotyping of Wakefield as a result of this research.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This research is expected to encounter limited ethical issues, but as part of conducting the elite interviews, it has obtained ethical approval from the University of Leeds. The ethical review confirmation email is provided in Appendix B as proof of this project passing the University of Leeds ethical review process. The main reason for the expectation that limited ethical issues would arise from this research is because it does

not deal with sensitive questions or groups such as politically sensitive questions, vulnerable groups, and almost no repercussions for participants. However, this does not mean there are no ethical questions surrounding research, and this will be fleshed out in this section as it has links to limitations of the research method adopted by this research. The first point of concern is obtaining consent from participants to the elite interviews. Obtaining informed consent from participants prior, during, and post elite interviews is crucial and this has to be explained to participants both in written and verbal format (Webster et al., 2014, p.89). This aims to minimise confusion or misunderstanding about the participants' rights, ensuring that they are not pressured in any way to take part in the research, and they make their choices voluntarily. Although generally speaking, participants asked to provide written consent remain apprehensive (Graham et al., 2007, p.21), this did not pose an issue in this research as the elite interview participants were working in the UK public sector and were familiar with the need to obtain written consent for ethical reasons (Graham et al., 2007, pp.14-15). In short, ethical considerations in terms of obtaining consent was not a major problem in this research.

However, the impact of COVID-19 and the ensuing restrictions to not only research activities, but also day-to-day activities did pose a great impact on the research. Initially, the research plan was to conduct a face-to-face survey to collect data on public perception towards the ECP and Brexit in Wakefield. However, the COVID-19 pandemic first became a national emergency in the UK on 16 March 2020 when the government announced the public from refraining from non-essential travels leading to the first lockdown on 23 March 2020 (Institute for Government, 2022). With a total of three lockdowns in the UK, movement was severely restricted (Sherrington, 2022). It became increasingly clear that a face-to-face survey was practically impossible as well as posing considerable risk towards both the researcher and participants, and thus the decision was taken after ethical approval was given that this research would not be conducting a survey. The pandemic also had an impact on gathering potential interviewees with response rates at below 30 per cent. Considering both ethical considerations over the risks of COVID-19 before vaccination became widely available, as well as the limitation in

forming key networks, this research relied on publicly available interview and archival data to supplement the elite interviews conducted by the researcher.

Another concern raised in terms of ethical considerations, as briefly mentioned at the beginning of this section, was to do with reputational damage. Since political positions such as the vote to Leave comes with unfavourable stereotyping (Nurse and Sykes, 2019; Evans, 2019), there was some concern over the reputation of Wakefield as a strongly Leave supporting area may imply for the region. In addition, Wakefield being part of the "Red Wall" seats faces an additional potential source of unfavourable stereotyping. However, other studies that conducted interviews in "left-behind" areas did not shy away from disclosing the location. For example, in trying to better understand the "Red Wall" seats, the thinktank *UK in a Changing Europe* conducted focus groups in Yorkshire and Humberside in which participants expressed their concerns and their voting choices (Menon, 2022). In another example, the work by Wood et al. (2023, p.7) specified that they conducted interviews in Sheffield, Newry, Rochdale, Rotherham, and Derry with the explicit research aim of highlighting the views of "left-behind" areas. These research shows the benefit of disclosing the research locations in the pursuit of improving understanding of the perspectives of such areas. Furthermore, social attitudes in "Red Wall" seats do not diverge much from other places in the UK (English, 2021), meaning that there is a possibility that some of the research findings from this thesis will in some aspects reflect overall social attitudes in the UK as a whole. The aim of this thesis is explicitly to move beyond such stereotyping in an attempt to understand the decision from the perspective of the area. In lieu of conducting interviews with local residents or focus groups, this thesis has looked into the historical development of Wakefield, contrasting the socio-economic realities of the area between its past, present, and potential future. By taking such a holistic approach and focusing on a singular area, it was possible to conduct research that considered a wide range of factors affecting a location.

In fact, similar concerns over reputation has led to *Coal is Our Life* by Dennis et al. (1956), one of the seminal works of coal mining communities, to focus on a singular location had used a pseudonym by calling it "Ashton" which is a fictional name. However, it was later revealed to be in Featherstone, Wakefield, a revelation which did

not entirely come as a surprise with the way the community was described, it was relatively obvious as to where the research took place. A more recent work that looked at the same area of Featherstone titled *Coal was Our Life* by Turner (2000) did not bother to create a fictional name for the area. Furthermore, it would be a challenge to pseudonymise the single case study as it makes use of projects funded by the ECP that are taking place in Wakefield. On balance, this thesis has made the decision that it is worth not pseudonymising the region.

In addition, although the direction of the research was influenced by local residents through the "swim along" method approach, no direct empirical data was collected through this method. The "swim along" method was not an approach which was actively sought as a research method for this thesis. It was only after the empirical data collection was completed that the researcher realised that some of the approaches taken for this thesis was ultimately traced back to conversations the researcher had with local residents. Approaches such as the focus on vocational training, questioning the close-knit community idea, the decision to investigate the distinction between coal mining and the logistics sector jobs were all as a result of conversations that were unrecorded, and part of the daily life of the researcher. Since no direct data was collected such as recordings of the conversations, ethical consent was also not sought. The reason this method is mentioned is because in hindsight, the contributions of lived in experience played a significant role in the design of this thesis, which warrants mention. Ethically, this thesis took the approach that it was necessary to credit the fact that approaches to this thesis was one that was rooted in the lived experience of the local area.

In sum, potential ethical problems are few, but precautions were taken to ensure the protection of rights of participants, and by taking a holistic look at the past, present and future of Wakefield this thesis has attempted to go beyond the negative stereotyping that entails much of "left-behind" areas.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter on methodology has explained what the main and sub-research questions are, the philosophical position underpinning the entire thesis, why Wakefield was chosen as case study, data collection methods, and the ethical considerations and

limitations of this research. The main research question asks *What was the impact of the ECP in "left-behind" areas?*, and to answer this research question, Wakefield was chosen as a typical "left-behind" area. The two sub-research questions are 1. *Why did "left-behind" areas such as Wakefield vote Leave?*, and 2. *What, if any, were the positive impacts of the ECP in Wakefield?*. The ontological and epistemological position of this thesis adopts that of the CR position, which allows for this thesis to use a mixed method approach. Furthermore, the CR's view that the structure exists prior to agency and agency has the ability to make a choice for its action has informed the chaptalisation and the argument in each chapter. By presenting a firm philosophical position, this thesis aims to contribute to calls for more philosophically conscious research (Halperin and Heath, 2017). Using Wakefield which is at once an "ordinary" place with limited academic interest, and part of the growing literature on the "left-behind" areas, this thesis provides a new case study to the field of Brexit and the ECP. The section on data collection has outlined how this thesis adopts a mixed method approach, making use of both qualitative and quantitative data to answer the research questions. The final section on ethical considerations has outlined how this thesis has been conducted in accordance with research ethics as well as limitations arising from the choice of research method. The limitations provide a key rationale for some of the data collection methods and compared to the discussion on the philosophical positioning provides a more practical consideration of this research. The next chapter will focus on the structure, and in particular the historical context of the development of the coal mining sector, the influence of Thatcher, and how her policies have shaped the future of former coal mining areas such as Wakefield.

Chapter 4 Thatcherism and the decline of the coal mines

4.0 Introduction

In understanding why former coal mining communities like Wakefield voted in favour of Brexit, history acts as an important structural context. Not only was the Leave vote strongest among the older generation (Hobolt, 2016; Goodwin and Heath, 2016b), but also the past was something that was much discussed in the context of Brexit by local residents according to multiple studies (Mattinson, 2020; Payne, 2021; BBC Radio 4, 2021; Menon, 2022; Wood et al., 2023). Clearly, the past played an important part in people's voting intentions as well as how they perceived the current day socio-economic conditions. The next chapter (Chapter 5) will delve deeper into how the legacy of some of the issues raised in this chapter had an impact on the socio-economic conditions and in particular the educational outcome in the area.

What this chapter aims to do is to trace back modern issues in former coal mining communities by addressing how we got here. The relative decline of such communities is interlinked to the decisions and the way in which the coal mine closures were managed back under the Thatcher government in the 1980s. Although this thesis is far from being the first to explore the impact of Thatcher and Thatcherism on the coal mine closures, it distinguishes itself from past attempts by analysing how the policy choices and failures *after* the mine closures shaped the socio-economic conditions in former mining communities. There are several advantages in analysing the past in this thesis. The first is with the passage of time, the topic has become less contentious, pressing, and thus allows for more careful analysis of the perspectives of the government as well as the trade unions. The second benefit comes from the release of classified documents of this time period in 2014. These new documents allow better understanding of the government thinking at the time, which would not have been available to past research conducted back in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, now is an ideal time with the passage of time and armed with new evidence to tackle the assessment of the Thatcher government's response to the coal mining communities.

Following the CR framework, this chapter will first explain the structural context of British coal at the global stage, followed by an exploration of mainly the disagreements between the Thatcher government and the National Union of Miners [NUM] led by

Arthur Scargill, Thatcher government's policy response to the coal mine closures with a particular focus on the Employment Act, the redundancy payment scheme, as well as the people-based response (Youth Training Scheme [YTS]) and a place-based response (British Coal Enterprise [BCE]). The analysis of each topic reveals three main findings. First, how the antagonistic relationship between the Thatcher government and the NUM stifled opportunities to devise policy that would have supported coal mining communities. Second, how Thatcherism's focus on neoliberal policies failed to adequately support coal mining communities after the mine closures despite relatively generous redundancy payments. Third, due to the antagonistic relationship between government and trade union as well as overtly neoliberal policies ill-fit at dealing with the socio-economic issues in former mining communities, later attempts at reversing the relative decline faced limited success. This chapter will conclude by arguing that while not all of the blame could be placed on Thatcher as an individual, repeated failures from the 1980s under her government and beyond has contributed to the long-term relative decline in places like Wakefield.

This chapter provides the historical structural context that helps answer the sub-research question which asks why Wakefield voted for Leave. The next section will focus on how British coal was in a state of decline decades before the Thatcher government took office, thus making clear that the issue of coal was long-term, and the Thatcher government's response came at a time when it was clear that a viable future for the sector was increasingly unlikely.

4.1 Decline of British Coal, a Global Perspective

Although the main focus of this chapter is to identify and analyse the government response to the decline of coal, and what measures were in place (or lack thereof) to mitigate unemployment among the former miners, it is necessary to start with why the coal mines were closed. The first thing to understand is that the coal mining sector was one of consistent decline. Data on employment, production, as well as number of mines show that employment has been in decline since 1958, production has been in decline since 1962, and number of mines have been in decline ever since nationalisation of the industry in 1946 as shown in Figure 4-0-1 and Figure 4-0-2. Some of the surge in production of coal can be linked to the two World Wars as well as the post-war boom.

However, despite this in particular employment nosedived from 607,000 employees in 1960 to 290,000, essentially halving the number of workers in the industry in just a decade (see Figure 4-0-1). Similarly, the number of mines in operation[10] plummeted from 698 mines in 1960 to 293 mines by 1970, closely mirroring the decline of employment and production (from 198million tonnes to 147million tonnes in the same period) (Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2021) (see Figure 4-0-1 and Figure 4-0-2). Taken together, it is clear that the industry has been in a state of permanent decline decades before the Thatcher government took office. Thus, while it is true that job losses in the mining industry was greater under the Thatcher government at 80 per cent compared to the 42.8 per cent decline under the Wilson government (Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2021), this was in the backdrop of a consistent decline in the industry which could be traced back even before WWII. In terms of what this means, to put it simply, the coal mining industry was in serious trouble. Thinking within government was one of how to manage the decline, rather than whether the decline could be stopped.

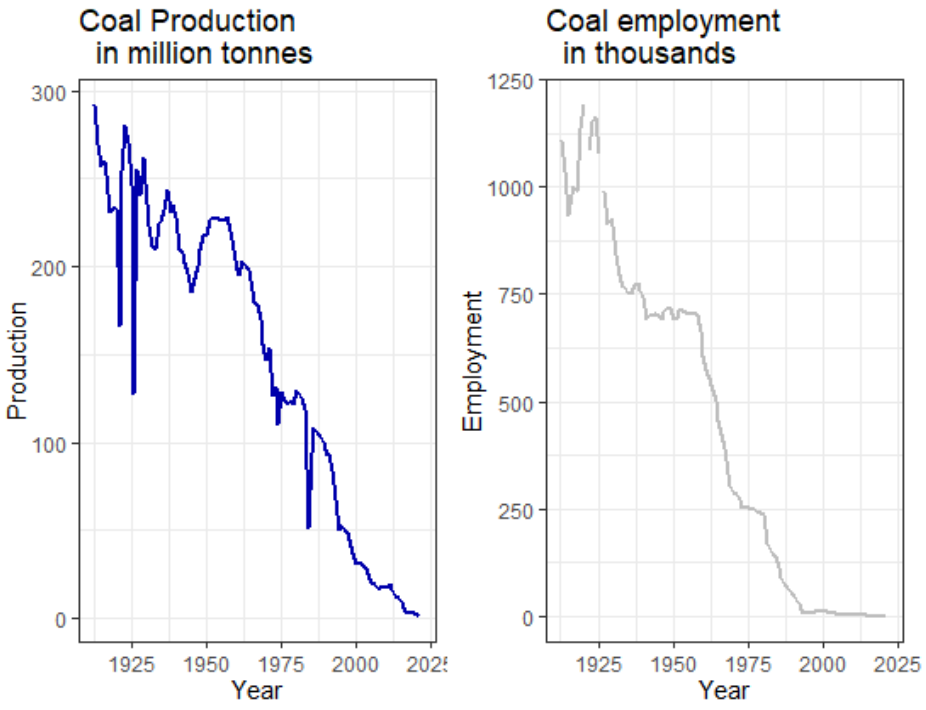

FIGURE 4-0-1: DATA ON THE NUMBER OF COALS BEING PRODUCED IN MILLION TONES AND THE EMPLOYMENT FIGURES IN THE COAL MINING INDUSTRY IN THE THOUSANDS BETWEEN 1913-2020. DATA EXTRACTED FROM

[10] Here, mines are defined by those operated by the NCB as there is official data for this.

DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY (2021). THE GREY LINE DEPICTS THE EMPLOYMENT FIGURES, AND THE BLUE LINE DEPICTS THE COAL PRODUCTION NUMBERS. EMPLOYMENT DATA FROM 1921 AND 1926 ARE MISSING FROM THE OFFICIAL DATA AND THUS ARE LEFT AS BLANKS. THE OFFICIAL DATA DATES BACK TO 1853, BUT UNTIL 1913 THE DATA IS AVERAGED IN A TEN-YEAR PERIOD AND WAS THUS OMITTED FROM THIS GRAPH. THE DIP IN PRODUCTION

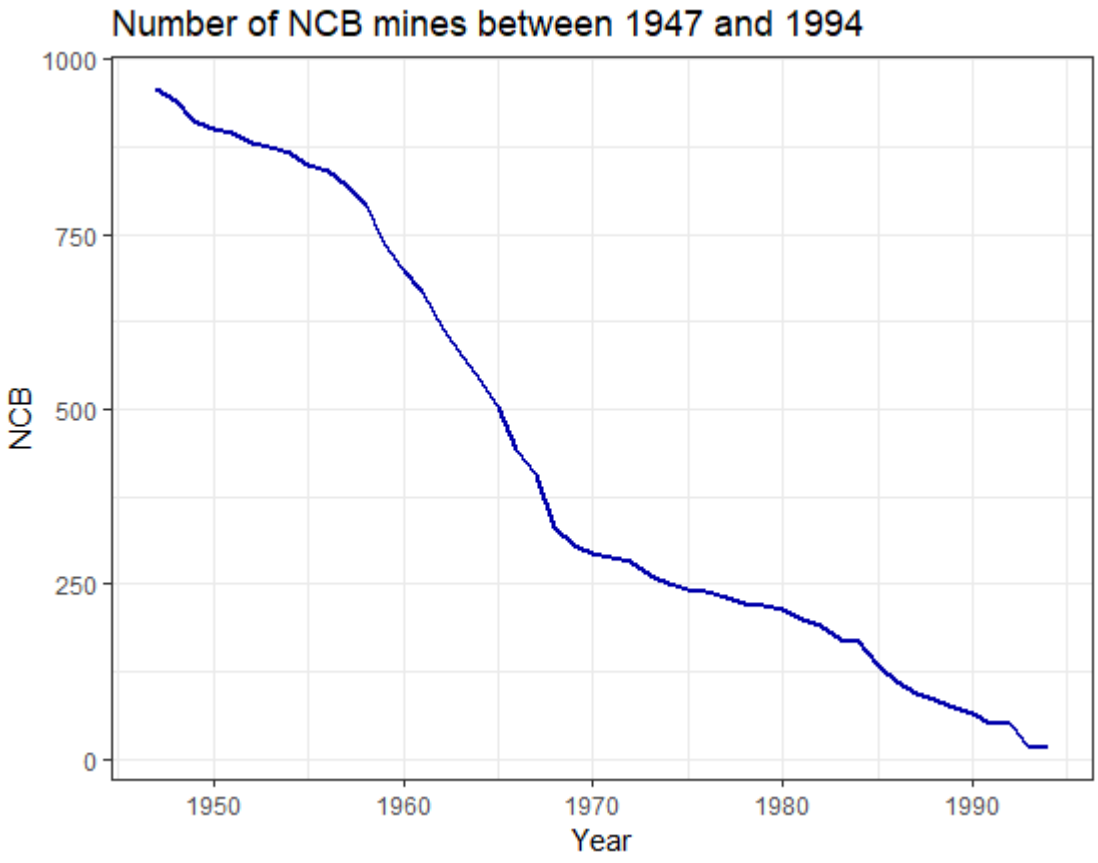

FIGURE 4-0-2: NUMBER OF NATIONAL COAL BOARD [NCB] MINES BETWEEN 1947 AND 1994. DATA FROM DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY (2021). WHILE THE NCB WAS CREATED IN 1946 AND DISSOLVED IN 1987, THE DATA COVERS THE DATA FROM AFTER THE DISSOLUTION AS THE MINES REMAINED IN OPERATION.

If the situation in the industry was of overall decline in the UK, such domestic issues had roots at the global stage. From the economic history perspective, the reason for the decline was the same whether it was happening in the UK or Japan (which was rapidly growing into an advanced liberal democracy at the time). The emergence of oil as a cheaper alternative to coal and as a key source of energy was arguably one of the primary reasons behind the decline of coal (Ashworth and Pegg, 1986, pp.422, 428, 439,

619). In other words, the decline in demand for coal was universal and mainly due to the rise in cheaper alternative sources of energy such as oil.

This is shown in an adapted graph from Our World in Data (2022) which visualised data from the British Petroleum [BP] Statistical Review of World Energy in Figure 4-0-3. The data shows the initial high reliance on coal as an energy source back in 1968 which accounted for 50.37 per cent of total energy consumption in the UK. However, by 1970 the presence of oil began to grow in importance, accounting for 48.17 per cent of the total energy consumption, slightly more than coal which accounted for 43.78 per cent of the total energy consumption.

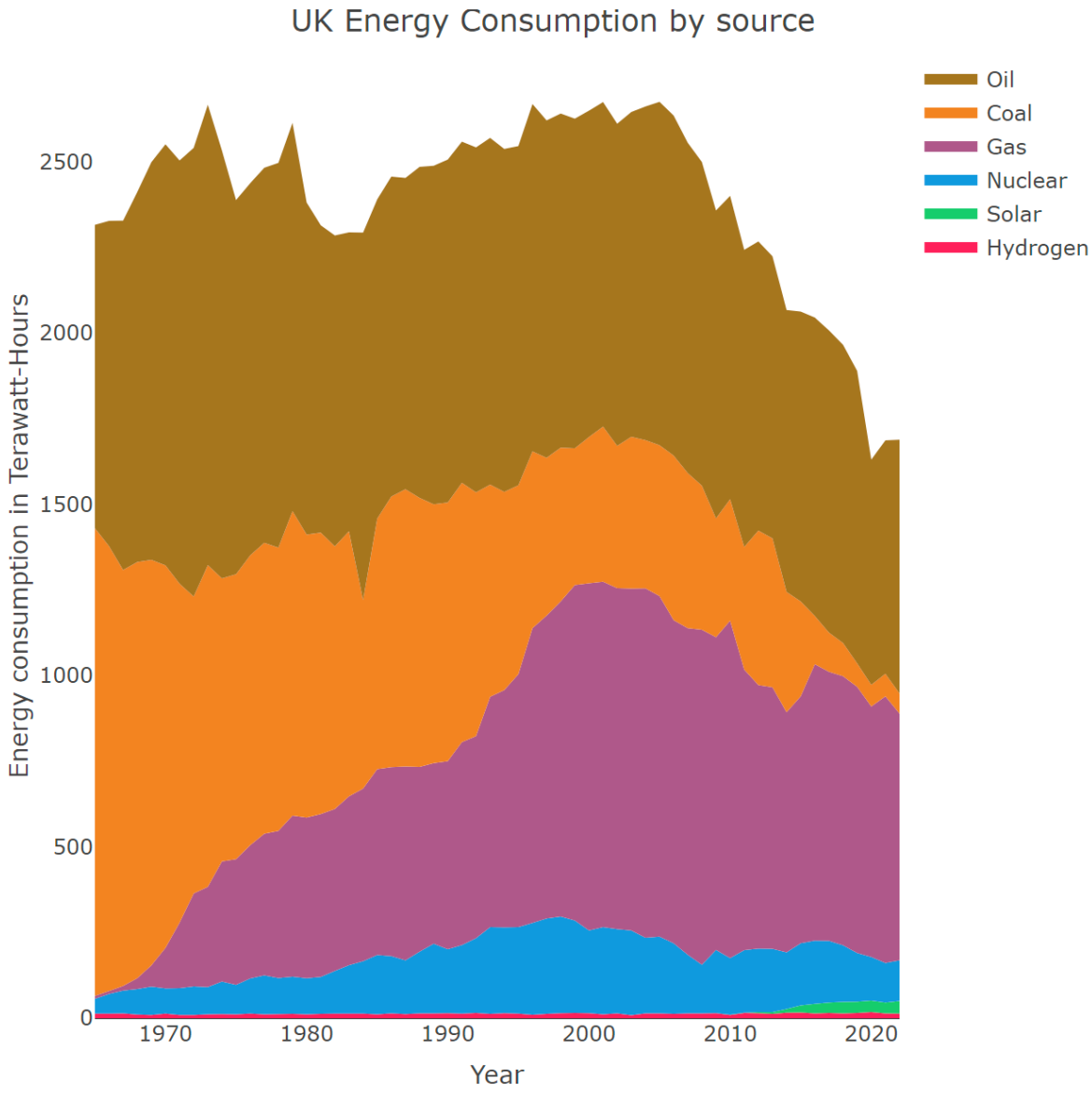

FIGURE 4-0-3: : ENERGY CONSUMPTION BY SOURCE IN THE UK USING DATA FROM OUR WORLD IN DATA (2022) BETWEEN 1965 AND 2021.

In addition to external factors such as consumption, internal factors also played a significant role as exemplified by domestic production of said energy sources which was also changing at this time. In the post-war period, domestic UK production of energy sources was dominated by coal. For example, in 1968 it accounted for almost all production of energy sources at 92.17 per cent according to the Department of Energy & Climate Change (2009, p.5). However, by 1978 production of other sources such as oil and gas were growing in the UK, and coal production by this point accounted for just 41.90 per cent of all energy source production (Department of Energy & Climate Change, 2009, p.5). Thus, domestically the UK was diversifying its energy source production by increasing the production of alternatives to coal. One reason for this was the growing environmental concerns leading to a pursuit of alternatives to coal at government level. For example, as early as the 1950s scientists were aware of climate change, and the Energy Technology Support Unit had advised the Thatcher government to work on improving the energy efficiency as one way of tackling this issue (Agrawala, 1998; Lees and Eyre, 2021).

In short, the declining demand for coal was not just to do with the rise of a cheaper alternative, but also to do with the increasing understanding for the need of energy efficiency. At the time under the Thatcher government, energy efficiency was the primary goal rather than for environmental considerations (unlike what Johnson had alluded to when he made the comment that the Thatcher government was at the forefront of tackling climate change). Nor was the attempt to pivot towards nuclear energy, as was argued by MP Dennis Skinner (Hansard, 1984), to undermine the efforts of the miners' strike. While the emergence of nuclear power as an alternative energy source had some impact on the demand of coal, the overall supply of coal globally also contributed to the decline in demand for British coal.

Rutledge and Wright (1985) argued that the increase in the global supply of coal contributed to the diminished profitability of it. Coal price convergence was happening at relatively earlier stage as far back as the 19th Century according to Wegerich (2016, pp.191–192). This was triggered by the increase in number of coal mines globally especially with developments in countries such as Australia, which remains the largest

exporter of both coking and thermal coal today (International Energy Agency, 2022a; International Energy Agency, 2022b).

In addition, technological innovation meant, similar to the case of other high income states like Japan (Nishinarita, 1994), higher productivity and decline in price (Rutledge and Wright, 1985; Surrey, 1992). Although the global coal sector was overall facing rapid change at the time, the oil crisis proved to be a major turning point. The oil crisis in 1973 and 1979 and the ensuing spiralling cost of oil changed perspectives on coal. In response to the oil crisis, there was anticipation of a rise in demand for other energy sources such as coal and the government had a more optimistic outlook for the future of coal (Surrey, 1992, p.21; Turnheim and Geels, 2012, p.42). In other words, there was an over-expectation of a surge in demand for coal following the oil crisis. However, in contrast to initial expectations, demand for coal did not rise in none of the historical uses of coal such as the manufacturing sector, business, or household use, and coupled with this the exchange rate at the time further helped to reduce the cost of Australian coal (Ray, 1989, pp.77–78) further weakening the position of British coal.

However, the growing reliance on oil as a source of energy such as electricity was not unique to the UK as shown in Figure 4-0-4. Other high income states, which the World Bank (2022b) defines as states with a GNI of more than $13,205, also increased their reliance on oil as a source of electricity in the early 1970s, and in the case of Japan such reliance is particularly pronounced (World Bank, 2022a). In the case of the UK, a sudden spike in reliance on oil occurs in 1984 as oil makes up 32.71 per cent of total electricity production which coincides with the miners' strike of 1984-1985, but otherwise the general trend is roughly in line with other high income states (World Bank, 2022a). In short, while there are some external and domestic pressures that are unique to the case of the UK, such as its higher cost, the UK was not alone in increasing its reliance on oil. Thus, the shift away from coal to other sources of energy such as oil was a universal trend, one which the UK was part of.

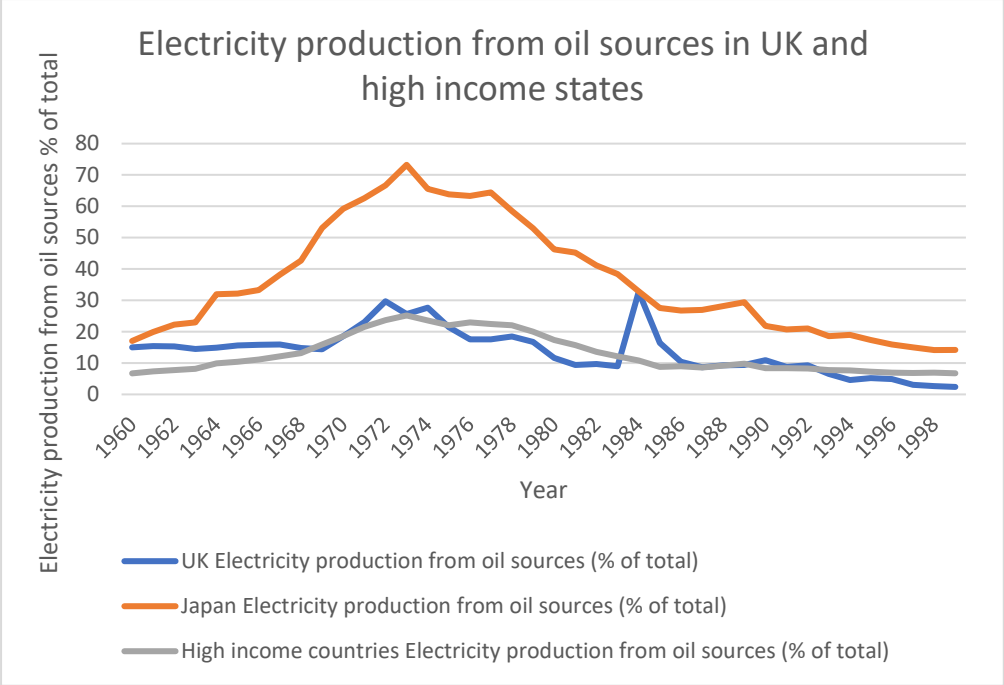

FIGURE 4-0-4: ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION FROM OIL SOURCES IN THE UK IN COMPARISON TO OTHER HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES BETWEEN 1960 TO 1998, USING DATA FROM THE WORLD BANK (2022A). THIS PROVIDES A SNAPSHOT OF THE RISE IN DEMAND FOR OIL TO USE IN THE PRODUCTION OF ELECTRICITY. HERE, IT SHOWS THAT THE UK WAS GENERALLY IN LINE WITH THE OTHER HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES. THERE WAS AN INTENSIVE SPIKE IN THE OIL DERIVED ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION IN 1984, THE YEAR WHEN THE MINERS' STRIKE HAD REDUCED THE SUPPLY OF COAL. HOWEVER, THIS IS DWARFED BY COUNTRIES SUCH AS JAPAN IN WHICH OIL DOMINATES THE PRODUCTION OF ELECTRICITY.

The previous sections explored how British coal went through long term decline due to the introduction of alternative sources of energy such as nuclear energy and oil. While the rise in nuclear energy was part of a wider push for energy efficiency, the shift towards oil was a universal trend, especially among high-income states at the time. Thus, the pressures the UK faced in terms of the need to reduce reliance on coal was one that was part of a long-term trend as well as a global one. The question thus becomes not as to *why* there was a shift away from coal, but *how* this was achieved. Answering this question as to how the shift away from coal was handled under the Thatcher government in particular will inform how former coal mining communities fared, and directly links to some of the long-term relative decline faced in such communities that ultimately led to the Brexit vote. This thesis aims to contribute to the literature on the nature of the mine closures and the subsequent support that the government offered, evaluating its impact and assessing how it has had an impact on

the local community. The next section explores the three main reasons presented in the current literature as to why the coal mines were closed so rapidly under the Thatcher government.

4.2 Three reasons behind coal mine closures

The desire for energy efficiency and wider global trends had combined weakened the position of coal as an energy source, this section aims to explore *how* the closure of the coal mines were handled by the Thatcher government. This section will assess the following three reasons that are the most commonly identified reasons presented for the closure of coal mines under the Thatcher government.

1) Thatcher wanted to close the coal mines out of fear of that the trade union will overthrow her government as they did back in 1974.
2) Thatcher had a personal dispute with Arthur Scargill, the president of the NUM.
3) Closure of the coal mines as part of a Thatcherism project.

These three reasons can be simplified to 1) electoral gain, 2) personal antagonism, and 3) political ideology. Although arguably all three contributed to a certain degree in giving a rationale for the way in which the coal mines were closed, this section argues that the third argument may present the best way in understanding the rationale behind the policy decisions. In particular, analysing the subsequent regeneration policies that were introduced is arguably better explained by Thatcherism as an ideology (the definition of Thatcherism will be presented in the subsequent section). For now, the next section will assess the three reasons one-by-one, thus starting from the first argument, electoral gain.

4.2-1 Electoral Gain

Electoral gain, while seemingly an obvious reason for any government to pursue a given policy, is commonly overlooked in the academic discussions related to the coal mine closures and the Thatcher government. The historical precedence of the miner's strike, which resulted in the Three-Day Week, placed considerable pressure upon the then Heath government. Some argued that this led to their loss in the 1974 general election to Labour. While this link is, rather understandably, denied by the leader of the NUM Joe Gormely at the time (Anon, 1975), it remains the case that the incident showed the far

reaching influence of industrial action. This defeat itself is credited to have made way for Thatcher to take the leadership role in the Conservative Party, providing her with a unique first-hand understanding of the political cost of losing against the trade unions.

However, while it is likely that there were concerns over the political influence of trade unions within the Thatcher government, this line of argument ignores several facts. One is that the Thatcher government had other preparations to mitigate the impact of potential miners' strikes. For instance, the Thatcher government had ordered the stockpiling of coal so that even if the strikes went ahead (Rawsthorne, 2018), there would be enough coal available to ensure a secured energy supply. Two, the strikes were not necessarily popular among the voting public and thus would have been relatively easy for the Thatcher government to use the strikes to their advantage. This was precisely the tactic that the Labour Party had used in their political campaign. Reminding voters of the aforementioned inability of the Heath government to deal with the strikes and the ensuing Three-Day Week problem, the Labour Party's slogan was "Remember the last time the Tories said they had all the answers?". This slogan speaks directly to the concerns the general public may have had over the return of the strikes, and how it could be weaponised against politicians.

Thus, public sympathy was not necessarily one that the miners could count on if they were to strike again, and since the Thatcher government had already stockpiled on coal, it was likely that the government could have handled the strikes and won over the public by arguing so. The combination of a lack of strong public sympathy towards the cause of the miners' strike and the government having prepared in advance of the strikes by stockpiling on coal would have significantly reduced risks to the Thatcher government's electoral gain even if the strikes were called. Thus, while feasible that there were concerns over electoral gain, this alone would have had limited impact over the decision to close the coal mines. The next section explores the consequences of failed key stakeholder cooperation, the diametrically different approaches as well as different ideologies that the two individuals from the two sides possessed during the miners' strike.

4.2-2 Thatcher vs Scargill

The second argument revolves around the personal antagonism between Thatcher and Scargill. This is hard to ignore not because it was the sole reason behind the fractious relationship between the government and the trade union, but because both Scargill and Thatcher were large personalities, influential, and each holding diametrically opposing views that ultimately informed their approaches. This made the clash between the two inevitable, as well as hard to reconcile. While both sides were in fervent belief that they were on the side of the "ordinary worker", they differed in terms of who they believed to champion. For Thatcher, her sympathies lay with the working miners who refused to strike and their families. This is reflected in her autobiography where she recounts how a meeting with a member from the "Miners' Wives Back to Work Campaign", Mrs Gibbon, who's family subsequently suffered an attack due to her vocal support of her husband and other miners who continued to work, emotionally moved her (Thatcher, 2010, p.451).

Her belief was that her government's policy was just as her government was democratically elected, and the policies legal, aimed at helping those in work with a desire to work continue to do so (Reicher and Hopkins, 1996). On the other hand, Scargill championed the miners who supported the strike. He viewed himself to have been always a part of a wider "political movement" (Scargill, 1975, p.3). The miner's struggle, in his view, was beyond a simple industrial dispute. He viewed it as a way to bring about a radical change to the world (Scargill, 1975, p.3). Scargill was also far more radical in his approach than his predecessor, Joe Gormely who had strongly advocated for continued talks over militancy (Anon, 1975). Perceived this way, the miners struggle was not just an industrial dispute, but a wider class struggle between the working-class and the government.

In terms of how Thatcher and Scargill viewed the future of the coal mining industry, they fell in opposing sides. On the one hand, the Thatcher government was keen to close uneconomical mines as evidenced in the Minutes from the Cabinet Ministerial Group on Coal in which they discussed the matter (Phillips, 2014, p.20). Scargill was on the other extreme of this position, arguing that all mines must remain open regardless of economic viability (Ashworth and Pegg, 1986, p.380). The disagreement over the

uneconomic mines continued to pose a problem between the two sides as discussions between the two revolved strongly on this point (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 1985b). This meant that the government was starting negotiations with the mind that some mines needed to close, while the NUM viewed any closures to be unacceptable. Thus, they disagreed profusely in terms of the starting point which partially explains the challenges when it came to the negotiations between the two sides. While some wondered if this stance by the government was deliberate in trying to tarnish the reputation of miners as being selfish for wanting to keep all mines open (Phillips, 2014, p.50), things were more complicated.

In reality, not all miners themselves believed that the mines could remain open, and opinion tended to be more divided, with some who strongly supported the strikes, those who supported going to work, and those caught in the middle who had sympathies for the cause but were unable to survive the financial burden of striking. Coal mining communities tend to remember who had suffered from the impact of the strikes, the financial pressures, and the challenges of those deciding to work, and those supporting the strike. This division within the community is perhaps best depicted in the drama *Sherwood* which aired on BBC One. The drama itself was based around a real crime case in Nottinghamshire back in 2004 in which concerns were raised that a murder took place as a result of animosity stemming from the miners' strike (this was found to be not the case) (Wainwright, 2005). This shows the lasting impact of the miners' strike had on local communities that were affected as well as the fact that support for the strikes were not universal even within mining communities. This thesis does not aim to argue by taking either side of the argument, whether they supported or disapproved of the industrial action. Instead, it attempts to illustrate how Thatcher and Scargill were in a strong belief that they were supporting the ordinary worker, and that indeed both sides existed within mining communities.

However, it is also true that such moves to champion either side had contributed to the deepening of divisions within mining communities, making the process of reconciliation that much harder. Such divisions also do not adequately reflect the complexity in terms of views that existed in mining communities. Anecdotally speaking, former mining communities continue to talk on the one hand about the pride they held for their former

profession and place within the wider UK economy as the engine of the country. Many may talk of the nostalgia they feel of a stronger community of the past, and a desire for the good times to return. However, at the same time, locals are quick to point out how they want a better future for their children, and the pride they felt when their children went on to universities and found work outside their communities (Anon, 1975; Mattinson, 2020; Payne, 2021). In other words, while there was much pride in mining communities of their profession, the mine closures did bring with it better social mobility opportunities as the locals were able to gain the education and progress on to professions that were hitherto closed to them. In other words, views towards the mining profession remained remarkably nuanced especially within the coal mining communities which saw both the good and the bad that came from the industry.

Returning to the point over the fact that the two key stakeholders, Thatcher and Scargill, were unable to work together, and how that had profound consequences when it came to the policy development for the support of mining communities. This is most evident when the policies under the Thatcher government are compared with current recommendations for mining communities in transition. Current recommendations for dealing with mine closures often talk of the need for continued dialogue, strong key stakeholder cooperation, and staged interventions to ensure a managed transition (World Bank, 2018). Trade unions in particular have been singled out for its vital role in supporting former miners into different jobs, as well as ensuring that they receive compensation for their services (Waddington and Parry, 2003; World Bank, 2018). Conversely, some have argued that the powerful trade unions have, in cases such as Germany, slowed down the process of reducing reliance on coal (Brauers et al., 2020). In short, trade unions have a role to play in the process of mine closures. However, in the case of the UK, the personal antagonism between Thatcher and Scargill had weakened the role the NUM could play in supporting miners in finding work outside mining. Declassified information also shows that in the absence of the NUM, the Thatcher government sought negotiations with the Union of Democratic Mineworkers [UDM], but had refrained from disclosing this due to fears over the perception that the UDM was working together with the government and undermining the NUM (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 1985c). The government as well as the NUM also relied on the Trade Union

Congress [TUC] to act as a bridge between the two (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 1985a, p.24) as the TUC was able to hold talks with both representatives from the government and the NUM without compromising the latter's position. Thus, the acrimonious relations between Scargill and Thatcher undoubtedly played a role in the inability of the trade unions and the government to work together to deliver a cohesive policy aimed at supporting the miners. This is further evidenced by how they tried to work around the issue by seeking talks with other trade unions such as the UDM, as well as the TUC. Getting trade unions on the side of the government was incidentally a route that was actively sought out by the Thatcher government (Ryan, 1995), arguably because it helped legitimise their policies. However, while this division explains why the coordination between the government and the NUM was lacking, it does not fully explain approaches taken to the policy responses *after* the mine closures. In the next section, the third reason, political ideology will be analysed as the driving force behind how the closure of the coal mines were handled.

4.2-3 Thatcherism

The third reason, Thatcherism is often analysed as a unique political ideology that has underpinned the Thatcher government's policy choices. The definition of Thatcherism here borrows from that developed by Gamble (1994, p.4) to be a "political project" led by Thatcher, with the main objectives being electoral success, market liberalism, and revival of state authority. Thus, under this definition, Thatcherism represents a broad spectrum of policy preferences under the Thatcher government rather than a singular ideology. It is important to note that one of the issues with Thatcherism is that its objectives as well as its relevance has been exaggerated in the past. For instance, it has been argued that the goal of Thatcherism was to "reverse" the "historic gains of the labour movement and other progressive forces" (Hall and Jacques, 1983, p.11). Similarly, Evans (1999, p.222) proclaimed that Thatcherism was a "crusade against socialism".

Such depictions of Thatcherism give the unintended impression of a cohesive and well-thought out long-term ideologically led decision making process under the Thatcher government. It also implies that Thatcherism did not have to contend with any obstacles common for any government such as electoral gain and stakeholder pressure. It has the

danger of ignoring the vital context in which these decisions were made and assumes that the outcomes exactly mirrored intent.

However, politics is rarely this straightforward and usually entangled in unintended consequences and ill-defined policies. Often times, policy objectives are contradictory and clash with each other. For example, Thatcher government was keen to reduce unemployment rates, and in particular youth unemployment rates. The introduction of the YTS has had the dual purpose of skilling the British youth as well as a form of a welfare system in which they provided guaranteed training and payment to unemployed youths (Raffe, 1987, p.2). In the development of the YTS, the Thatcher government had actively sought out the cooperation of both the TUC and the General Workers Union [GWU] (Hansard, 1986). As mentioned previously, the government showed similar interest in working with the TUC and UDM when talks broke down with the NUM (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 1985a, p.24). These examples indicate towards at least a certain willingness from the Thatcher government to work with trade unions. A rather far cry from the goal being a "crusade against socialism" (Evans, 1999, p.222).

The reason behind the desire to work with the trade unions was relatively straightforward. Thatcherism's main goals were to introduce market liberalism and revival of state authority (Gamble, 1994, p.4), and as such, the government was keen for industrial disputes to be resolved between the NCB and the NUM rather than having a strong involvement of the government. Thus, from the perspective of Thatcherism as a political ideology, seeking cooperation with the trade unions is in fact in line with its main goals. Others have pointed out the irony of the stronger involvement of the government under the Thatcher government in contrast to its desire of reducing government involvement as it found itself in major disputes with the NUM. Thus, the previous point of the acrimonious relation between Thatcher and Scargill was a relative abnormality, rather than the norm.

Other examples such as the push towards privatisation of key sectors in the UK also neatly follows the main goals outlined in Thatcherism. It also debunks the idea that policies pursued under the Thatcher government were cohesive. By selling off key public assets to the private sector such as electricity, water and gas, the government hoped to reduce government deficit, increase efficiency, and gain support from the public. The

Thatcher government had strongly pushed for privatisation as a way of allowing the public to have a stake in the national economy (Buckland, 1987), its privatisation policy was particularly supported by people buying shares for the first time and those who bought council houses particularly (Marsh, 1991). Marsh (1991) rejects the idea that privatisation was a premeditated strategy by the Thatcher government and argues that it was likely a short-term government response to rising inflation and the desire to lower the national deficit at the time. Supporting one of the key goals of Thatcherism being one of electoral success, in 1979 there was a growing public demand in favour of privatisation as people became more disillusioned with the rising deficit among nationalised industries such as gas and rail (Stevens, 2004, p.51). Thus, by the time Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979, public discourse had already shifted away in favour of privatisation, reducing the political cost of pursuing policy that revolved around privatisation. It could thus be argued that the Thatcher government felt confident in pursing privatisation with the assurance that the public were broadly on side. Thus, pursuit of market liberalisation, a key goal of Thatcherism also benefitted from public support and therefore potential electoral success as a result. Ultimately, this has been credited to have brought a fundamental change in the British management style (Vickers and Wright, 1988, p.25; Bortolotti and Siniscalco, 2004, pp.71–72).

In sum, Thatcherism as an ideology provides a stronger explanation to the government's actions during the miners' strike which was to seek out cooperation with other trade unions. The next section will continue to apply Thatcherism as a political ideology to the government's plan for after the miner closures. This is of particular interest for this thesis as this arguably resulted in the long-term relative decline in former mining communities.

4.3 Thatcherism and Mining

This section explores how the Thatcher government handled the mine closures starting from changes made to the right to strike, followed by a discussion on the redundancy payment scheme, its strengths and limitations. These two cases best illustrate how the aforementioned political ideology, Thatcherism influenced the development of both policies. The point on the redundancy pay policy also reveals the shortcomings of Thatcherism as an ideology in terms of how it was unable to devise a policy that worked

for former coal mining communities. In other words, one of the weaknesses of Thatcherism was its lack of place-based policy which arguably has led to a relative decline in former mining communities. The next section will argue how despite the general willingness the Thatcher government showed in working together with trade unions, it updated the Employment Act to strengthen individual choice which ultimately weakened the collective strength of trade unions.

4.3-1 Thatcherism and the Employment Act

Thatcherism has been often perceived as synonymous to individualism. This was perhaps unintentionally best encapsulated in the quote from Thatcher that "[t]here is no such thing as society" (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 1987, p.30). It is worth noting that such individualism is based on the idea of a "small state" (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2012, p.504), in which the government reduces its involvement. This may seem at a glance contradictory to the aforementioned goal of Thatcherism as the revival of the state. However, it is in fact a reflection of the fact that Thatcher had opposed the idea of the government being involved in every aspect of public life, and wanting individuals and families to take back some of the responsibilities so that the government would not be held responsible for matters, at least under her belief, were beyond its scope or mandate. This is expressed in the same interview in which "[t]here is no such thing as society" (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 1987, p.30) was mentioned. In it, Thatcher goes on to argue that "[t]here are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first"(Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 1987, pp.29–30). This shows that Thatcherism's push for market liberalisation as well as the revival of the government can be combined with a pursuit for greater individualism to take root and allow for a smaller state that is more capable of focusing on what the government was meant to do such as reducing deficit.

Such push towards individualism also arguably informed the 1980 Employment Act. Notable changes from the legislation were its ban on closed shops – outlawing discrimination towards employees who refused to join trade unions, and banning fly picketing – sending union members around the country to picket (Anon, 1980). Although criticised once more in line with the argument that Thatcherism was about "crusade

against socialism" (Evans, 1999, p.222), it was accused of being introduced to curb trade union power. However, looking at the legislation, it is also possible to view this as a way to strengthen trade unionism as it provides a stronger democratic mandate to trade unions. Incidentally, the failure of the NUM to seek a valid ballot had ultimately helped undermine their cause, resulting in the establishment of the UDM as an alternative. In the pervious section, it was mentioned that the Thatcher government had strongly believed itself to be on the side of ordinary workers. Such sentiment may have also been strengthened when considering that the print media had focused on the violent nature of the miners' strike in their publications (Wade, 1985). Likening the dispute to warfare was also a common strategy in the British print media at the time (Hart, 2017). Such publications were then reported to the Thatcher government as a press digest which included a section on coal as well as law and order in which such publications were prominently discussed (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 1985c). Considering these factors, it is reasonable to infer that the sense that her government was on the side of ordinary citizens would have been strengthened when confronted with print media publications that were largely negative in their covering of the miners' strike and providing justification to her policies. It is thus likely that in her eyes, trade union power had been too strong and had the danger of over-riding the democratic process. Thus, the amendment of the Employment Act was arguably more to do with strengthening individual choice than a deliberate attempt at crushing trade unions. This presents on the one hand that the policies were not solely led by ideology alone, but on the other hand, that there was an undercurrent of the ideology that helped shape the direction of the policy.

4.3-2 Thatcherism and Redundancy Pay

The previous section on the Employment Act argued rather favourably towards the Thatcher government by arguing that it was more likely derived out of a desire for greater individual choice rather than to damage trade union. However, Redundancy Pay is slightly different in nature. This point is surprisingly relatively under-explored in the current literature on Thatcherism and the closure of the coal mines. Far more attention has been given to the Redundancy Pay introduced both before and after the Thatcher

government, giving almost an impression that this was not something that the Thatcher government had thought of.

In fact, Redundancy Pay likely failed to gain the same level of interest as the Employment Act did as it was broadly a continuation of the previous one which was introduced in 1968. However, it is important to retrace this scheme as it provides key insight into Thatcherism thinking as well as its shortcomings. Under *The Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Scheme (Payment Schemes)* 1984, miners who were made redundant after the mine closures were given a lump sum of money or a weekly payment. The amount depended on age, with the sum being smaller for younger miners and higher for older miners. The smaller payment for younger miners, some speculated to have been an attempt to entice them back into work (Hart, 1985). It was pronounced at the time by David Hunt, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy as "possibly the most generous scheme that has ever been seen in this country or in the Community" (Hansard, 1985). The amount of pay given to former miners were indeed generous. Set at £1,000 for every year of service for those between the ages 21 and 50 (Anon, 1984, p.1400), this is the equivalent to £3,015.49 today (Bank of England, 2023c). A study by Turnbull and Wass (1997, p.36) calculated that the average payout was around £21,000 (equivalent to £36,471.36 today[11] (Bank of England, 2023c)). The main update that was introduced in 1984 compared to 1968 was the broadening of the age group that were eligible for payment. In 1968, the lump pay was eligible for only those over 55 (Anon, 1968), but by 1984 this was expanded to include those aged 21-50 (Anon, 1984).

Perhaps owing to comments such as the "enemy within" (Thatcher, 1984a) , Thatcher herself as well as her government has had the tendency to seem harsher towards mining communities. However, as historian Vinen (2019, p.124) rightfully argues, this may reflect the "difference between words and deeds" of the Thatcher government – where words are harsher than the actual policy responses. Tendency to focus on the rhetoric of the government (Reicher and Hopkins, 1996) rather than their actual policies may have given the impression that the Thatcher government had done little for mining

[11] Historical inflation was calculated at £21,000 in 1997 (publication year of the source) to its equivalent in 2022.

communities. Schemes such as *The Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Scheme (Payment Schemes)* 1984 show that there was an acceptance that former miners required financial support, and the level of compensation was relatively high, and the pool of recipients broadened to include younger miners was indeed an improvement.

However, while the redundancy payment was ostensibly generous, it was not without issues. Limitations to the scheme may explain in part why former mining communities struggled afterwards. This thesis identifies four limitations, 1) restrictions to *The Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Scheme* itself, 2) inadvertent acceleration of entrapment and immobility, 3) use of payment for debt relief, 4) people-based rather than place-based solution contributed to long-term relative decline. One thing to note here is that the list of limitations regarding the redundancy scheme is notably different from the intentions of a redundancy scheme. As will be made clear in the following sections, the way in which the redundancy scheme was used was not necessarily for an adequate compensation for the length of service or sufficient resource to invest in reskilling as was defined by Booth and Chatterji (1989, pp.505 & 518).

First, the payment was restricted based on years of service. The requirement that miners had to have been employed in the sector for more than a decade (Anon, 1984) meant that despite the scheme being extended to 21 years and above, in reality few young miners were able to receive payment. While it could be counter argued that younger former mine workers would be most likely to find alternative employment, especially by reskilling, this did mean that the situation remained a challenge for young miners.

Second, the money from *The Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Scheme* inadvertently encouraged people to stay in former mining communities. One of the most common uses of the redundancy payment was to purchase their own house in the local area (Bennett et al., 2000). This on its own is not necessarily a negative outcome. Homeownership was of grave importance to Thatcherism as an ideology as in Thatcher's view, it was linked to "individual responsibility" as well as a symbol of a free and prosperous state (Thatcher,1984b). More importantly, home ownership was a popular concept among most of the electorate. Another Thatcher-era policy to increase home ownership by allowing council housing tenants to purchase their property called the

"Right to Buy" scheme continues to be viewed positively by the general public with 65 per cent of those surveyed endorsing the policy (Clark, 2013), despite it leading to a shortage of council housing and widening regional disparities in housing availability (Murie, 2016; Eardley, 2022). Home ownership was seen as a "vote winner" (Murie, 2016, no pagination), and thus former miners owning their house through *The Redundancy Mineworkers and Concessionary Scheme* was arguably a win in the eyes of the Thatcher government. However, this also meant that former miners tended to stay in the local community, further contributing to their immobility. This meant that families of former miners were often stuck in former mining communities which had limited opportunities in terms of further education as well as employment. In other words, the ability to purchase property using the payment from *The Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Scheme* may have inadvertently perpetuated the existing problem of entrapment of former miners and their families.

Third, the payment was also often used to pay off debt incurred during the miners' strike (Rees and Thomas, 1991). One of the reasons behind this was that striking miners were unable to access unemployment benefits while they were on strike (Rawsthorne, 2018, p.186). This meant that some former miners were left in financially precarious positions despite the lump sum of money given to them due to the financial burden they were saddled with as a result of going on strike. Once again, this meant that the redundancy payment acted neither as compensation for years of service nor as funds to reskill as was the purpose of the redundancy payment scheme as envisioned by Booth and Chatterji (1989, pp.505 & 518).

Fourth, the redundancy pay was unable to compensate for communities that were hitherto monolithic economies that relied solely on the one industry coal. The approach taken by the Thatcher government was to focus on supporting the individual rather than the local area. This focus on the individual over the collective was a common theme in Thatcherism, a way to combine practical policy solutions to the open market with that of a moral argument for individual responsibility (Bevir and Rhodes, 1998, p.103). While this led to changes such as the aforementioned Employment Act 1980 which brought stronger individual choice in terms of trade union membership, it also meant place-based support was weakened. Lack of funding for local authorities led, as will be further

discussed in Chapter 8, former coal mining local authorities to look to the EU for additional funding (Turner, 1994; Fothergill, 1995). Such fears over local funding had its roots in The Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 which introduced strict spending restrictions to local authorities (Travers, 2013). During the Thatcher era, there was thus a move towards people-based rather than place-based support. This push explains the lack of policies that were specific to coal mining communities. Today, there is acknowledgement that former coal mining communities require targeted and holistic support to enable managed transition (World Bank, 2018). Norman Tebbit who was the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry at the time now admits the shortcomings of policies back then (Payne, 2021). Using Essex and Durham as examples, he addresses the fact that former coal mining communities needed stronger support due to the differences in terms of alternative opportunities (Payne, 2021). In short, the lack of a place-based approach meant while individuals may have received compensation, their communities were set on a path towards long-term relative decline.

To summarise this section, the two key policy interventions under the Thatcher government, the Employment Act and *The Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Scheme* illustrate how Thatcherism affected the policy development. The conclusion reached here is that on the one hand, it was not "sheer political spite" (Prescott, 2013) that led to the nature of the closure of the mines and the subsequent long-term relative decline faced by former mining communities. The Employment Act, while it may have been detrimental for trade unions gave individual workers choice. The redundancy payment was relatively generous and was a further improvement to the one introduced in 1968. On the other hand, the redundancy payment scheme had four major limitations – restrictions of the scheme itself, the main use of the payment being for housing and debt relief, and a lack of place-based support. Each limitation was a product of the Thatcherism ideology which prioritised the individual over the collective, and the belief that individuals will be able to correct the flaws of the market. This section has focused on the Thatcher government's response to the mine closures as a focus of analysis as to why former coal mining communities may have suffered long-term relative decline. The next section will dig a little deeper by analysing what came next, specifically focusing on the YTS and the response of the British Coal Enterprise.

4.4 What came next?

The previous section explored how Thatcherism influenced policy response during and immediately after the mine closures using the Employment Act and *The Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Scheme* as case studies. This section will explore how Thatcherism influenced two types of interventions. The people-based intervention under the Youth Training Scheme, and the place-based intervention under the BCE (formerly known as the National Coal Board). Both shared the idea that a market-led intervention will be able to solve socio-economic challenges. However, they are also key examples of the limitations of a market-led approach as it ignored the deeper socio-economic problems that required further interventions. Some of the success, such as the importance of focusing on skills and the benefit of a virtuous cycle of investment will form key lessons in the subsequent chapters of this thesis (in particular, the role of skills will be addressed in Chapter 5 and the virtuous cycle of investment will be addressed in Chapter 8). This section will conclude by arguing that these two examples show the limitations of Thatcherism ideas, but also evidence attempts of support for former coal mining communities under the Thatcher government.

4.4-1 Youth Training Scheme

As noted in the previous section, the Thatcher era response to the mine closures was one of people-based policies rather than place-based policies. This meant that government-level response tended to rely on blanket policies which targeted specific individuals but not necessarily places. One example of this is the Youth Training Scheme [YTS]. The scheme was introduced under the backdrop of a rapid decline in apprenticeship positions triggered by the shrinking manufacturing sector, resulting in a staggering 25 per cent youth unemployment rate recorded in the early 1980s (Dolton, 1993, p.1261).

Although the academic discourse at the time, and one that influenced Thatcherism thinking was one of Friedman (1977) and his theory of “natural rate of unemployment” – whereby the government prioritised reducing inflation and any changes to unemployment rates were considered as an acceptable “side effect” (Frazer, 1982, p.529), youth unemployment was viewed differently. There was a recognition that youth unemployment was a significant problem as the inability to find employment at an early

stage could continue on in their later years as well as creating a multi-generational deprivation (Harper et al., 2003). Thus, reducing youth unemployment rate was imperative for the government.

Youth unemployment was of particular issue in post-industrial regions in particular (Gould and Fieldhouse, 1997). Considering that mining was a profession that largely relied upon apprenticeships rather than formal further education (Roderick and Stephens, 1972), and that children from former coal mining communities scored lower than the national average at key stages such as GCSE (Gore and Smith, 2001), former coal mining communities remained at an educational disadvantage. Thus, couple this with the sudden lack of employment opportunity due to the mine closures, and communities were faced with an imperative to help young people reskill and retrain.

The YTS was arguably part of a larger education policy of the Thatcher government, which regarded it as key to the country's success. This is despite the fact that investment in education declined as a percentage of GDP under the Thatcher government and only became on par with other OECD states under the New Labour government (Heath et al., 2013, p.230). During the Thatcher era, there was a growing demand from businesses to improve the education system to better equip school leavers with the requirements of the job market (Chitty, 2014, p.35). The 1988 Education Reform Act, was touted as one of the "largest single piece of legislation Parliament had enacted" (Husbands, 2013). It comprehensively modernised the education system which hitherto remained largely the same since 1944. The act introduced things that are taken for granted at present such as the introduction of a national curriculum and parental choice in school enrolment. Although the influence of Thatcherism, or specifically the desire for a stronger central power, marketisation, and the belief that the market could resolve social problems may have influenced the design of the legislation (Robertson, 1986, p.293; Whitty, 2008, pp.167–169; Chitty, 2014, p.51), it was also reflective of the need to improve educational outcomes and a stronger bridge between education and the job market.

The linkage made between investing in education and training as a way of improving human capital and thus the economic output (Schultz, 1961) is a key supply-side economics concept, which again formed a crucial part of Thatcherism. The importance

of the education policy was thus part of a broader economic thinking which viewed investment in education as a form of improving the overall British economy.

To summarise the academic thinking behind the YTS, it was understood that while some level of unemployment was necessary (Friedman, 1977; Frazer, 1982), youth unemployment was seen as problematic (Harper et al., 2003), and the cure to the problem was to invest in human capital (Schultz, 1961). The YTS's main goal remained to reduce youth unemployment. The design of the YTS was such that it attempted to incentivise take up among the young unemployed.

Despite the clear incentive for the government to address youth unemployment, the YTS remained a scheme which paid relatively poorly. The allowance provided under the YTS was marginally higher than that of unemployment benefits. In their first year, young people undertaking YTS were given £27.3 per week, and this was increased to £35 per week if they stayed on to their second year as a way to incentivise retention (Chapman and Tooze, 1987, p.59). That is the equivalent of roughly £69.6 per week today (Bank of England, 2023c). Unemployment benefits offered £27.05 at the time(Rutherford, 2013, p.10), making the YTS pay ever so slightly more, just high enough that it could be claimed that it was a better option for young people, and a point that was not lost in other works (Dolton, G. Makepeace, et al., 1994, p.263). Taylor (1993, pp.267–268) notes that the YTS was created with close cooperation from the TUC was viewed by the government to be "vital for the successful operation". The TUC itself also shared interest in working alongside the government as the YTS offered training funds, opportunity to recover trade union membership which were in perpetual decline, and allowed it to be actively involved in shaping the training scheme (Ryan, 1995, p.3). It was also speculated that this was a strategy of survival for relevance for the TUC as it was cognisant of the much changed economic climate in which trade union membership was rapidly declining and with it their influence on national politics (Ackers and Payne, 1998). In the end, this partnership ended when the TUC voted against the YTS in 1988, promptly leading to the scheme being entirely controlled by the Department of Education as a result (Taylor, 1993). The scheme itself was costly at around £1billion to roll out (Ryan, 1995, p.3). Thus, the YTS showed some unusual moves from the Thatcher government as in it showed a strong willingness to work with the TUC, and contrary to the idea of a small

government, it was an expensive scheme with strong government involvement in the labour market.

Despite the high costs, the impact of the YTS was mixed. On the one hand, it helped young women to join the labour market, a reflection of a change in both economic and social norms (Dolton, G.H. Makepeace, et al., 1994). Those who stayed on the scheme for the full two years and those who were not unemployed before they joined the scheme and instead came after graduating schools tended to fare better in terms of finding employment after completing the scheme (Upward, 2002). There were also accusations that young people under the YTS were seen and treated as cheap labour rather than an opportunity for them to learn new skills that prepared them for future work (Simmons and Lambert, 2019). Thus, the YTS has been praised for giving young people opportunities, but at the same time, criticised for its limitations in terms of impact.

However, the broad and universal nature of the YTS underscored the lack of a place-based response from the Thatcher government. In the North of England, where youth unemployment rates were high, the YTS was unable to address the wider socio-economic issues (Hollands, 1996; Upward, 2002). The limitations of the YTS or the vocational sector in general to help former mining communities will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

In sum, the YTS was designed in line with Thatcherism and academic thinking at the time with the aim of reducing youth unemployment, enjoying some success in achieving this goal. However, the people-based rather than place-based nature of the scheme meant that it was unable to address some of the deeper socio-economic issues present in former coal mining communities. This issue of a people-based at the expense of a place-based approach will continue to be a common theme in the response to the coal mine closures by the National Coal Board (or the BCE as it was changed to).

4.4-2 National Coal Board/British Coal Enterprise

If the YTS was a blanket people-based scheme, the BCE which was a rebrand of the NCB in 1987, was to offer a more place-based support as it was given a new set of responsibilities to tackle the issue of struggling former coal mining areas. Its two responsibilities were to 1) offer retraining for former miners and 2) provide financial

support to encourage local entrepreneurism. Discussions over the achievements of the BCE is one that is surprisingly lacking in the literature related to former mining communities, despite the clear relevance of their responsibilities to the regeneration efforts to the former mining areas. This puzzle was of importance to this thesis as its timeline fits with the question over the government response after the mine closures, but before the arrival of New Labour. Some references are made to their contribution in snippets such as a brief mention of its existence in the work by Waddington et al. (2001, pp.166–167). To address this gap in literature, this section will analyse the impact of the BCE in tackling issues in the former coal mining communities.

When the BCE receives an explicit mention in the rare occasions such as in the work by Bennett et al. (2000), there is a sense of scepticism over their contribution. Bennett et al. (2000, p.15) found that although the BCE claimed it helped 106,000 people into employment in former coal mining areas, the net employment generated was closer to 16,000. In other words, the impact in terms of employment was positive, but not as high as it was claimed to be. In terms of local entrepreneurism, there are equally sceptical voices as to its real term impact. A study by Turner (1995) analysed the impact of the entrepreneurial push in former coal mining communities such as South Kirby in the Wakefield District. The Langthwaite Grange Industrial Estate which was located in South Kirby was given the enterprise zone status (Turner, 1995, p.35) under the BCE. Turner (1995, p.36) concludes that the majority of businesses set up in the enterprise zone was a result of relocation from neighbouring areas rather than the fruit of new entrepreneurism. There were thus questions over how much “new” businesses were set up as a result of the creation of an enterprise zone. Furthermore, the Langthwaite Grange Industrial Estate was not a new creation and it was established decades before, originally by Harold Wilson back in 1949 (Langthwaite Business Association, 2022). Thus, the enterprise zone was not necessarily a new establishment as a result of the BCE but was simply given additional resources to continue its services. While thus nothing new, the continued existence of the enterprise zone did help in attracting funding. For example, the enterprise zone was successful in attracting £1.2m funding from the Coalfield Regeneration Trust, and gaining the Business Improvement District Status from 2011 to 2016 (Langthwaite Business Association, 2022). The result of the regeneration

efforts is thus mixed. On the one hand, it functioned as a useful space to attract further investment, creating a virtuous cycle of long-term sustained funding. This virtuous cycle will be explored in further depth in Chapter 8. On the other hand, it shows the BCE did little to create new opportunities since by the time of the mine closures with having had more than four decades of experience at that point, and thus does not indicate a new turn for South Kirkby into an entrepreneurial area.

However, once again the lack of support to the wider socio-economic issues faced by former coal mining communities meant that businesses in such areas faced an upward struggle. The economic literature is now clear over how economic activities are place bound, with a tendency of agglomeration of businesses in places with the right level of supply and demand (Krugman, 1991; Audretsch and Keilbach, 2007). There is also the challenge of businesses in absorbing the sudden rise in labour surplus as a result of the coal mine closures (Aragón et al., 2018). This may explain why the businesses that were able to survive in former coal mining communities tended to be well-established to begin with, with decades of experience (Rees and Thomas, 1991). Coal mining communities were constrained both in terms of its market demand due to the high unemployment rates as well as its supply owing to the lack of skilled labour (Rees and Thomas, 1991). Combined, coal mining communities were at a severe disadvantage when it came to facilitating an entrepreneurial environment.

Additionally, former coal mining communities had to reinvent themselves into becoming hubs of new economic activity which was far from easy. Employment rate for men in former coal mining communities rose higher than the national average, but this was caveated by the fact that it coincided with a rise in part-time positions held by men and the pay of these new types of employment tended to be much lower than what mining offered (Beatty and Fothergill, 1996, pp.633–634). Attempts at reinventing places were predominantly made to attract inward investment as well as foreign direct investment [FDI] (Bennett et al., 2000, p.16). The reinvention process took time as local authorities struggled to find their key strengths that they could promote, as well as successfully differentiate themselves from other local authorities which were similarly trying to establish themselves in the increasingly global market. At the point of immediately after

the coal mine closures, it was difficult for local authorities to be able to identify such strengths.

In sum, the BCE was a prime example of a more ostensibly place-based intervention to the problems faced by former mining communities. Despite some levels of success in supporting enterprise zones, and helping former miners back into work, the approach of tackling deep socio-economic issues through market forces had its limitations. In the end, former coal mining communities struggled to reinvent themselves into new economic hubs and provides insight as to how such communities were set on a path towards long-term relative decline. Once again, rather than this being a deliberate attack towards former mining communities (Prescott, 2013), it may be more accurate to state that this illustrated the limitations of Thatcherism in terms of its ability to offer solution to socio-economic problems.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter began with an analysis of the wider structural issues related to coal mining and showed that the decline of coal was not only a British problem, but also a global, long-term issue. Thus, the Thatcher government was tasked, as were former governments of the past, to facilitate a managed decline of the sector. While the need for a managed decline was a necessity, the way in which the decline was handled was unique to the Thatcher government. The literature is in general divided between those who argue that it was part of electoral gain, a result of personal antagonism, and political ideology. This chapter analysed the response to the coal mine closures using the last argument by focusing on the influence of Thatcherism as a driving force behind the policy responses after the mine closures. From the perspective of Thatcherism, the Employment Act, redundancy payment scheme, the YTS, and the response of the BCE all show consistency in approach – the idea that the market-led interventions would be sufficient in addressing wider socio-economic issues in former coal mining communities. However, contrary to such optimism, the interventions fell short of rectifying such issues. The lack of a place-based support also meant that the combination of supply-side and demand-side issues persisted, arguably leading to long-term relative decline which the Brexit vote helped bring to the forefront. The findings in this chapter counters some of the previous arguments in the literature which tended to over-estimate the

capabilities of the Thatcher government, and instead exposed both its strengths and limitations. The limitations addressed in this chapter show that rather than it being a deliberate attack towards former mining communities, it reflected a more fundamental flaw in neo-liberal, place-blind approach to regional development issues. The next chapter will focus on Wakefield in West Yorkshire by analysing how some of the problems mentioned in this chapter proved to fossilise into long-term issues.

Chapter 5 Wakefield

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the historical context of former coal mining communities more broadly by arguing that intervention policies that were designed with Thatcherism thinking of market-led, people-based interventions ultimately had inadvertently may have led to long-term relative decline. This chapter presents the case study area for this thesis, which is the Wakefield District. Wakefield District may not, at first glance, be the most obvious place to commence a study on the relationship between the ECP and Euroscepticism. Located within West Yorkshire, it outwardly has no feature that would make for an "interesting" case study. Under the EU criteria of less developed, transition, and more developed areas, West Yorkshire is now categorised as more developed. This means that despite some of the similarities in terms of development issues to its neighbour, South Yorkshire as presented in Chapter 3, Wakefield District did not receive similar levels of funding. In terms of Brexit, it did have high levels of Leave support with 66.4 per cent voting Brexit. However, it was not the highest Leave supporting areas with places like Boston or South Holland in Lincolnshire having higher shares of Leave voters at 75.6 per cent and 73.6 per cent respectively (The Electoral Commission, 2016).

In terms of deprivation levels, Wakefield shows mixed results. Its unemployment rate is slightly lower than the national average at 3.8 per cent (national average is 4.1 per cent) between April 2021 and March 2022 (Office for National Statistics, 2022c). Its life expectancy at birth is again the same as the national average at 79, compared to Glasgow City which is has the lowest life expectancy at 75 (Office for National Statistics, 2021c). For context, Glasgow City has the same life expectancy as Central Europe and Baltic countries, while Wakefield is just one year shy of the average in the EU (World Bank, 2023). In short, Wakefield does not particularly stand out as facing challenges when assessed by some of indicators related to economics and health.

Incidentally, in academic discussions, there is a propensity for research to favour the extremes. We like to discuss about places that ranked the highest or lowest by some measure. In other words, places that stand out. Wakefield is in the awkward position of not scoring high, but not low enough to attract political or academic attention. Perhaps this is why the term "left behind" works well in encapsulating the sentiment of the area.

However, in recent years, Wakefield has increasingly become the centre of political (and steadily academic) interest. In the 2019 general election, it elected a Conservative MP with a majority of 47.3 per cent, the first time in over eight decades (UK Parliament, 2021a). This came as a surprise as most of the residents in Labour safe seats in the North dubbed the "Red Wall" voters were also unaware of the possibility of a Conservative win (Johnston et al., 2020). Slowly but surely, there has been an increasing recognition that hitherto "ordinary" places like Wakefield deserves some attention.

This chapter is structured as follows, it will first discuss the socio-economic characteristics of Wakefield, discussing how its historical industries, coal and textile helped shape the district. This will be followed by how the limitations in Thatcherism interventions discussed in the previous chapter is evident in how the same issues with skills, health, and employment are still evident today. This will be followed by arguing that addressing the long-term relative decline remains difficult using the example of the limitations in apprenticeship as a driving force for social mobility. This chapter will conclude by arguing that "left-behind" places like Wakefield is still haunted by the socio-economic decline which was triggered by the mine closures due to its historical development of the sector. Solutions are hard to find, and even some of the common ideas such as increasing apprenticeship holders is unlikely to plug in the gap left behind from the industrial decline.

5.1 The Socio-economic background of Wakefield

This section explores the socio-economic background of Wakefield. Due to the constraints in material specific to Wakefield and acknowledging the influence of the surrounding area in the formation of its socio-economy, this chapter will be combining data pertaining to Wakefield with that of West Yorkshire more generally. This will allow for a more holistic appraisal of the socio-economic history of the region, and some of the issues related to it in the present. This section will argue that the historical development of the coal mining and textiles industries helped shape not only the economy of Wakefield, but also its geographical features which influences the local economy to this day. In particular, the transportation of coal helped create the region's transportation network, which this section identifies as key in cementing its present key advantage. On the other hand, this section also argues that it was not all positive impact

as the same advantages explains the remoteness, and skills gap in the region. In particular, this shortage of skills is holding back the region from reaping the rewards from the change into a knowledge economy in recent years.

5.1-1 Coal mining communities how they developed

This section explores how the coal mining communities developed focusing on why they concentrated in places like Yorkshire alongside the textile industry. This will be followed by a discussion on two myths that surround coal mining communities, that it is "close-knit" and that due to the working-class nature of the profession, low-income. Debunking these myths allows us to better understand how the sense of relative decline felt in former coal mining communities developed. The development of coal mining and textile as an industry helped fuel the development of the good transportation network such as the motorways and large railway networks that have been identified as strengths in such areas. While factors such as the dangerous nature of the profession may have cultivated a sense of comradery unique to the profession as was noted in several interviews with former miners (Turner, 2000; Strangleman, 2001), the notion of a homogenous community should be questioned.

The isolated nature of the coal mining communities may originate from how such communities developed, making it harder to develop solutions of current mobility issues. Additionally, this section argues that mining as a profession was dangerous, and while conjures a sense of pride, not necessarily a profession that people wanted their children to pursue. What is often misunderstood in relation to the profession is that it was a relatively well-paid profession, making its loss that much harder for the community. The next sub-section will explore how Yorkshire became the centre of coal mining and textile industry.

5.1-1-i Historical industries, coal and textile

Historically, there were two major industries which shaped the socio-economic profile of Wakefield and its surrounding area, coal mining and textiles. For example, according to the 1981 Census data, Wakefield had the seventh highest proportion of its workers working in the mining sector of all local authorities with 17 per cent of workers working

in the sector (Office for National Statistics, 2023b)[12].Coal mining developed in Yorkshire through a combination of its natural endowment, development of transportation links, and rising demand for coal energy through industrialisation. Yorkshire was known for its abundance in coal as early as the 12th Century, but extraction of coal only began in earnest from the 18th and 19th century, as the development of the transportation network drastically reduced the transport costs and allowed for the industrialisation of the region. The first mode of transportation which developed in the region were roads. Turnpike trusts became responsible of financing the maintenance and development of toll roads, through the passage of 942 Acts between 17th and 19th Century, allowing for significant investment in roads connecting major cities and industrial areas in the UK (Bogart, 2005, pp.439, 460–464; UK Parliament, 2021c). These roads were the precursor of modern motorways, as it was much easier to create them over existing road networks rather than creating brand new ones. This explains the relatively high number of motorways located in the Yorkshire and the Humber region. After the coal mine closures, the region was encouraged to use its central location in the country as well as its good transportation networks to be used as a key selling point for potential investors (Beatty et al., 2007, p.1672). The reason behind this strength, this thesis argues, lies in the importance of coal in the past which fuelled private and public incentive to invest in the road networks. This idea that man-made geographical features endow regions with unique advantages is nothing new. Cronon (1991) had already coined the term “second nature” to describe this phenomenon. According to this idea of “second nature”, some of the geographical advantages such as good connectivity is often not just a result of natural geographical characteristics but owes to the human activity such as road and rail construction (Cronon, 1991). Thus, the Yorkshire region benefited from natural endowment of coal which further spurred investment in road networks which has further strengthened its geographical competitiveness in the form of its second nature endowment.

Other forms of transportation links were also developed in this period to support increasing demands for better transport. Before the development of the canal, proximity

[12] This uses data of workers in the energy & water sector, which mining was part of. A similar method was used to define local authorities that relied on the coal mining sector in the work by Abreu and Jones (2021).

to rivers such as the Calder in Wakefield, and the Don in South Yorkshire helped the development of coal mining in the region (Hopkinson, 1976, p.10). This was further spurred by the passage of 44 acts in the 18th Century, mainly owing to private investor interests, led to the rapid development of canals (Canal and River Trust, 2021). Transportation of coal through canals were of vital importance as in some cases it halved the cost of coal as the weight of coal mattered less on water and since the canals were man-made it strategically connected production sites with the main markets (Sidaway et al., 1995, p.3). Thus, Wakefield and the Yorkshire region in general benefited from both its central location in the UK and its proximity to rivers which allowed it to develop its transportation system on both land and water. In short, economic interests in producing and transporting coal fuelled the development and maintenance of the transportation networks surrounding Wakefield.

In addition to roads and canals, landowners and colliery owners increasingly showed interest towards the investment and construction of the rail network in the North (Turncock, 2003, p.39). Interest towards trains developed mainly because it cost nearly half that of road transportation and vastly quicker than canal transportation (UK Parliament, 2021b). Train networks also benefited from substantive government investment. The British government supported the expansion of train networks by passing more than 300 Railway Acts in a span of two years in the 19th Century (Bogart and You, 2018). These developments in the transport network were only made possible due to the economic interests of the coal industry and its surrounding industries which relied on them.

Figure 5-0-1 illustrates how extensive the rail networks developed in the UK by 1851. As much of the smaller rail networks have since been destroyed under the Beeching Act, this older data shows how the transportation network had developed. These networks were important in ensuring that coal was used in the production of other manufacturing goods. For instance, Doncaster which borders Wakefield District, specialised in steel and thus required a steady and timely supply of coal (Appleton, 1956, p.164). Rail and canal networks also ensured that coal produced in Yorkshire was distributed throughout the UK. For instance, further to the east, coal was exported using ports in Hull (Appleton, 1956, p.164). Thus, the coal industry shaped the geographical characteristic of the

Yorkshire region to one with good transport connections which is still evident today with the major interchange passing through the region.

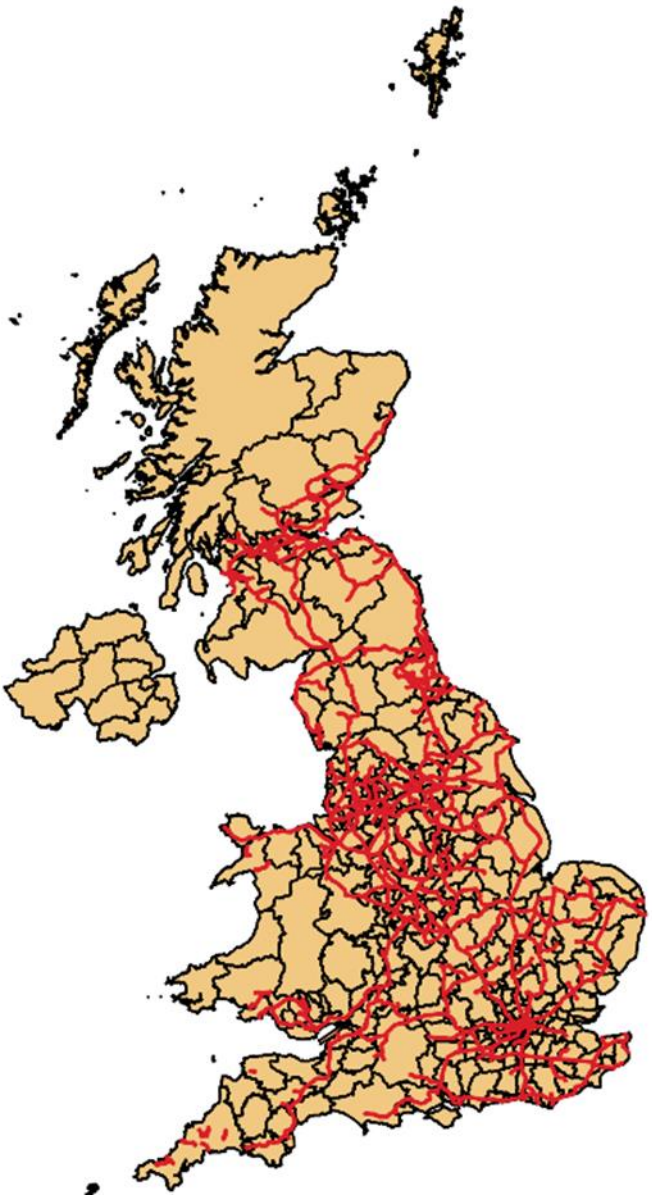

FIGURE 5-0-1:MAP OF TRAINLINES IN THE UK IN 1851 IN RELATION TO PRESENT LOCAL AUTHORITY BOUNDARIES. THE RED LINE SHOWS THE TRAIN LINES AS THEY EXISTED IN 1851. DATA SOURCES: DATA ON TRAIN LINES OF 1851 WERE EXTRACTED FROM SATCHELL ET AL. (2018), AND LOCAL AUTHORITY BOUNDARY DATA WAS TAKEN FROM ONS GEOGRAPHY (2022A).

The textile industry was also key to the development of Yorkshire, and West Yorkshire in particular. While men worked in mining, close to half of women in West Yorkshire were employed in the textile industry in the 19th Century (Busfield, 1988, pp.62–63), and nine per cent of engineers related to the textile industry were found in Leeds alone in the same period. While it is not entirely clear why the textile industry flourished in this

region, there are some tentative explanations. Some credit the innovation of machinery and the abundance of engineers who operated them to be originally from Yorkshire (Cookson, 1994). Still others focused on the numerous banks in the region as important financers (Hudson, 1981). Further others argue that the geographical advantages alone do not explain the strength of the textile industry in West Yorkshire. Maw (2010, pp.759–760) further credits the active exchange of merchants between it and the US in allowing for textile trade to flourish between the UK and US (and for the UK, secure an important international market). Adding on to this argument of personal relations, Caunce (1997) argued that the close community within and the informal connections people made through such exchanges resulted in its success. Whatever the reason was behind the textile industry taking off in the region, this history has shaped the current economic landscape of West Yorkshire. Both the coal and textile industries created an incentive to develop transport links, and a strong focus in manufacturing sector which employed both men and women.

5.1-1-ii A close-knit community?

Furthermore, these industries had influences beyond that of economic influence. It was often the source of new communities being constructed. As such, the remote nature of mining lent to such communities developing to become close knit or isolated. Mining was thus seen as more than just an industry in facilitating the development of a unique "tightly knit" community according to Working Class Movement Library (2022). This phrase is often accompanied by a sense of pride and the fact that such a sense does not exist anymore (Power, 2008, p.176). However, what exactly fuelled such closeness in coal mining communities?

One explanation is that the dangerous nature of the occupation strengthened bonds. Of the 164,356 total casualties recorded in the coal mining sector, of roughly 16,000 deaths were recorded between 1950 and 2000 (The Coalmining History Resource Centre, 2021). Risk of injuries from handling heavy equipment such as the longwall shearers, cave-ins, explosions, toxic air are some of the dangers that come with the profession. Deafness and vibration white finger were some of the cited ailments that former coal miners suffered from as a result of working in the mines (Turner, 2000, pp.241–242). To this day, former miners are entitled to compensation from the government for such health

issues caused by coal mining under the Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (Gov.UK, 2022c).

One potential explanation as to how a sense of community can be formed in a hazardous profession like coalmining is the theory of the "common enemy". Developed by De Jaegher (2021). The theory of the "common enemy" argues that existing groups start to cooperate better with one another when faced with shared dangers which includes that of environmental danger (De Jaegher, 2021, p.4). This category of the common enemy concept differed from other forms of cooperation which focused on group to group antagonism and cooperation achieved through the existence of a common enemy (De Jaegher, 2021). The idea of cooperation against an environmental danger is one of an existing group working together in adverse circumstances. In other words, cooperation is achieved through survival instincts to minimise physical risks involved in working in coal mining, rather than one born out of neighbourhood connections.

Teamwork was one key characteristic of miners, as "[y]our life might have depended on" the ability to "work as a team" (Turner, 2000, p.69). Such high levels of trust in the workplace may explain why mining communities seemed to be closer. In addition to the environmental danger, there was also the sense of the in-out group dichotomy. In coal mining communities, "outsiders" were not just foreigners, but people who were outside of their village and some of the rise in crimes after the coal mine closures were attributed to such "outsiders" (Turner, 2000, p.223). All this may give an impression of coal mining communities as homogeneous, and that miners are born and raised solely in the same place with the community dominated by white workers (Bulmer, 1975). However, in reality, there were much movement within coal mining communities.

Historically, coal mining communities throughout Europe including the UK relied on miners from colonies and other European states (Knotter, 2015). In an attempt at addressing the narrative of a predominantly white mining community, projects in recent years have collected interview data, pictures, and equipment used by Black miners (Black Miners Museum Project, 2021). In the case of the Wakefield District, there is an area called "Scotties Corner" named after the fact that the area was populated by Scottish miners who moved to work (Turner, 2000, p.33). It was thus common for miners

to move around to different mines as a result of mine closures in their local areas as well as in search of better working conditions. Furthermore, Gilbert (1995) muses that those who did not fit the image of a traditional local miner (for example, those who moved out in search of other opportunities) may have been omitted from the general narrative and thus helped create an image of cultural and social cohesion. More recent work has failed to identify a particularly close sense of community in mining communities which puts to question whether there was an over-estimation of such emotions in the past (Abreu and Jones, 2021). Thus, the narrative of a coherent and close-knit community is not entirely accurate and may hide some diversity in terms of both origin and beliefs. Questioning this concept of a close-knit community further allows us to understand how former coal mining communities suffered from isolation which has further contributed to the sense of relative decline.

5.1-1-iii A community in isolation

The close-knit community narrative may also be conflating the fact that coal mining communities are by its nature quite isolated. At present, places like Wakefield face the problem of limited transportation option with it being easier to get outside from Wakefield than moving within the district (BBC Radio 4, 2021). This lack of mobility within the district has been linked to a barrier to work opportunities for young residents (The Newsroom, 2018). A wide range of issues have been identified as the root of this issue such as decades of privatisation push (Vickerman, 2021, p.96), preference for solutions to transport issues to be found at the local level (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2011), and disparity in terms of government investment in transport by region (Pope and Hourston, 2022). In general, public expenditure for transport is not equal between regions. For example, when viewing the public spending towards transport per capita, London receives the most out of all English regions (see Figure 5-0-2). This disparity is due to costs being higher in London but shows the limitations in public funding towards transportation. However, it also emphasises the fact that places like Wakefield situated in the Yorkshire and the Humber region may struggle to have sufficient levels of public funding to ensure that the

transportation network is well-maintained.

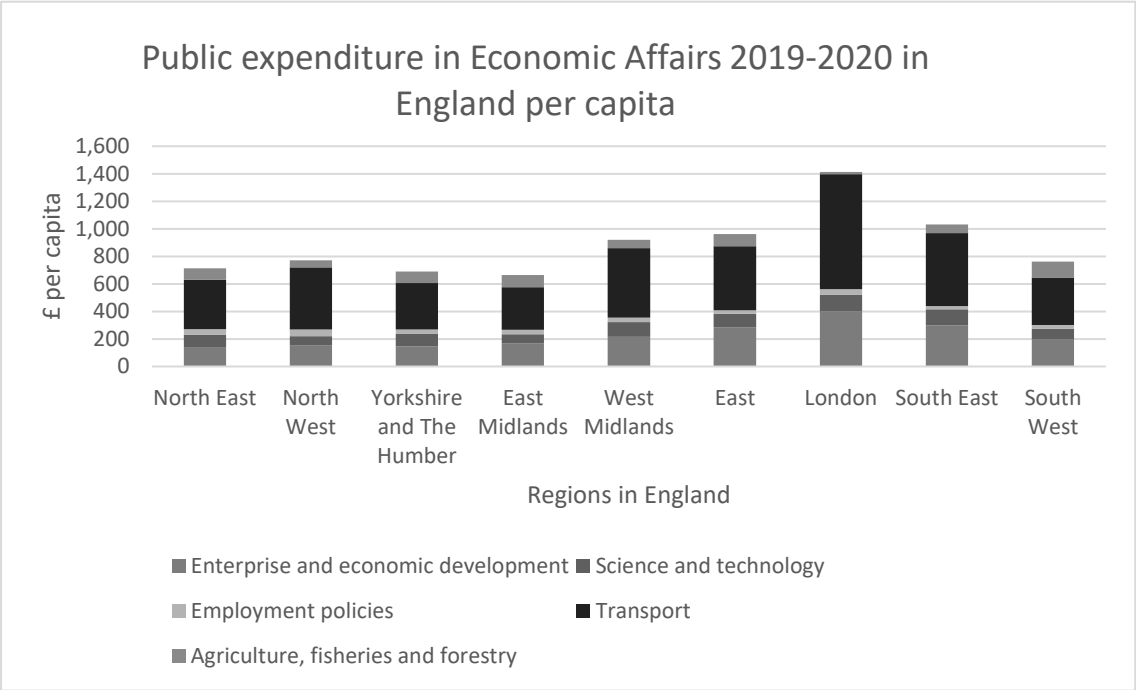

FIGURE 5-0-2: PUBLIC EXPENDITURE IN ECONOMIC AFFAIRS 2019-2020 IN ENGLAND PER CAPITA. DATA SOURCE: HM TREASURY (2022) COUNTRY AND REGIONAL ANALYSIS REPORT FROM 2022. THE DATA SHOWS THAT TRANSPORT WHICH IS EXPRESSED IN BLACK MAKES UP THE LARGEST EXPENDITURE FOR ALL FUNDING RELATED TO ECONOMIC AFFAIRS. IT ALSO SHOWS THAT LONDON HAS THE HIGHEST EXPENDITURE FOR BOTH ALL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT.

This section argues that in addition to the lack of central funding, Wakefield's history as a former coal mining community lends to the challenge of isolation. Since the isolation is imbedded in the way in which coal mining communities developed, it will be that much harder to address the issue.

Mining with its unequivocal link with geography and space, often played a central role in the formation of local communities themselves. In the Victorian period, the high labour intensity meant that mine owners needed to build housing to accommodate large numbers of miners to relocate near the mines for maximum efficiency For instance, mining villages were often created as a result of mining businesses setting up housing for their workers near the mines which resulted in entire communities being formed where everyone was working in some shape or form in the mining industry. In addition to housing, places for socialisation were created such the workingmen's social clubs.

Workingmen's clubs were created in the Victorian period aimed at educating the working-class and addressing moral issues such as alcoholism (Price, 1971). It morphed in later years to become an important recreation site even though entrance to workingmen's clubs were often restricted to men (Cherrington, 2009). Social institutions such as Workingmen's clubs ensured that local residents' social as well as work life needs were met within mining communities. In short, the close proximity of leisure spaces, workplace and accommodation in one location meant that most of the day-to-day activities of workers and their families were accomplished in the same space. This may explain as to why former coal mining communities developed in isolation from other economic hubs. Such isolation also links to this idea of relative decline, and this is evident from the socio-economic issues in former coal mining communities like Wakefield. Before delving into this point, it is important to note that alongside the myth of a close-knit community, there is a propensity of focusing on coal mining as a working-class occupation, and by extension a sense that it was a low-income occupation. The next section argues that contrary to such a popular belief, one of the reasons why former coal mining communities suffered from a sense of relative decline is because of the relatively well-paid nature of the profession.

5.1-1-iv Coal mining a well-paid working-class occupation

Coal mining has a reputation of being "an unpleasant, dirty, dangerous, and difficult" profession (Dennis et al., 1956, p.38). Some former miners are quick to say that they would not want their own children to go into the same profession precisely because of such hardships (Anon, 1975). Historically, coal mining was a particularly dangerous profession, their housing quality poor (Lyall, 2000), gruelling physical work (Dennis et al., 1956, pp.58–59), and sometimes their labour uncompensated (Haynes, 1953).

These facts, however, do not tell the whole story. Archival data on the median wage of workers in selected industries in the UK between 1970 and 1985 show that coal mining had relatively high pay (see Figure 5-0-3). This data shows wage for manual labourers, and among manufacturing and agricultural work, coal mining was the highest paying. In 1975, the median wage in coal mining sector was at £66.9, the highest among all other manual workers (Office for National Statistics, 2016a). While the wage of those in the coal & petroleum products industry overtake those in the mining & quarrying industry in

terms of median wage in 1985 (Office for National Statistics, 2016a), mining remains a well-paid position in comparison to other manual labour work such as chemicals and textiles.

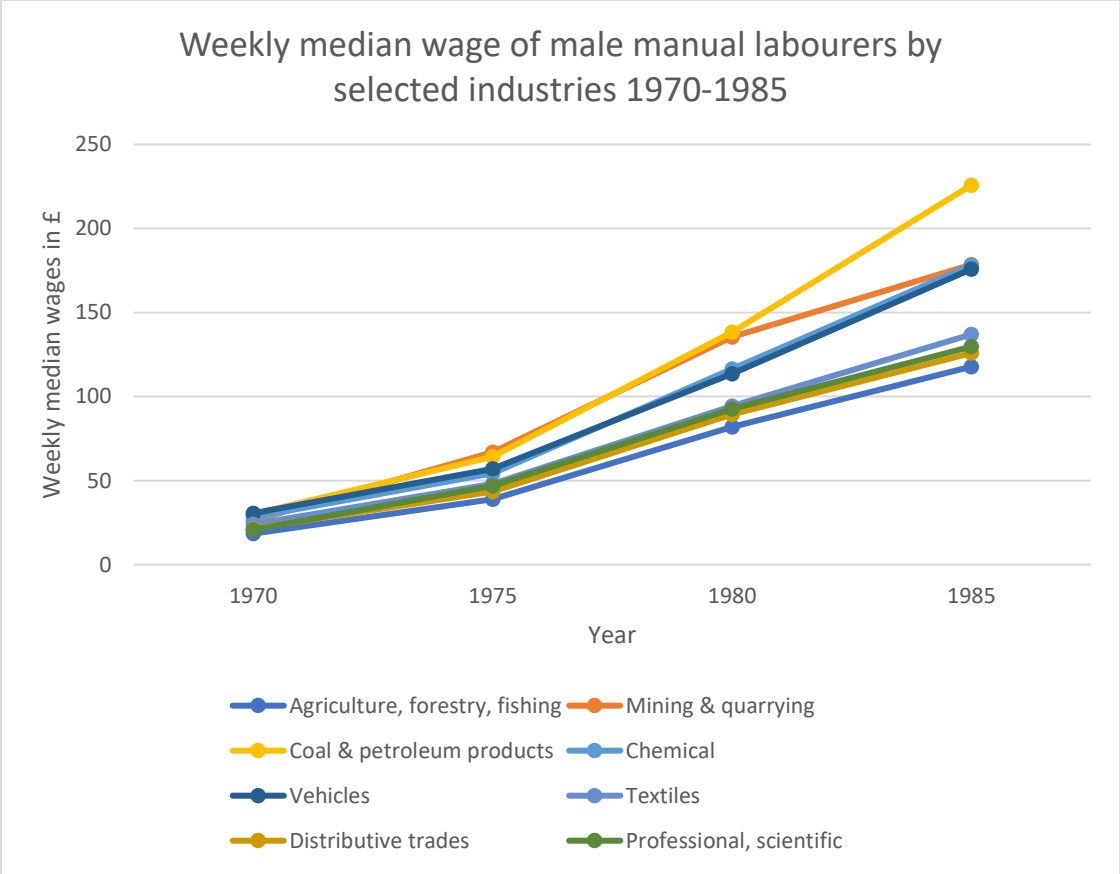

FIGURE 5-0-3: WEEKLY MEDIAN WAGE OF MALE MANUAL LABOURERS IN SELECTED INDUSTRIES BETWEEN 1970 AND 1985. DATA SOURCE: OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS (2016A) NEW EARNING SURVEY.[13]

The data is starker when coal mining work pay is compared to the average pay of all manual professions. Figure 5-0-4 shows the pay for deputies and face-trained workers. Between 1970 and 1972, the data was split between underground and surface workers with the former being higher paid. This definition was changed from 1973 to be between deputies and face-trained miners. Deputies referred to experienced miners who were given supervisory positions underground (Ackers, 1994). Face-trained miners referred to the regular miners. Figure 5-0-4 shows that coal miners, whether they were deputies or

[13] The timeframe and the selection of profession was based on data availability and changes to the definition of the categorisation. The highest paid profession was coal and petroleum, but coal mining (categorised with quarrying) was paid the highest until 1980, and while it declined from 1985, it remained a high paying profession.

face-trained enjoyed an above average weekly median wage compared to other manual labourers (Office for National Statistics, 2016b).

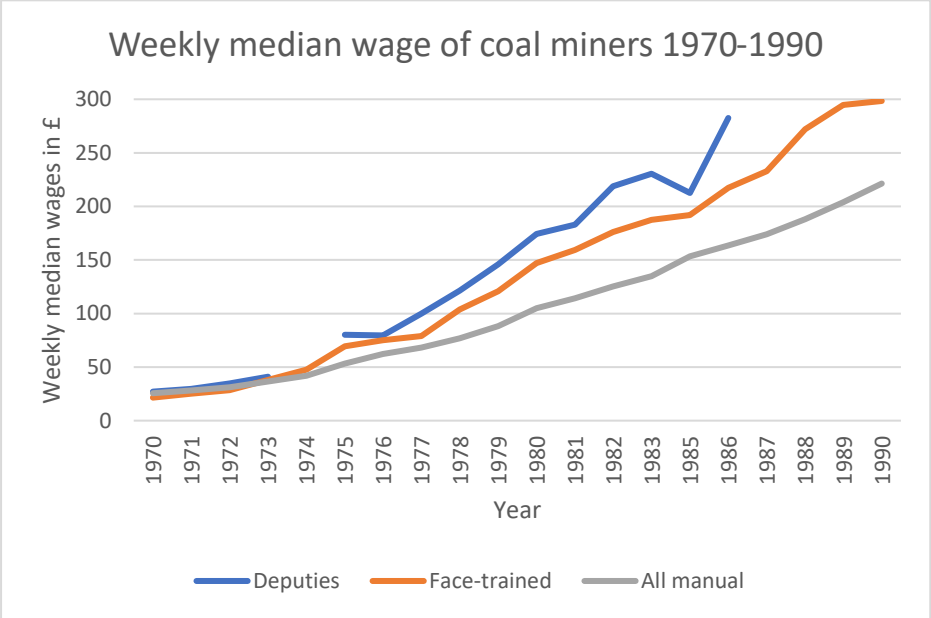

FIGURE 5-0-4: WEEKLY MEDIAN WAGE OF COAL MINERS BETWEEN 1970 AND 1990. DATA SOURCE: OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS (OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS, 2016B).[14]

There is also anecdotal evidence from an interview conducted with former coal miners in the early 2000s. A high-earning miner was said to have been able to earn around £30,000, and this was in stark contrast to the opportunities made available after the mine closures which was mostly part-time or low-skilled which amounted to slightly above £10,000 (Strangleman, 2001, p.259). In short, coal mining was a relatively well-paid position in comparison to other manual labour positions at the time. It also paid better than the jobs that came after the closure of the mines. This explains in part why there was such strong sense of relative decline in former coal mining communities. It was not just about losing a job, but losing a well-paid job for working-class people. It is thus not a surprise that the sentiment, "things were better back in the day" is a common notion among especially the older generation in such communities.

[14] Between 1970 to 1972, the occupation was split between underground and surface miners. However, from 1973, the distinction changed to deputies and face-trained miners. Since the distinction was made to show the difference in pay, the underground miners are treated as face-trained miners and surface miners are treated as deputies in this Figure. Data on deputy miners in 1974 and 1976 onwards are unavailable and thus left blank. The years are every year between 1970 and 1972 except 1984 which official data is unavailable for both deputies and face-trained miners. This is likely related to the miners' strike, but the omission is unclear in the official records.

5.1-2 Current socio-economic characteristic of Wakefield

The previous section explained why former coal mining communities remain isolated and how contrary to popular belief, coal mining was a well-paid occupation thus explaining how relative decline was exacerbated in such communities. This section turns to the current socio-economic situation of Wakefield. The primary argument presented here is that former coal mining communities like Wakefield may on paper seem to be doing relatively well. However, there are clear socio-economic issues that still bear the scars left behind from the closure of the coal mines. Arguably, some of the present-day issues, and the challenge in reviving the region has much to do with its historical past.

5.1-2-i Wakefield, still a "working-class" region

Although in the UK there has been a rapid shrinkage of the manufacturing sector, and the country has made a transition into a service-led economy, places like Wakefield still has a higher-than-average share of people still working in more traditionally working-class professions. For example, 12.3 per cent of employees work in the manufacturing sector and 10.3 per cent in transport and storage (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). For reference, the average in Great Britain for workers in the manufacturing sector is 7.6 per cent and those in transport and storage sector is 5.1 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). In other words, while it no longer has a coal mining sector (mining and quarrying is at 0.1 per cent, the same as the average across Great Britain (Office for National Statistics, 2021b)), it still houses more predominantly what would traditionally be considered working-class occupation.

This is also mirrored in the number of businesses registered in the Inter-Departmental Business Register. At present, based on this register, there are 805 businesses in the transport and storage sector, which accounts for 8.35 per cent of all businesses in Wakefield in 2019 (Office for National Statistics, 2022a). In comparison, throughout the UK, this sector only accounts for 4.10 per cent of all businesses, much smaller compared to Wakefield (Office for National Statistics, 2022a). The construction industry has the most number of businesses set up in Wakefield at 14.63 per cent of all businesses recorded in the district (Office for National Statistics, 2022a). In short, industries such as logistics and construction remain dominant in the region.

Additionally, the warehouse industry has seen dramatic increases in demand in recent years, and Wakefield seems to have been successful in attracting investment to become a key logistic hub. The rise in demand are primarily driven by a rise in e-commerce, and the development of new supply chains as a result of the UK leaving the EU (Office for National Statistics, 2022d). Wakefield's prime location such as being at the centre of the country, historical development of good transport network as discussed in the previous section has allowed the region to specialise in this industry. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 8, this did not necessarily result in positive outcomes and may have helped brew Eurosceptic sentiments which was fuelled by the British media.

However, while it remains true that traditionally working-class occupation dominates the region, this does not mean that the shape of employment has not changed in Wakefield. Historically middle-class occupations such as health and public administration, have become key sources of employment. Those working in health and social care now account for 15.5 per cent of all workers in Wakefield, higher than in Great Britain which stands at 13.7 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). The same is true for public administration which makes up 6.5 per cent of all workers in Wakefield, once again higher than in Great Britain which stands at 4.6 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). Health and public administration, in other words, the public sector is a major employer in the district, indicating the relative lack of private sector employment opportunities in contrast to the public sector.

In sum, some of the more traditional working-class occupations still dominate the district. Signs of more traditionally middle-class occupations have now become important sources of employment, but these are in the health and education sectors, likely more of an indication of a relative weakness in the private sector compared to the public sector in the region.

5.1-2-ii Skills, a recurring issue

The previous sub-section argued that Wakefield was still dominated by more traditionally working-class occupations, and a relatively stronger reliance on public sector employment. While they signal both strengths and weaknesses, the problem with skills remain perhaps one of the most important issues in the region.

For every skills qualification apart from what is considered “other qualifications”, Wakefield scores lower than the national average (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). While declining steadily, Wakefield still has relatively high percentage of those without any qualifications at 9.1 per cent of its population compared to 7.7 per cent across the UK as of 2019 (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). Additionally, those with at least an National Vocational Qualifications [NVQ] 4 which is equivalent or above higher education level qualification (Gov.UK, 2023e) was at just 27.6 per cent compared to Great Britain which is at 40.3 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). To be clear, here skills refer to those recognised under the government framework, and it does not mean that those without a qualification is necessarily without any skill. The greater point made here in terms of the seriousness of the problem of the existence of people with no qualification is that NVQ1 is equivalent to GCSEs with grades *below* D (Gov.UK, 2023e). Thus, to categorise as no qualification, these individuals do not even hold GCSEs. As will be discussed in the third section of this chapter, this is a major problem in places like Wakefield where the common solution to skills gap is to encourage people to take up apprenticeship. For now, the next problem related to lack of qualifications is one of skills shortage.

Data on skills shortage vacancy shows that Wakefield has a disproportionately high prevalence of workers without relevant experience or skill applying for job opportunities in the region which amounts to a staggering 41 per cent of all vacancies compared to just 25 per cent in England (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2021a, p.125). This indicates that the lack of qualified workers is harming local job opportunities even though as mentioned previously that the region is mostly focused on logistics, construction, public sector work that do not necessarily require exceptionally high qualifications.

In many ways, the problems faced by Wakefield is one of low hanging fruit. Its problems are with lack of skilled and qualified people. Due to such lack of skills, in the future it is also expected that it will struggle with the danger of automation of much of the work that already exists in the region (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2021a, p.72). Thus, what it needs is a drastic improvement in skilled workers.

In summary, this section has argued that Wakefield still has what would be considered predominantly working-class occupations although it is equally seeing a growing importance of traditionally middle-class jobs in the public sector. However, the main problem in the region is that of skills with no qualification being a problem as well as skills needs of local businesses remaining unmet. How exactly is it best to approach this problem? The seemingly obvious answer to this problem is to increase the number of qualified residents. The next section explores one commonly cited solution for "left behind" regions such as Wakefield which is to skill-up residents by encouraging people to take up apprenticeships. However, the next section will argue how such seemingly simple solution is riddled with problems.

5.2 Apprenticeship

The previous section identified skills shortage as a major driver in the relative decline of Wakefield. This section will focus on apprenticeship as one of the potential solutions to this problem. Apprenticeship, a form of vocational training is often seen as the solution to high unemployment and low skills. Although it is a relatively fluid term, using the definition presented by Ryan (2000, p.44) it could be understood as a "formal, structured programme of vocational preparation, sponsored by an employer, that juxtaposes part-time off-the-job instruction with on-the-job training and work experience, leads to a recognised vocational qualification at craft or higher levels".

The reason why this section is focused on apprenticeship is because it is often suggested as a solution to many socio-economic issues especially in places which has fewer people seeking higher education. Much of the recent framing of apprenticeship roles are centred around the notion that it is a good alternative route to higher education. A popular position especially among politicians who are sometimes keen to use it as a pretence to criticise the higher education sector. For example, in a Tweet by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (2023) read "[s]o I'm cracking down on rip-off university degrees and boosting apprenticeships". Apprenticeships were considered so vital that in an interesting echo of the YTS, former Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced during the COVID-19 pandemic that "every young person [will be given] the chance of an apprenticeship" (Camden, 2020). Thus, apprenticeship was considered to be a viable alternative to higher education qualifications and a way to help young people in

accessing employment during a crisis. Apprenticeship still feature in the manifestoes of both the Conservative and Labour Party (The Labour Party, 2019, p.18; The Conservative and Unionist Party, 2019, p.36). It is also seen as a solution to a wide range of issues such as youth unemployment, wage stagnation, route into employment and participation in society to just name a few (European Commission, 2013, p.2). In other words, there is high expectations when it comes to what apprenticeship could do to tackle socio-economic problems.

This section is structured as follows. First, it will discuss why apprenticeship is seen as vital especially in places like Wakefield. Second, it will present an overview how apprenticeship system is delivered today and how the demographic of apprentices is changing. Third, it will provide a description of how the apprenticeship system developed in the UK, and how it has taken on board much of the criticism it received in terms of how the system was run. Lastly, it will use an example of a typical apprenticeship position and the housing costs in Wakefield to illustrate how despite the improvements made, it is increasingly an unaffordable route for local residents. This section thus argues that encouraging apprenticeships in left-behind places like Wakefield is unlikely to be enough to tackle the problem of relative decline and further emphasises the deep socio-economic issues faced by such areas.

5.2-1 Apprenticeship, a viable route for the left-behind?

While pay and income after gaining apprenticeship is discussed in depth (Thelen, 2004; Department for Education, 2022), so far there is little discussion over working as well as living conditions of apprentices while they complete their programme. This gap in literature has allowed people to continue to hold outdated views of apprenticeship which has fuelled the idea that apprenticeship is a viable route for left-behind areas like Wakefield.

Perhaps one common way people view apprenticeship is that it is an ideal route for people who want to avoid student debt, earn while they learn, and those who struggle academically (Bearne, 2019). This is often encapsulated in the phrase, “[u]niversity is not for everyone” (Bearne, 2019). The aforementioned Tweet by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (2023) also creates the image of a dual career route, one academic, and the other vocational. On paper, considering the fact that 27.6 per cent have a qualification

equivalent and above a degree (Office for National Statistics, 2021b), rather than increasing the number of degree holders, the more realistic option may seem to be to increase the number of apprentices. In the subsequent sections, the focus will be on how feasible this is under the modern apprenticeship system.

While this will be the main question, it is important to note that apprenticeship does remain a critical path to some occupations. For example, construction and engineering are sectors that still prefer to employ workers through apprenticeship as it values skills and practical experience (Gambin and Hogarth, 2017, p.11). As discussed in the previous section, Wakefield has a higher than average proportion of businesses that specialise in construction located within its district, accounting for 14.63 per cent of all businesses registered in the region (Office for National Statistics, 2022a). Thus, it is likely that there will be a strong demand for apprentices. Data on apprentices are difficult to analyse as the official collection of data is by the home address of the apprentice. This means that while for the academic year 2018/19, the last year before the effects of the pandemic takes place, there was 5,830 apprentices from Wakefield (Gov.UK, 2022a), but this needs to be caveated by the fact that not all of them would be starting an apprenticeship in Wakefield. There is thus data on how many people become an apprentice, but who exactly becomes an apprentice?

5.2-2 Who are the modern apprentices?

The likely image of apprentices is one of young people, perhaps between 16-17 is what most people would imagine to be starting an apprenticeship. These people will be forgiven for thinking this as the starting age of apprenticeship is set at “16 or over” (Gov.UK, 2021). It may have been true that in the past most people who left compulsory education to start an apprenticeship from 16 years old. However, at present only around 22 per cent of all apprentices are below the age 19 (Department for Education, 2017, p.9). This means that a greater number of those currently working as an apprentice is older. What exactly is contributing to this change in the age of people becoming an apprentice?

One contributing factor is that the age cap was lifted by the New Labour government (Mirza-Davies, 2015), allowing for older people to become apprentices. Another change to consider is the growing popularity and affordability of higher education. While tuition

fees have risen, the loan system has made it possible for more people to pursue a degree. This is reflected in the number of undergraduate students in the UK. This number has doubled from 271,000 to 570,000 between 1994 and 2020 (Bolton, 2021, p.7), showcasing the growing prevalence of people pursuing higher education. Furthermore, more than a quarter of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in England have now entered higher education (Bolton, 2021, p.20). Additionally, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies (Britton et al., 2021), some of the least selective modern universities had 10.7 per cent of its entire student cohort from disadvantaged backgrounds, the highest among all other universities. This implies that the expansion of higher education providers since 1992 provided more opportunities, especially among those from disadvantaged backgrounds to enrol in higher education. In other words, higher education became a more viable option for a greater number of people, including those from less advantaged backgrounds.

The older age of apprenticeship starters also implies that they are more likely to have started their apprenticeship after completing another form of qualification. This assumption is supported by data which shows that most apprentices have already obtained level 3 qualifications (equivalent to A-levels) when they start their apprenticeship according to Department for Education (2018, pp.59–60). This presents a slight conundrum to the idea of encouraging young people to pursue an apprenticeship in order to increase the number of highly qualified workers.

A potential issue here is that the number of total skilled workers may not increase even if more people start an apprenticeship. This is because the vast majority of apprentices are working to achieve either a level 2 or level 3 qualifications (equivalent to a GCSE or A-levels), which are either on the same level or slightly below the qualification level they have already obtained before starting their apprenticeship (Department for Education, 2018, pp.59–60). This implies that the apprenticeship scheme is supporting people to upskill, but not necessary supporting those without any qualifications to obtain one. Indeed, two of the most popular reasons cited was their desire to obtain a qualification and commence their career in a specific sector (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2012, p.24), not necessarily to obtain a higher qualification.

In short, apprentices are increasingly older, start their apprenticeship with already qualifications that are above or at least the same as the ones they already hold. How did we get to this point? The next sub-section will explore in brief how the apprenticeship system developed in the UK and argue how the problems in the system are deep rooted and thus hard to resolve.

5.2-3 The development of the apprenticeship system

The point of tracing the historical development of the apprenticeship system lies in the fact that it allows us to distinguish between a fundamental issue with the system and the misuse of the system. The former indicates that the system altogether requires a re-think, while the latter indicates that some readjustments would suffice. This sub-section argues that the historical development of the apprenticeship system shows that the problem in the British vocational system is one of fundamental issues, and for the system to function as a way of ensuring skilled career routes for residents especially in "left-behind" areas, a major change is necessary.

The history of the apprenticeship system is long, but it was the 1563 Statute of Artificers that first codified apprenticeship and brought it into the control of the central government (Snell, 1996, p.304). In other words, attempts at standardisation of the apprenticeship system has a long history. However, at present the UK apprenticeship system is not fully standardised. This, Thelen (2004, pp.114–115) argues, is the product of the lack of quality training and certification of skills at the end of the apprenticeship scheme. This is often presented in contrast to the German system which is argued to have better outcomes such as relatively high completion rates, levels of skills gained, and business interest in the delivery of the apprenticeship programme (Ryan and Unwin, 2001). Steedman (2001, p.78) stated that while "a young person who successfully completes an apprenticeship qualification in the German-speaking dual system would be able to meet the standard for a British NVQ3 in the same occupation", "the young person with a British apprenticeship and NVQ3 would not be able to reach the standard required for the dual-system general and technical education requirements on the basis of NVQ3 alone".

The apprenticeship system has gone through several stages of change in the UK. It was recognised that the apprenticeship system suffered from lack of enforceability of the

statute due to a combination of the rapid changes in the skills, tendency of jealous protection of the number of skilled workers, and reliance on charitable organisations to offer training (Thelen, 2004, pp.98–101 & 118). Change came more rapidly in the post-war period. In 1964, The Industrial Training Act was introduced to standardise the training period to three years, levies and grants were introduced to further ensure a fairer distribution of training costs (Marsden, 1995, p.90). Despite such efforts, apprenticeship figures continued to drop, and in addition the country faced a rise in youth employment due to deindustrialisation. The Thatcher government announced the YTS to tackle this issue. By rebranding the system as YTS, it was also hoped to make it more appealing for young people. However, since the YTS was developed predominantly for young people to obtain NVQ2 level, it was criticised for its training quality, low level qualification, and low pay (Marsden and Ryan, 1991, pp.363–364). The Major government further expanded the industries that could offer an apprenticeship to include non-traditional industries such as business and healthcare, and increased the level of qualification to NVQ3 (Fuller and Unwin, 2003, pp.6–7). At present, apprenticeship qualifications are set by standards designed by employers themselves in an attempt to make the skills obtained by apprentices more relevant to sector demands (Gov.UK, 2020). Thus, throughout the years, there has been some attempt at addressing the issues pertaining to the apprenticeship scheme by Steedman (2001) and Ryan and Unwin (2001). More recently, in a further push to match current skills needs with apprenticeships, degree apprenticeships were developed. Degree apprenticeships are apprenticeships that are the equivalent to undergraduate or a Masters degree.

In sum, from standardisation efforts starting in the 16th Century, the apprenticeship system has gone through considerable change especially since the post-war period. UK apprenticeship has struggled with allegations that the training is below standards and the qualification levels low compared to countries like Germany. In recent years, apprenticeship is offered by diverse industries, have stronger involvement of business, and offer up to degree-level qualifications. What then, could this pose as a problem to left-behind regions? The next section argues that despite such attempts at improving the system, it is increasingly an unviable option for people in left-behind areas.

5.2-4 Apprenticeship opportunities in Wakefield, still a viable route?

As mentioned in section 3.1 in this chapter, apprenticeship has been often viewed as a way of reducing socio-economic issues and considered a viable alternative option to higher education. Section 3.2 showed the overall changes to the demographic of apprentices to a cohort of older and more qualified individuals. The previous sub-section (3.3) has presented how the apprenticeship system has changed in the last couple of decades to offer higher level of qualification. Put together, the face of apprenticeship is changing drastically. What does such change mean for left-behind places like Wakefield? This sub-section will argue that these changes to apprenticeship, while welcome in some regards have also become harder for people in left-behind areas to access. In other words, if policymakers' attempts to increasing apprenticeship positions without a serious reassessment of the system has the danger of continuing to make the system turn into an unviable option for people in left-behind areas. This sub-section will use Wakefield as a case study to illustrate how taking up an apprenticeship position looks like for the majority of people in left-behind areas.

The data used in this sub section is based on figures from 2023. As of 2023, the minimum wage of apprentices was set at £5.28 per hour for the first year of their apprenticeship (Gov.UK, 2023a). At present, the greatest rise in apprenticeship figures is found among those aged over 25 (Gambin and Hogarth, 2017, p.5). In contrast, the minimum wage of those aged over 23 in 2023 was £10.42 (Gov.UK, 2023a). This means that older apprentices will be paid half of what they are entitled to by becoming an apprentice. Apprentices are entitled to minimum wage of their age from the second year of their apprenticeship (Gov.UK, 2023a).The extremely low minimum wage is hardly mentioned in much of the promotions for apprenticeship roles. Most argue that this is the minimum wage and that in reality many other job opportunities pay higher than this. This is indeed true for higher apprenticeship and degree apprenticeships (equivalent to above A-levels to Masters degree), which offers at the lowest £14,644 salary (Gov.UK, 2022d) as opposed to £10,296[15] if the hourly wage of £5.28 is converted to an annual salary.

[15] The calculation was based on a 30 hour per week plus one day of training (7.5 hours) on a £5.28 per hour work. 30 hour per week is the typical working hours of apprentices, and one option for apprentices is

However, to put into context, 32 per cent of all apprenticeship participants were pursuing a higher apprenticeship while the rest (68 per cent) was pursuing apprenticeship levels that were lower than level 3 (A-levels) in England academic year 2021/22 (Gov.UK, 2022a). In 2023, there was only one apprenticeship offered in Wakefield which was a higher apprenticeship (level 4 qualification) offered by National Highways (Gov.UK, 2022d). In other words, higher paying and higher-level qualification apprenticeship is rarer in places like Wakefield. This is because degree apprenticeships require higher education providers that could provide the educational side of the apprenticeship scheme as well as businesses that require workers who need skills that are degree-level. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Wakefield has neither, meaning that both the supply and demand for degree-level workers remain relatively low.

Thus, even if Wakefield wants to increase the number of people pursuing a higher-level apprenticeship, they will most likely need to pursue them outside of the district in either larger cities or in the capital, London where such opportunities continue to concentrate. Sub section 2.2.2 in this chapter argued that when we say Wakefield has a problem of people with no qualifications, this refers to people without even a GCSE D. There is a strong geographical component to this problem with the growing north-south divide in GCSE grades presenting serious issues for the prospects of people in left-behind areas. For example, for GCSE math, only 71 per cent of students aged 16-19 in West Yorkshire achieved a D or above (Ofqual, 2023). For English, the same dataset showed that 81 per cent of students achieved a D or above for English language (Ofqual, 2023).[16] A level 2 intermediate apprenticeship, the lowest apprenticeship one could get requires GCSE English and math above D according to Wakefield College (Wakefield College, 2023). Technically, one passes GCSE when they obtain C or above (4 or above under the new system) (BBC News, 2023a). When the criteria is narrowed to just students who *passed* (grades C or above), only 55.5 per cent of students aged 16-19 in West Yorkshire pass GCSE maths (Ofqual, 2023). This means that there are young people today in the area who are failing to meet the minimum requirement for apprenticeship positions. Thus,

to have one day of training (this is an estimate as length of training is set on a case by case) (The University and Colleges Admission Service, 2021).

[16] For reference, the average in England was as follows: GSCE math (77.3 per cent), English language (85.2 per cent).

apprenticeship is not necessarily a viable route for those who are not academically inclined as is the popular image as getting on to a desirable higher-level apprenticeship is increasingly requiring higher grades. If the low skill is not addressed, there is a strong possibility that in left-behind places people do not qualify to pursue even an apprenticeship let alone further education.

Another issue that contributes to this issue is the problem of affordability. Since apprentices are paid a wage and paid for their training, they cannot access maintenance loans which is afforded to students pursuing a degree. Degree apprentices also cannot access maintenance loans as they are treated as apprentices. The idea is that the apprentices should be able to live on the wages they receive. Recently, more than half of undergraduate students have been found to be taking up part-time roles to help support their studies. This is despite students receiving £9,706 per year if they are living away from parents for the academic year 2022/23 (Gov.UK, 2023c).

provides a comparison between what undergraduate students, apprentices, and 16-17- and 18–21-year-olds earn. The caveat is that undergraduate students working part-time will be taking home more on top of what they receive through the maintenance loan. Additionally, since undergraduate students are eligible for means tested loan, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be able to receive more. The table includes 16–17-year-old median wage to highlight the fact that apprentices on minimum wage earn lower than what young people earn. In short, apprentices suffer low pay, and they may have less money compared to undergraduate students receiving maintenance loan and working part-time.

TABLE 5.1: COMPARISON OF MAINTENANCE LOAN IN RELATION TO APPRENTICESHIP MINIMUM WAGE AND THE MEDIAN WAGE OF 16-17- AND 18–21-YEAR-OLDS. DATA SOURCE: FRANCIS-DEVINE (2023) AND GOV.UK (2023C).

Undergraduate maintenance loan	Apprentice on minimum wage	Median wage of 16–17-year-old in the UK	Median wage of 18–21-year-old in the UK
£9,706	£10,296	£11,908	£20,904

Alongside pay, factoring in housing costs show that apprentices are unlikely to be able to live away from family. Apprentices on minimum wage will earn £198.00 if they work for 30 hours and earn for training 7.5 hours per week. According to Home.co.uk (2023), the median cost of rented rooms was at £399 per month or £99.75 per week as for 2023, and this jumps to £595 per month pr £148.75 per week for a one bedroom rented property in Wakefield. While property prices fluctuate, this gives a snapshot of the realities of living even in places like Wakefield where it has a much lower property prices compared to larger cities and the South. This means that if an apprentice is living on their own, renting a room will take 50.37 per cent of their weekly earnings and 75.13 per cent if they wish to live in an average one-bedroom accommodation. In other words, renting is unaffordable on minimum apprenticeship wages even in left-behind areas where apprenticeship is still viewed as a viable path.

Such growing unaffordability of apprenticeship is reflected in the fact that more than a third of disadvantaged people drop out from apprenticeship schemes, and the low pay is often cited as the reason (Social Mobility Commission, 2020). When it comes to apprenticeship roles, London offers the most diverse options and higher level apprenticeships which generally pay higher (Battiston et al., 2020; Magrini, 2020). Furthermore, the cost of apprenticeship to employers remains high. Take for example the construction sector, training a single apprentice is said to have cost the employer £34,600 (equivalent to £45,076.53 in 2022 (Bank of England, 2023c)) in 2011 (Gambin and Hogarth, 2017). On the other hand, the same paper found that apprenticeship in

healthcare brings a net £750 (equivalent to £977.09 in 2022 (Bank of England, 2023c)) to the employer (Gambin and Hogarth, 2017). This indicates that the increase in non-traditional apprenticeship such as healthcare may signal less increase in certification and standardisation of skills, but a way for employers to cut costs. Thus, the current apprenticeship is letting down the most deprived people, the higher-level apprenticeship is found more in larger cities, and the cost of apprenticeship is encouraging growth in numbers of apprenticeship offers in non-traditional sectors that are likely creating such positions as a means to cost cut.

In sum, financially, the current apprenticeship system is increasingly becoming an unviable option for the left-behind regions. Starting work even in part-time roles while going to university is now more affordable in the short-term. The growth of the non-traditional industries offering apprenticeships may simply be a substitute for full-time roles. It remains questionable how much the recent push to encourage apprenticeships will have a positive impact in left-behind regions.

5.3 Relative decline, a "sticky" problem

This chapter has discussed how some of the socio-economic issues faced in Wakefield has roots to its past development as a coal mining community. Skills was identified as a recurring issue in the district. The previous section argued that the current apprenticeship system with its low pay, lack of standardisation and centralisation, as well as the increase in the non-traditional industries increasingly offering apprenticeship roles all combined make it an unviable route for people in Wakefield. Perhaps one of the most serious issues is that some people in Wakefield are failing to obtain the necessary minimum qualifications even to become an apprentice. This means that people are likely failing from a very early stage, perhaps starting from failing to pass GCSE. This has a knock-on effect as not having GCSE maths and English would bar them from pursuing an apprenticeship and thus likely to miss out on being able to move on from a low paying position they are stuck at.

This also has implications for inter-generational inequality as parents who lack such minimum qualifications may themselves struggle to support their children passing GCSE. The problem of working-class white people failing to meet educational needs have been raised several times. While the reason for this may be multifaceted, culture is said to

play an important role. It is understood that white working-class students often have parents who do not see the point in education and if they are surrounded by peers who share the same view, it is difficult to combat this issue. In addition, the lack of local opportunities has been identified as one of the reasons behind the greater social mobility rate in London compared to left-behind areas. In other words, it is harder to reverse the trend of relative decline at an individual level.

This is why relative decline is a sticky problem, hard to shake off, and the root of issues are deeply embedded in the way regions developed. Increasingly, the gap between "left-behind" regions like Wakefield and other parts in the UK are growing. This is also reflected in how there is a growing divide between politicians and their voters. According to focus groups, people have expressed those in left-behind areas felt politicians were "looking down" on them, and had "taken us for granted" (Rayson, 2020, pp.182 & 195). Reflecting how their views as well as backgrounds are increasingly different from the better educated and more liberal political class (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020, pp.153–155). This echoes the divide in Brexit support which was mainly to do with educational levels.

It may be reflecting the fact that the Wakefield had lost a well-paying, respected employment in the form of coal mining without any new industries that replaced its position have contributed to the sense of decline. Apprenticeship positions also do not help plug the gap left by the departure of coal mining as the financial insecurity makes it hard to stay on the scheme. The grade requirements especially for the higher-level apprenticeships are high and, in some cases, out of reach. This is likely to continue as the general increase in skill levels result in higher entry requirements. This is why in Chapter 8 the discussion will be on how places like Wakefield are trying to rebrand itself by investing in the arts. This chapter provides context for what kind of issues are faced in left-behind places that the ECP had to face.

In sum, by focusing on a singular case study of Wakefield, this chapter has shown that the source of left-behind is deep and has long historical roots. The Brexit vote in such areas reflect a sense that the status quo was not working and that there was a desire to bring change regardless of what it meant.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter attempted to put into context how the sense of relative decline developed in left-behind places using the example of Wakefield. It started with tracing the socio-economic background of the region, focusing on how the region's focus on coal mining and textile helped shape both the region's strength and weakness. Its strength lay with the transport network that developed as a result of transporting coal. However, it was also the coal mining community which caused it to develop in isolation from other economic hubs. One thing that this chapter argues is often forgotten is that coal mining was a well-paying, respected job. None of the new job opportunities that were introduced to the region after the mine closure could revive that sense of being at the engine of the British economy, further fuelling the sense of relative decline.

One of the main issues that remain in some respects as a result of it once again being a former coal mining community was its lack of skills. Wakefield suffers from a lack of people who have formal qualifications. This is of particular relevance at present as jobs increasingly require skills. The common solution to this skills shortage for left-behind regions is to increase apprenticeship. However, this chapter argues that the current apprenticeship system is an increasingly unviable option for residents in Wakefield. This is fuelled by a combination of low pay and the problem of people not meeting the minimum entry requirement. This is why this chapter argues that the problem of relative decline is sticky, and hard to solve. The next chapter will present the relationship between the ECP and public opinion, arguing that once again it is the historical development of the system (in this case the ECP) which in part has contributed to the lack of understanding of how the ECP works.

Chapter 6 The European Cohesion Policy and public perception

6.0 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on how a sense of relative decline set root in Wakefield which could be understood as one reason why the region voted for Brexit. However, if the sense of relative decline became a sticky problem in Wakefield, what was the EU's response to such issues? This chapter and the next will explore the ECP, how public perception developed towards it and whether it led to the development of a multi-level governance structure. The focus of this chapter will be on the impact of the ECP in terms of its influence over public perception, namely addressing how and why the ECP was not well-understood among residents.

To answer this question, this chapter argues that the complexity of the EU funding structure and the passive promotion of the ECP may be key to understanding this puzzle. The EU has been criticised for being an overly bureaucratic institution with an acute problem of democratic deficit, and a tendency of being elitist and thus out of touch with the public (Hayward, 1996; Behr, 2021). The ECP was in general poorly understood by the British public, and thus pro-EU sentiment failed to materialise through the delivery of the ECP alone.

Previous studies placed the blame for this problem over the lack of pro-EU attitudes in the UK on a wide range of potential causes such as the hostility of the British media (Startin, 2015), British culture (Spiering, 2015), and the Eurosceptic politicians and political parties (De Vries and Edwards, 2009). What is less discussed, and yet still worth exploring here is the complexity of the ECP itself and whether the EU's efforts to improve output legitimacy was sufficient in tackling the allegations of democratic deficit.

This chapter categorises the EU's attempt to improve output legitimacy into mainly two categories. One, increased focus on improving the "value for money" argument, and thus trying to improve the image of the ECP by working to reform the policy itself. Two, over-reliance on the implementation guidelines to help make the ECP visible, thus leading to the passive promotion of the ECP. In both regards, the EU struggled in the face of a limited media coverage in the UK as well as a strong sense that the ECP was insufficient in tackling relative decline using the example of Wakefield.

The main argument presented here is that the design and delivery of the ECP was too complex to be effective in building output legitimacy and that made it less accessible for the general public. Discussions over reforms of the ECP was made at the elite level such as among academics, EU bureaucrats, and local authorities. However, at no point in the consultation was there a discussion over how to explain the funds and the process to the public, and this chapter argues that this is precisely what led to a passive promotion of the ECP. In short, this chapter presents the argument that the complexity of the ECP was its Achilles heel. This confusion further fuelled the sense that the ECP was not sufficiently tackling the problem of relative decline. This had the further knock-on effect of making it difficult to explain the benefits of the EU membership during the EU referendum.

This chapter will set the background to the idea of the challenge over output legitimacy of the ECP in section 6.2 by addressing the fact of educational divide in the understanding of the ECP and how this has contributed to the idea of democratic deficit as well as in contrast to the idea of the ECP as a tool for output legitimacy for the EU. This will be followed by a discussion on how this divide can be traced back to the complexity of the ECP due in part to how it was developed. Using examples of the Leave campaign's "£350 million" argument and how support for the EU did not materialise as a result of greater funding through the ECP, section 6.3 argues that the benefit of the ECP was not well-understood by the public. Section 6.4 turns to efforts made by the EU to improve the ECP by focusing on its "value for money" by reforming its targets and implementing guidelines, but that they were ultimately unsuccessful in improving public perception this way. Section 6.5 in contrast argues that despite its limitations, the ECP had a positive impact in areas such as Wakefield by providing additional funding that it would have otherwise not been able to access. The final section 6.6 analyses how the passive promotion of the ECP and the reality of relative decline in areas such as Wakefield meant it ultimately failed to change the perception of the ECP among the public.

6.1 Lack of understanding of the EU

The fact that the EU as an institution is not very well understood among the general public has been widely regarded as one of the persistent issues faced by the EU.

Understanding of the functions of the EU was low among the British public. Less than a third of British respondents were able to correctly answer questions related to the EU based on an Eurobarometer survey (Hix, 2015). Furthermore, there was a distinct difference between those with higher and lower education qualifications in terms of their affinity to the EU, with those with lower educational levels tending to have less favourable views of the EU. These findings are not new, and explanation as to why the link existed between higher educational attainment and affinity towards the supranational bodies such as the EU has been widely hypothesised in the past. One of the earliest arguments was presented by Inglehart (1977). Inglehart (1977, pp.9–10, 97, 336–337) set out three reasons as to why the more educated had greater affiliation to the EU; 1) the more educated tended to have greater interest in political affairs, 2) they were more likely to have learned about the EU through their education, 3) they are more likely to hold, and know people who hold cosmopolitan values which gives them a better understanding of the concept of a supranational institution. The argument was thus that the more educated have greater interest, knowledge, and connections which allows them to have a greater understanding and appreciation of the EU.

More recent research supports this initial argument presented by Inglehart (1977). Consistently studies have found that those with higher education qualifications had a better understanding of the EU institutions (Carl, 2019; Stoeckel, 2019). In the case of Wakefield, which voted predominantly in support of Leave, one possible explanation lies in its relatively low proportion of those with a high-level educational qualification. As noted in the previous chapter, residents with a qualification of NVQ4 and above (degree or degree-equivalent) made up just 27.6 per cent of the local population as opposed to 40.3 per cent in Great Britain (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). Fewer residents with higher education qualification indicates that according to prior research Wakefield was already in a disadvantaged position in ensuring that its residents had a good understanding of the EU.

However, despite the fact that those with higher qualifications tended to have stronger affinity towards the EU, it did not necessarily mean that they had a better understanding of the EU. According to studies which analysed the difference in understanding of the EU between Remain and Leave voters, both sides had limited understanding of the EU (Carl,

2019). The same findings were confirmed in other EU member states such as Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, Spain, and Poland where it was found that understanding of the EU was equally poor in these countries (Stoeckel, 2019). Confusion over how the EU works, while lower among those with higher skill levels, continued to be relatively high. A Eurobarometer survey conducted in the UK found that 44 per cent of highly educated people and 45 per cent of workers in managerial positions lacked understanding of the EU, while the comprehension level was lower among those with lower educational qualifications or less skilled professions, it nevertheless indicates that broadly speaking the EU is not well-understood among the general public (European Commission, 2009). This mix of understanding presents a greater complexity to the potential relationship between a person's knowledge of the EU and their affinity towards it.

Furthermore, a study conducted in the Netherlands found that even among those with some understanding of the EU, they were not necessarily supportive of the it as they felt the EU had become too large in scale for them to be able to make an informed decision on their views of the EU when they had only fragmented understanding of it (van den Hoogen et al., 2022). Thus, while those in lower-skilled professions and lower-educated tend to have little understanding of the EU, confusion over the it was a widespread issue and being knowledgeable of parts of the EU did not guarantee that they necessarily came to support it.

For the EU, they were aware of this problem that its works and functions were not well-understood among the public. One way they tried to tackle this issue was to tackle Euro myths. This was such a prevailing issue especially in the UK that the European Parliament Liaison Office in the UK has a dedicated page in which they try to debunk some of the Euro myths. They did so by creating 24 articles of their own, using similar sensational and eye-catching language used in the British papers such as "Sorry, Daily Express, the European Parliament is not trying to liquidate any political party" and "Bendy Bananas – the Myth to end all Myths" (European Parliament Liaison Office in the United Kingdom, 2017). This is one example of how the EU has attempted to tackle the issue by adopting a more accessible language or fighting fire with fire. As the EU battled the half-truths and the fictions concocted over their conducts, they were faced with another allegation that they have struggled to shed, that it has a democratic deficit.

6.1-1 The democratic deficit: a thorn in the side of the EU

Discussions over the democratic deficit of the EU has had a long history. In general, the discussions revolved around two aspects of representation, at the policy level and the procedural level (Rohrschneider, 2002, p.464). There were accusations that the EU as an institution was not adequately held accountable. In terms of policy development, views that EU policies tended to be developed independent of voters' preference was viewed as the crux of the issue. The EU has approached this issue in several ways. For example, the role of the European Parliament was steadily increased with the Maastricht Treaty, gaining equal power to that of the Commission and the Council (co-decision procedure) (Duff et al., 1994). The Lisbon Treaty further extended the Parliament's power by allowing them to decide alongside the Council on the EU budget (European Commission, 2023c). The expansion of the Parliament's power was in part to increase democratic accountability by ensuring that the voices of the EU citizens were being represented through MEPs. However, reaction to such changes has not been to increase the democratic accountability of the EU as an institution, but further create a sense of distrust. According to a Pew Research, 62 per cent of EU citizens felt that the EU "does not understand the needs of its citizens", and in the case of the UK, 53 per cent have an unfavourable view of the European Parliament (Rosenberg, 2019). This indicates that there is still considerable mistrust and dissatisfaction over the representation of EU citizens' views in the EU despite attempts to address this issue.

While efforts are made to address the problem of democratic deficit in certain corners of the EU structure, questions have been posed as to whether the democratic deficit constitutes a problem in terms of policy delivery. Follesdal and Hix (2006, pp.542–543) argued that redistributive policies of the EU tended to lack democratic accountability. They pushed back on assumptions that since redistributive policies of the EU are for the benefit of all EU citizens, it does not require democratic accountability (majoritarian support) (Follesdal and Hix, 2006, p.542). They argued that this assumption that redistributive policies will automatically be supported by the wider public was in and of itself a problem. However, despite identifying the correct problem, their remedy to this takes on a technical approach. They argue that there needs to be greater focus on assessing the outcomes of such policies, and help facilitate the development of

oppositions against policies that are determined to be unresponsive to citizens' needs (Follesdal and Hix, 2006, p.548). In other words, their argument for an improved legitimacy based on the EU's policy performance is one of output legitimacy, a concept that has been widely embraced by the EU.

6.1-2 Output legitimacy

Tackling the problem of the democracy deficit and the prevailing view that the EU policies were not in line with public needs, the EU focused on investing in evaluating policy outcomes. By improving the policy outcomes, it was envisioned that this will also lead to an improvement in their output legitimacy. Output legitimacy, according to Scharpf (1999, p.11) refers to governments that "derives legitimacy from its capacity to solve problems requiring collective solutions". Since the ECP is a policy aimed at solving regional development issues, arguably how successful the EU is at showing citizens its capacity to solve such issues through its flagship policy has the potential to become a source of output legitimacy. Proponents of this idea of the ECP as an output legitimacy tool argued that the ECP was one of the few EU policies that is *visible* to ordinary citizens. The ECP is widely considered (despite some push back (Barca, 2009)) as a redistributive policy (Bachtrögler et al., 2019; Bauhr and Charron, 2020), and as such, the ECP was one of the few visible hand of the EU (Farole et al., 2011, p.1099).

However, for citizens to formulate their opinion on the ECP, based on its effectiveness in terms of how well the policy addresses regional inequalities, people need to have at first heard about the policy. In a recent speech on the ECP, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen (2022) described the ECP as "the silent strength of our Union" in a nod to how the policy is lesser known among the public than the EU had hoped. Arguably, the policy has remained too silent for the public to take note. Studies suggest that public knowledge of the ECP tends to be low especially among the British. This was reflected in an EU-wide survey conducted under Horizons 2020 with a quintessentially long title "Perception and evaluation of Regional and Cohesion Policies by Europeans and Identification with the values of Europe" [PERCEIVE] project which found that the UK (they used Essex as their case study) scored the lowest when it came to having heard of the ECP, ESIF, and EU regional policy more generally (López-Bazo and Royuela, 2017, p.43).

This is further supported by other research which tried to analyse the relationship between public opinion towards the ECP and the different funding sources. A study on the relationship between the ECP and public perception in 12 EU member states found correlation between larger CF (funds that go to the least developed countries) expenditure in a region and recognition as well as positive view of the ECP (Borz et al., 2018, p.12). The study further found that there are significant differences between CF, ERDF, and ESF. According to their survey results, a significantly higher funding, to the tune of €1,000 per capita, increased the likelihood of positive perception of the ECP (Borz et al., 2018, p.15).

These findings indicate that higher levels of funding may make it more likely for citizens to have heard of the ECP, while places like the UK where funding was relatively smaller tended to have less awareness of said policy. The source of heightened awareness of the CF was found in media coverage as well as general publicity of the funds (Borz et al., 2018, p.16). While awareness of the ERDF also derived from similar sources to that of the CF, notably the ESF differed in that it relied more heavily on the media coverage of the funds as part of "Europe as a common project" (Borz et al., 2018, pp.19–21). Other studies have also found that for the public to show both knowledge of and satisfaction towards the ECP, funding needed to be perceived as addressing the needs of the public (Capello and Perucca, 2019).

In short, the amount of funding needed to be high, better targeted, and enjoy greater publicity for it to be registered among the wider public. Although the ECP can be understood as the "visible hand" of the EU, these studies indicate that there still needs to be efforts to actively communicate the benefits of the ECP to the public.

If the public needed to be informed about the benefits of the ECP, how easy was this to be achieved? One of the potential obstacles against the public having a better understanding of the ECP and its impact was arguably the complexity of the funding structure itself. The complexity of the ECP is already apparent when trying to discuss its funding sources. The ECP derives its funds from three separate funds, the ERDF, ESF, and CF. In addition to these three funds, there are two other funds called the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development [EAFRD] and European Maritime and Fisheries Fund [EMFF], and the five funds together make up the European Structural Investment

Funds [ESIF]. EAFRD is part of the Common Agricultural Policy, and the EMFF is part of the Common Fisheries Policy. These different sources of funding, while making logical sense as a way to better target funding to different problems, nevertheless created extra confusion over what kind of funding the EU provided. Thus, the existence of five separate funding which supports three separate policies already indicates the complexity of the EU funding structure. The complexity of the ECP owes in part to its long history which means that the current implementation is a result of countless reforms and adjustments to meet the needs of an everchanging economic landscape. The next section explores the origins of the complexity of the ECP through its historical development.

6.2 Development of the ECP and its complexity

Initially, interest for the creation of the European project and economic integration were formed on the idea of peace in Europe as was outlined in the Schuman declaration in 1950 (European Union, 2023). Similar views over the European project being one of peace is also an idea shared by Churchill (Churchill, 1946). Addressing regional inequality only formed part of this grander goal. Reflecting the secondary role that tackling regional inequality had in comparison to the objective of economic integration and peace-building, it was under the 1957 Treaty of Rome that the ESF was established (Eur-Lex, 2023). Marks (1992, p.193) notes that the original six EU member states (France, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Italy, and the Netherlands) were of the belief that "greater regional equality could be achieved as a by-product of economic integration and growth and so did not feel the need to target individual regions directly".

This was also a time when the prevalent economic thinking was that of the neo-classical growth theory which supported the idea of economic conversion as the less developed countries (and regions) will catch up to the more developed ones (Solow, 1956; Swan, 1956). Some went even further to believe that regional inequality will soon be a problem of the poorer states (Williamson, 1965, pp.9 & 44). Reflecting such views, there was less pressing need to focus the budget on tackling regional inequality and thus it had little in terms of a strategy and it was mostly allocated at the national-level with little oversight (European Commission, 2007, pp.10–12). Thus, the budgetary scale of ECP remained relatively small at this point accounting for just 1 per cent of the total budget in 1970

(European Commission, 2007, p.3), and the focus of the ESF was limited to supporting training and back-to-work initiatives (Graziano and Polverari, 2020). In short, the initial development of the ECP was relatively constrained with just a single source of funding (ESF) without a strong overarching strategy and played a limited role in the overall EU expenditure.

This changed with the increasingly persistent nature of regional inequality which ushered in greater interest in the exogenous characteristics that determine regional inequalities (Martin and Sunley, 1998, p.202). The enlargement process also contributed to the development of this line of argument. As membership to the European project grew from the original six, to include Ireland, UK, and Denmark in 1973, regional cohesion became an important issue for the EEC in enabling enlargement (Hooghe, 1996, p.28). State interests formed the basis of the ever-growing importance of tackling regional inequality within the community. Countries such as Italy and the UK (two countries with high levels of regional inequality) argued in favour of the creation of the ERDF to support lagging behind regions (Marks, 1992, pp.193–194). Incumbent states such as France, Italy, and Greece were also part of the forces behind the increase in the ESIF in 1987 when the Iberian states, which had some of the poorest EU regions, were set to become members states in 1986 (Baldwin et al., 1997, pp.159–160).

Thus, the rationale for reforms to the ECP were often based upon the interests of member states in the face of EU enlargement (Tarschys and Eriksson, 2005, p.21). The stronger desire of incorporating a regional component thus won over and the ERDF was established in 1975 following the 1974 Paris Conference (Council Regulation (EEC) No 724/75 of 18 March, 1975). In short, the addition of the ERDF to the existing ESF reflects greater interest in regional cohesion which was fuelled predominantly by the nation states facing acute regional inequalities. Thus, the introduction of two separate funds was a result of growing prominence of the role played by the EEC introducing the first set of confusion. To further add to the confusion, at this point, the ECP was known as the European Regional Policy.

Complementing this policy development was the greater focus on the reasons behind the persistent nature of regional inequality in the academic literature in the 1990s. The new economic geography argued that divergence rather than convergence was the

norm. Krugman (1991, pp.487 & 497) argued that economic activities tended to concentrate in regions which benefits from a close proximity to large markets, steady supply of a large labour force, and low transportation costs in terms of moving key goods and services. This work heralded a new idea of the formation of the core and periphery of economic activity, which brings a distinctive spatial aspect to economic thinking. It was increasingly understood that regional conversion as envisioned under the neo-classical theory was not presenting itself in reality (Breinlich et al., 2013, pp.6–8). Thus, at national, supranational, and academic level discussions increasingly focused on the need to tackle regional inequalities, and since this was tied to EU enlargement the ECP increasingly became a crucial part of the European project.

However, increasing importance and presence of the ECP also led to growing concerns over the ECP's effectiveness. In the late 1990's it was increasingly becoming clear that the budgetary pressure of the ECP was going to increase from further enlargement of the EU such as the discussions over the CEECs joining the union (Shutt and Colwell, 1998; Becker, 2019). The expansion of the EU member states to CEECs after the end of the Cold War, coupled with calls for greater support for lagging behind regions from the net beneficiaries of the ECP resulted in the creation of the CF in 1994 (Council Regulation (EC) No 1164/94 of 16 May, 1994). The CF is reserved for less-developed EU member states. Only EU member states that has a Gross National Income [GNI] per inhabitant that is less than 90 per cent of the EU average qualifies for the CF (European Commission, 2020a).

Efforts continued at creating a standardised methodology when it came to allocation of the funds. While the UK did not qualify for CF, its territories, like all other EU member states was divided between the more developed, transition, and less developed regions. The more developed regions are defined as having a GDP per capita that is 90 per cent more than the EU average, those in transition have a GDP per capita at 75-90 per cent of EU average, and the less developed regions have a GDP per capita lower than 75 per cent of the EU average (Eurostat, 2023). Thus, better targeting of resources was attempted through the ERDF, ESF, and now the CF, as well as categorisation of regions into three stages. While this may help in better targeting of EU resources, it also means that this has further contributed to the complexity of the ECP. However, there were still

further calls for better cost-benefit calculations of projects being funded by the EU as the CF had laxer guidelines and its larger budget brought in further concerns over the effectiveness of the ECP in the recipient regions and countries.

This resulted in a flurry of academic literature that discussed the cost effectiveness of the ECP in the 2000s (Florio, 2006; Bachtler and Wren, 2006; Wostner and Šlander, 2009). Although the verdict was mixed, there was little call for the abolition of the policy altogether. Instead, following from the intervention by the Barca report (2009), the ECP was increasingly understood as a key means of delivering both economic growth *and* social justice (Marek and Baun, 2014, p.3). The combination of both economic growth and social justice as a prime objective was arguably a way to balance the competing interests of better cost effectiveness of the ECP as well as maintaining the ideals of European cohesion.

It also reflects compromises reached between the two opposing views of the ECP among EU member states. On the one hand, member states that were net beneficiaries of the ECP viewed the role of the ECP to pursue wider social justice, and on the other hand, the net contributors viewed the ECP to prioritise economic growth and be exclusive to member states with the highest needs with the most deprived regions (Becker, 2019, pp.156–157). The contention here boils down to an argument over whether or not the ECP should be understood as a redistributive tool (Begg, 2008). Despite this point being heatedly debated (Leonardi, 2006; Barca, 2009), a compromise was reached between these two opposing views of the ECP. The net contributor's argument of placing economic growth at the forefront was arguably more successful as they were championed by larger EU member states which had the upper hand in most negotiations (Baldwin et al., 1997). Thus, the ECP was to be treated as a tool to address regional inequality, an issue that posed significant impediment to economic growth (Molle, 2011, p.6; Bachtler and Begg, 2017, p.749). Such balancing acts have ensured the continued relevance of the ECP as well as elevating it to one of the most important tools that the EU possess (Becker, 2019, p.162).

The importance of the ECP is reflected in its increasing prominence within the EU budget. In the most recent ECP programme, the 2014-2020 programme, the ECP made up more than 30 per cent of the entire EU budget, making it the second largest

expenditure of the entire budget coming only after the Common Agricultural Policy [CAP] (Darvas et al., 2019, p.20; Browne et al., 2020, p.2). Increasingly, however, the ECP has been pressured to adjust their delivery as it faced one crisis after another. For example, in response to the 2008 financial crisis, the ECP was used to support the European Economic Recovery Plan to act as a fiscal stimulus, extended deadlines for project completion, simplified and accelerated the rate of advanced payments, and agreed to reduce the national burden of co-financing to alleviate budgetary pressure on national governments (Berkowitz et al., 2015, pp.8–11). More recently, adjustments were made in response to COVID-19, with greater flexibility in thematic rules, transfer of funds, and extension of project deadlines announced in 2020 (Bachtler et al., 2020, p.24).

Additionally, there has been increased attempts to place the ECP in line with EU-level strategies. At present the EU funds are allocated to support different themes that are decided at the EU-level to provide greater cohesion of the different projects as well as ensuring that the funds support EU-wide goals. For instance, the ESF provided funding to projects that fell under five themes: the “sustainable & quality employment”; “educational & vocational training”; “social inclusion”; “technical assistance”; “efficient public administration” (European Commission, 2020b). The ERDF funded projects were also categorised under the themes of “sustainable & quality employment”, “social inclusion”, and “technical assistance”, as well as seven additional themes: “competitiveness of SMEs”; “research & innovation”; “low carbon economy”; “information & communication technologies”; “environment protection & resource efficiency”; “network infrastructures in transport and energy”; “climate change adaptation & risk prevention” (European Commission, 2020b). Thus, the ECP continues to adapt to changing academic discourse, national interests, as well as EU interests, in an attempt to make it align more with public interests as a means of improving output legitimacy. However, in turn its increasing attempts at better targeting of the funds resulted in further technocratic complexity further making it a challenge to explain the ECP to the wider public.

6.2-1 The success of the "£350 million" argument in the Leave campaign

As a result of such developments, the ECP now has strict guidelines, greater need for national and sub-national governments to participate in the delivery of the funds, and stronger EU-level strategies encompassing the policy. However, to what extent does the public understand this? One key example of the issue between a complex system and publicity is the now infamous red bus from the 2016 EU referendum campaign was received by the public. The bus was part of the Leave campaign which argued that £350 million per week is sent to the EU, and this money would be better used for the NHS. Two years after the EU referendum, more than half of Leave voters still believed this to be true (The Policy Institute, 2018). Sovereignty and the healthcare services were some of the most important problems for Leave supporters (Curtice, 2016b, pp.10–11), and the £350 million bus campaign has undoubtedly struck a chord with them. This campaign was extremely successful for arguably two reasons, 1) the promise of the money being spent on the NHS an institution that is close to people's actual needs made it an appealing promise, and 2) it weaponised the fact that the public did not and could not understand the complex funding agreement with the EU.

The first point is that the £350 million slogan adeptly identifies the greatest concern of the British public, which is the wellbeing of the national healthcare system. Concern over immigration was one of the key issues for Leave voters as well as the wider public for some time even before the 2016 EU referendum (YouGov, 2021). Concerns were often linked to not only employment and culture, but more importantly on the strain over the healthcare system. Even though EU immigrants were less likely to place a burden the NHS and in fact made larger contributions towards the NHS compared to UK citizens (Dustmann and Frattini, 2014; Giuntella et al., 2015, p.15), the pressure on the healthcare service was real. Arguably, one of the successful strategies of the Brexit discourse was to link together the legitimate concerns over the real problems in the healthcare system to that of the fear over immigration (Clarke et al., 2017a, p.132). Concerns toward the healthcare system was one that was shared among a majority of the public. More than 90 per cent of respondents to the British Social Attitudes survey believed that the NHS faced financial challenges, a figure that has persisted since 2014 when respondents were first asked this question (Wellings et al., 2022, p.29).

Despite high levels of concern over the funding situation, public support for filling in the financial gap with further cuts to public sector, higher taxation, and introduction of charges to services remains unpopular (Curtice and Ormston, 2015, p.116). The idea that several hundred million pounds could be recouped by simply leaving the EU was undoubtedly a highly appealing solution. The £350 million slogan was thus effective as it was able to link its promise with the public need for a better funded healthcare system. Thus, it was able to achieve what the ECP has struggled with, to link the public's perceived need with a policy solution (Capello and Perucca, 2019). In the case of Wakefield, concerns over the funding of the healthcare system were undoubtedly an important issue for residents considering that the region has a higher-than-average proportion of residents receiving incapacity benefits and employment and support allowance [ESA] at 8.1 per cent of the working-age public, compared to Great Britain as a whole which stands at 6.1 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). Those who are categorised as long-term sick is also high in Wakefield at 33.1 per cent of the working-age population as opposed to 25.5 per cent in Great Britain (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). Thus, having a well-funded healthcare service is of particular importance in places like Wakefield where there are high-levels of reliance on health-related support, making the argument for more funding towards healthcare more persuasive.

The second point of weaponizing the complex system relates to the difficulty in trying to explain the rebate system. The rebate concession has been widely praised by the general public as a key win for the UK and the Thatcher government back when it was first introduced. A recent survey found that the rebate was considered one of Thatcher's best achievements, only preceded by other landmark achievements such as "being the first female Prime Minister", "winning the Falklands War", and "winning three general elections in a row" (Smith, 2019). However, despite the high praise for securing the rebate, the system itself can be hard to explain. The rebate accounts for 66 per cent of the difference between the UK's budgetary contribution and its benefits (European Parliament, 2016), this means that the amount of the rebate is not set and therefore fluctuates in any given year, making it more difficult for the public to understand. However, perhaps what was more damaging for efforts to explain the benefits of the

rebate lay precisely in attempts at trying to debunk the "£350 million" argument by trying to explain the system. In an attempt to educate the public on how the rebate worked, there was a tendency of becoming highly technical as well as inadvertently strengthen the argument that considerable amounts of money were sent to the EU.

This problem is best illustrated in the attempt of Full Fact (2017) to correct the "£350 million" claim. Full Fact (2017) argued that the £350 million per week argument "is wrong", but coming up with arguably one of the worst rebuttals by arguing that "it's more like £250 million a week". *The Guardian* digs a deeper hole by pointing out that once the ECP is factored in (although it does not specify the ECP by name and instead alludes to funding towards the public and private sectors), the cost is closer to "£136m a week, less than 40% of the amount splashed on the battlebus" (Henley, 2016). The problem here is not that either *The Guardian* or Full Fact being factually wrong, it is purely the optics that is the problem here.

The difference between £350 million per week, £250 million per week, and £136 million per week is highly technical, with the amount still extremely high in the minds of the public for whom such an amount is nearly inconceivable. This is why such rebuttals were unlikely to persuade the public to change their mind on the subject. Instead, it further helped to highlight the fact that money, any money was being sent to the EU – a point few Leave voters would have been too happy to hear. It further relates to the idea that large sums of money are being sent to the EU, permanently out of control of the UK government. Considering the British public tends to have a slightly higher level of trust towards their national government as opposed to the EU (European Commission, 2015b, pp.T53–T55), the British public may have felt marginally more comfortable with the idea of the money being spent by the UK in the UK as opposed to the EU.

Thus, the example of the "£350 million" argument was powerful precisely because it weaponised the confusion over the ECP, people's lack of knowledge or confusion over scale, while tapping into with an issue that was close to the heart of the public (healthcare). Any push back swiftly helped to further strengthen the view that too much money was being sent to the EU which the UK had little to no control over. This is precisely why the claim was so successful. Attempts at trying to explain how the rebate system worked proved too complex and too easily confirmed people's dislike towards

the idea of money going to the EU. It also arguably benefited from the campaign enjoying the backing of two prominent Brexiteer politicians such as Boris Johnson and Michael Gove, who lent crucial political credibility to such claims (Clarke, et al., 2017a; Johnston et al., 2021).

In sum, the difficulty in explaining the ECP to the public is arguably encapsulated in the fact the example of the £350 million claim which continued to be widely believed among the general public. This claim chimed with the legitimate concerns the public held over the issue of the national healthcare service. The rising waiting time and staff shortages have resulted in greater dissatisfaction towards the service among the public. The Brexit discourse was successful in combining this legitimate concern over the NHS with an equally rising concern over immigration. The simplistic solution to the complex problem of the NHS in the form of leaving the EU and using hundreds of millions of pounds towards improving the NHS was an appealing prospect for the public. In addition to the alluring simple solution provided by the Leave campaign, trying to explain how the ECP worked was proved to be a considerable challenge. Even the rebate system which has been widely perceived to have been a political success of the Thatcher government, was difficult to explain as the amount saved was in percentages and thus fluctuated. Furthermore, counterarguments of the claim served only to emphasise the fact that hundreds of millions of pounds were being sent to the EU, further legitimising the argument that too much money was sent to the EU rather than being used domestically.

6.2-2 Challenges of making the case for the ECP in the UK

What then was the public perception of the ECP in the UK? Two regions in the UK stands out as clear beneficiaries of the ECP, namely Wales and Cornwall. Both Cornwall and Wales voted in favour of Brexit, in Cornwall 56.5 per cent voted in favour of Brexit (The Electoral Commission, 2016). Wales voted in favour of Brexit (52.5 per cent voted for Leave), and this was despite having the highest per-capita expenditure of funding from the EU which amounted to £123 per year, which dwarfs the UK average which was at £31 (The Electoral Commission, 2016; Brien, 2020, p.5). Despite the high levels of EU funding in Wales, it sometimes elicited negative perceptions. A survey conducted by Cardiff University and YouGov found that among those from working-class backgrounds that supported Brexit, EU funding in their region of South Wales Valleys were often

perceived as “wasteful” (Awan-Scully, 2017). Thus, there was a perception that the ECP was not meeting the needs of the public, a key component in fostering satisfaction towards the ECP (Capello and Perucca, 2019).

In another area of the UK which received relatively high levels of ECP funding was Cornwall. This owed to Cornwall being designated an Objective 1 area which is another measurement that defined less developed regions in the past due to their relatively low GDP per capita. Here, residents also shared the view that the ECP were wasteful rather than cultivating a positive attitude towards the EU (Willett et al., 2019, p.1351). Despite their strong conviction that the ECP was a waste, this did not mean that residents were necessarily informed about what the EU funding was used for. However, residents in Cornwall were confident that the money would be better used by the UK government (Willett et al., 2019, p.1350). The reason for such trust towards the UK government as opposed to the EU, regardless of whether they were misplaced or not, reflects generally higher trust towards the national government in comparison to the EU among the British public (European Commission, 2015b). The literature regarding trust towards the EU and the national government amongst citizens have been divided.

On the one hand, Harteveld et al. (2013) and most recently Talving and Vasilopoulou (2021) argued that considering limited knowledge of the EU among the public, they are more likely to use their views of their national government as a proxy to their views on the EU. This line of thinking argued that as a result there will be a close alignment between countries with high levels of trust towards the EU and those with high levels of trust towards their national government. On the other hand, others like Muñoz et al. (2011) questioned this idea by arguing that in some countries citizens have higher trust towards their national government than the EU and vice versa. Although both sides of the argument used the Eurobarometer data on EU citizens’ perception of the EU and their national government, Muñoz et al. (2011) brought the Corruption Perception Index to the argument by analysing that countries with lower levels of perceived corruption also had more trust in their national government than the EU. The UK has consistently scored highly under this index, usually in the top 10-20 states in the world for their low levels of corruption (Transparency International, 2022). Such high levels of trust as a transparent institution may have contributed to the image that if the same amount of

funds were to be under the control of the national government as opposed to the EU, they would be put to better use.

Furthermore, even places that voted in support for Remain and benefited from EU funding such as Fife in Scotland did not have a strong understanding of the ECP. In a study by Neal et al. (2021, p.108), one of their interviewees who was a member of the local migration community organisation acknowledged that the ECP had been key for Scotland's infrastructure projects, but believed the wider public were left unaware of this. Thus, studies from England, Scotland, and Wales show a general consensus that the ECP was ill-understood by the wider public (Awan-Scully, 2017; Willett et al., 2019; Neal et al., 2021). Thus, in general, places in the UK which received high levels of ECP funding still voted in favour of Brexit, and showed how the public were relatively ill-informed of the impact of the ECP in their local area. In a slight twist of irony, although the public believed that public services such as the NHS received insufficient funding, the UK government was often more trusted than the EU to manage public funds. The next section explores how the EU reacted to the problem over lack of support towards the ECP by focusing on the "value for money" argument.

6.3 Improving the "value for money": Economic evaluation of the ECP

Negative public response towards the ECP was taken as a sign at the EU level that the cost of the funding needed a justification, in other words it needed to show "value for money". There was caution over the idea that the EU public should be feeling grateful for the ECP, and instead of working to improve how ECP was being promoted either through greater efforts to educate the public on how the ECP works, or making the system less complex, the focus in the EU was squarely on taking steps to ensure greater efficiency of the ECP. This was achieved by working to standardise the delivery of the ECP across its member states. The EU introduced guidelines that made it mandatory for projects to submit economic (wider societal impact) and financial (return for investment) evaluations as part of their application from the programme period 1994-1999, and the legal basis of these evaluations were strengthened in subsequent programme periods (Florio et al., 2018). Similar focus on improvement of evaluation happened among the academic sphere as well, but no discussions took over whether the changes would be understood by the general public.

The literature on the cost effectiveness of the ECP is widely mixed when it comes to identifying what projects or programmes worked the best (Rodríguez-Pose and Fratesi, 2004; Edverdeen et al., 2006; Gagliardi and Percoco, 2017; Crescenzi and Giua, 2018; Darvas et al., 2019). The current literature on the ECP, is simply put, inconclusive as to whether it had positive effects in EU regions (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.7). If academics were divided over the impact of the ECP, greater levels of confusion existed among the public. The mixed literature thus further contributes to the complexity of making the case for the ECP. While some found positive effects (Basile et al., 2008, p.336), others found conditional positive effects (Dall' Erba and Le Gallo, 2008, pp.237 & 240), and still others found non or insignificant effects (Le Gallo et al., 2011, p.474). There are mainly three reasons why the results were mixed. 1) The impact of different funds (ERDF, ESF, CF) differed considerably as did the thematic focus of the funding, 2) regional variation in the effectiveness of the ECP, and 3) unintended consequences of the stricter guidelines. The three reasons will be explored in order in the following sections.

6.3-1 Differences depending on the funding source & theme.

EU-wide studies have attempted to analyse which funding type yielded the best economic returns. Darvas et al. (2019, pp.35–37) compared GDP per capita at purchasing power parity [PPP] between 2003 and 2015 in all EU member states at NUTS-2 level and selected the best and worst performing projects based on these criteria. This study (2019, p.59) found that projects that focused on infrastructure and the private sector had a far better return than those which focused on education and social inclusion. This study has helped provide some insight as to what kind of funding produces the best return for money spent. This can be taken as to mean that future EU funding should focus on ERDFs over the ESFs as the ERDF funds projects that relate to infrastructure and the private sector as opposed to the ESF which focus on education and social inclusion.

However, as Darvas et al. (2019, p.22) acknowledges in their study, they were unable to show a direct causation between the ECP and economic output as it is impossible to attribute any positive effects to economic growth solely on the ECP. Furthermore, even among projects that received ERDF funding, there were differences in terms of whether

stated objectives were met depending on the sector that was supported. Bachtler et al. (2017) tried to evaluate the ECP by testing whether projects accomplished their stated objectives and found that this varied immensely between different sectors. They found infrastructure and tourism related projects to have generally met their main objectives, while it was less clear in projects related to regeneration and business support (Bachtler et al., 2017, pp.17–18). They attributed the difficulty in assessing the impact of regeneration and business support to objectives being less clear than infrastructure or tourist related projects. Some remained cautious with even the projects that have been profitable as it had the danger of connecting richer areas together, potentially exacerbating existing regional inequalities especially in poorer regions (Dall' Erba and Le Gallo, 2008, p.223).

Other studies on the contrary found greater positive results when the ECP focused more on projects related to developing human capital and knowledge rather than infrastructure (Rodríguez-Pose and Fratesi, 2004; Rodríguez-Pose and Novak, 2013). While the benefits of such investment may not be apparent in the short-term, they argued that in the long-term it will contribute more to regional economic growth (Rodríguez-Pose and Novak, 2013). Additionally, the impact of investment in education and skills development may be more apparent at an individual-level rather than at a national economic-level. It is well-established that such investment has a significant positive impact to individual participants, and some indication that this may translate to an improvement in the national economy (Blundell et al., 1999). Studies have found that in general projects funded by ERDF and CF had higher impact than ones funded by the ESF (Bachtrögler et al., 2019). This is likely due to the CF and ERDF were aimed at improving economic growth and competitiveness among businesses, they are thus used for higher value projects compared to that of the ESF (Bachtrögler et al., 2019, p.133). Thus, the evaluation of the impact of the ECP differs considerably depending on the fund, the sector receiving the funds, and at which time span the evaluations are made. Such mixed results would have once again been a challenge to explain to the general public as studies reach different conclusions. Another reason why the evaluation of the ECP is mixed lies in the regional heterogeneity of the results.

6.3-2 Regional heterogeneity

Impact of the ECP also depended heavily on the regional characteristics. For example, the greatest beneficiaries of the ECP tended to be CEECs. Additionally, as the EU differentiates regions between the more developed, in transition, and less developed regions based on GDP figures, this also contributes to the difference in the amount of funds regions can expect to receive (European Commission, 2014). Almost all regions in CEECs fall under the category of less-developed regions, and in addition they are eligible for the CF (European Commission, 2020c), resulting in greater levels of funding allocated to them. Thus, the case of the CEECs show the importance of prior socio-economic conditions in analysing the impact of the ECP.

The structural conditions can have a significant impact on the outcomes of the ECP. For example, Percoco (2017, p.836) focused on the strength of the service sector in regions and compared the impact the ECP had on regions with stronger and weaker service sectors. His (2017, p.842) findings show that regions that already had stronger service sector did not enjoy the same levels of development as did places with weaker or negligible service sectors with the extra investment into this sector. In the case of Wakefield, while it does have a slightly higher than average proportion of workers in the manufacturing sector, it remains a predominantly strongly service-led region in line with the UK overall (Office for National Statistics, 2021b) and thus unlikely to have benefited from high levels of development in less-developed regions. This again follows similar arguments made by studies that focused on CEEC as it shows greater return on investment in less-developed areas (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.95). What the study by Percoco (2017) shows is the importance of the pre-existing economic conditions of ECP recipient regions.

Additionally, how connected the region is and whether it is rural or urban also makes a difference in levels of economic growth with better connected rural areas benefiting, urban relatively well connected areas having no impact, and rural least connected areas showing negative impact (Gagliardi and Percoco, 2017, p.865). In the case of Wakefield, its city centre may be connected to other parts of the country through its rail network, the district as a whole is less well-connected. Movement within Wakefield district remains a challenge and residents need to rely on either private transportation such as

cars or risk the patchy bus services (Parsons, 2021). Furthermore, the North in general lacks good public transportation connections. For example, in the North few can access the city centre within half an hour (Centre for Cities, 2021). The lack of connectivity places further limitations on the benefits that the ECP could provide to places like the Wakefield District. This shows how geographical characteristics of the region can make a significant impact on the delivery of the ECP. In sum, the effect of the ECP is heterogeneous, heavily dependent on the exiting economic conditions and development levels.

Related to this, studies have also found the importance of the pre-existing political structure of the recipient countries. In CEECs, it was found that the capacity of the regional government was crucial in how successful the country was at absorbing funding through the ECP (Bachtler and McMaster, 2008, pp.420–421; Tosun, 2014, p.382; Surubaru, 2017, p.853; Šlander and Wostner, 2018, p.734), as well as help develop the administrative capacities of the recipient country (Bachtler et al., 2014). Thus, the ECP's impact goes beyond financial benefits and encompass governmental capacity building as well, instilling a multi-level governance practice. This is an important contribution that the ECP makes that is not necessarily apparent from purely quantifiable examination of the policy (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.8). Discussion over the impact of the multi-level governance structure and the ECP will be explored in the next chapter.

In short, while the EU was keen to improve the cost-benefit performance of the ECP, academic evaluation is at best mixed, and results remain heterogenous and reliant on specific regional context.

6.3-3 Unintended consequences of the guidelines

The third reason why the impact of the ECP is mixed may have something to do with the unintended consequences of the EU guidelines. In places like Wakefield, the shift for a greater focus on fiscal and economic evaluation and "value for money" meant that it progressively became more difficult for third sectors such as charities to access EU funding as they struggled to meet the requirements (Local Authority Staff A, 2022). Tightening of requirements also meant that application to funds required experts, an additional labour that third sectors struggled to afford. This meant in the case of

Wakefield, the primary way third sectors accessed EU funding was through local authority staff who had the expertise to support the application and without their support it was considered they would have unlikely been able to access such funds (Interviewee C, 2022). This was less of a problem in the higher education [HE] sector, as they found it easier to tailor their application to that of the thematic objectives as they tended to focus on scientific and educational goals (European Commission, 2020b; HE sector staff, 2023). This indicates that in the pursuit of "value for money", the ECP has become more complex and potentially alienated sectors, organisations and individuals who would have benefitted the most from its support. Thus, the reforms of the ECP may have had an unintended consequence of making the system more complex and harder to access.

There were also concerns over the longevity of ESF funded projects such as those focused on retraining and reskilling in Wakefield. There were concerns that these activities tended to be short-term and once the funding ended, unless the organisations could find another source of funding it was difficult for the services to continue in the mid to long term. The short-term nature and uncertainty of the future of such programmes was lamented by local authorities in Wakefield that supported them as is expressed below:

"*Whereas in some other small programmes or ESF funded programmes that tend to serve a purpose for that period and time while it is running, and while it is running people are supported into work, or further training, and job search, and that is a really positive thing while they are receiving the support during the timeframe of that projects. But when those projects come to an end, and then it is about designing another project to do something similar, but with a different set of funding. And so it is kind of, there is always going to be that need of provision and it is kind of just designing projects to suit what the funding is available at the time, but so there is a kind of a legacy with those kinds of projects.*" (Local Authority Staff B, 2022)

While discussions continued on the economic evaluation of the ECP, new guidelines unintentionally amplified the complexity of the ECP and made it more difficult to support sectors with less capacity to digest and work in accordance with EU guidelines. The following section will analyse how the impact of the ECP was evaluated in the UK

and argue that despite the limited positive impact, the greatest benefit of the ECP lay in providing a stable source of additional income places such as Wakefield would have struggled to attract in its absence, a point that would have been difficult to explain to the general public.

6.4 The impact of the ECP in the UK

Economic evaluation of the ECP in the UK proved to have further challenges. In addition to the mixed and limited impact of the ECP identified through assessments (Regeneris Consulting and Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, 2015), the amount of funding allocated to the UK meant that the scope for larger scale impact of the ECP remained limited. For example in the UK, the ECP consisted of around just 1 per cent of the total government capital investment between 2007 and 2013, while for Hungary it amounted to a staggering 57 per cent of its government capital investment (European Commission, 2016). Thus, the relatively small amount of additional funding meant that quantifying the impact of the ECP in the UK context was always going to be a challenge. Another issue in the case of the UK was that the methodology adopted for the ECP allocation was often ill-targeted.

The definition of less-developed regions that are eligible for the higher amounts of funding compared to those in advanced or transition regions were set at GDP levels below 75 per cent of the EU average. This was considered “arbitrary” (Becker, 2012, p.6) as this meant that some regions could not qualify under such categorisation missed out on additional funding. An example of this is the former industrial regions which faced similar economic development issues found in the less-developed regions but were unable to gain additional funding due to this categorisation (Begg, 2008, p.8). West Yorkshire was a prime example of this. This was a point raised at the Communities and Local Government committee meeting, in which it was discussed that reliance on GDP figures at NUTS-2 levels meant regions such as West Yorkshire with the comparatively more affluent areas such as Leeds masked pockets of deprived areas (Communities and Local Government, 2012, Q.47). Conversely, places like Cornwall and Isle of Scilly qualified as a less-developed region after it separated itself from Devon rather than any changes to real time socio-economic situation (Sandford, 2002, pp.18–19). As recent re-calculations showed, the region was found to have not been eligible for the additional

funding due to its GDP being at 83 per cent, and in reality there were other regions which qualified for this such as Tees Valley and Durham (BBC News, 2017). Thus, funding was based on an imperfect categorisation of regions and brought to light the limitations of distribution of funding in some cases. It was also noted that there was not that much differentiation of funding allocation between regions that meet similar criteria, yet differ in terms of their socio-economic levels (Crescenzi, 2009, pp.120–122). This meant that despite the place-based nature of the ECP and its fundamental principle of allocating funds to the less-developed areas, short comings remained in its ability to allocate the funds to where it was most needed. As noted previously, places such as Wakefield lost out on additional funding due to its proximity to areas with higher levels of GDP per capita such as Leeds (Communities and Local Government, 2012, Q.47). Thus, the allocation methodology of the ECP remained relatively broad despite repeated efforts at making it more targeted and therefore there remained questions as to the fairness of some of its allocation.

Questions also remained over how well regions do once the funding ended. Although this argument rarely goes as far as Leonardi's (2006, p.123) and Farole et al.'s (2011, pp.1098-1101) claim that the ECP may create a culture of dependency, research does suggest that regions do not necessarily become fully self-sufficient once the funding ends. Di Cataldo (2017) attempted in his study to work out how much South Yorkshire and Cornwall benefited from the ECP. The choice of these two regions were based on how they received more funding through the ECP due to their categorisation as less developed regions and thus were treated as Objective 1 regions (currently known as less developed regions). South Yorkshire lost this status in the 2014-2020 programme period which allowed him to analyse the effects the loss of such funding brought to the region. The study by Di Cataldo (2017, pp.21–22) found that both regions were successful in rapidly reducing its unemployment rate during the funding period. However, the study failed to find a long-term change in South Yorkshire's economic prospects after the higher levels of funding ended when it was re-categorised by the EU as a region in transition rather than as a less-developing region (Di Cataldo, 2017, p.36). The implication of this finding is that in the case of South Yorkshire, the change in categorisation was not a result of the region having successfully transitioned into a

higher level of development. In reality, the region continues to face some of the same socio-economic challenges as it did while it received ECP. Thus, the ECP may help support regions while the funding is available, but may not be sufficient in creating a new economic condition for the recipient region.

An additional issue with evaluating the ECP is how its effects cannot be isolated from the effects stemming from other policies of the EU, membership to the EU, and other national policies. It is once more, impossible to isolate the effects of the ECP from that of the effect of other EU policies, EU market access, and national and regional policies which are in-place (Bachtler and Wren, 2006, p.147). This means that much of the studies concerning the ECP needs to hedge most of its findings with a note that other external effects may have played a role in the changes to employment rates, GDP growth and other indicators.

In short, the lack of clarity when it comes to the impact of the ECP in the UK has severely hampered the ability of the EU to make the case for "value for money" to the public. However, while studies have found mixed results, amongst those responsible for the delivery of the ECP there was widespread agreement that the ECP has been a critical source of funding that regions would otherwise have struggled to access.

6.4-1 The ECP as a stable source of additional funding

Despite some arguments that poorer regions in the UK may have contributed more to the ESIF than the amount they received in return (Swidlicki et al., 2012, p.16), there is a wide consensus within the literature as well as those who dealt with the ECP that it has provided critical sources of additional funding. In its review of the ESIF, the OECD (2020, pp.16–19) noted that one of the key benefits of the ECP was to act as a crucial source of much needed financial support to regions at a time when public investment was falling in the UK. Indeed, government spending per capita continued to decrease, and in particular this was the case for regions outside of London (Pope and Hourston, 2022; Brien, 2022). This sentiment was shared by those in Wakefield and Yorkshire more broadly who argued that one of the key benefits of the ECP was that it brought additional finances that the region would have otherwise would not have received (Local Authority Staff B, 2022; HE sector staff, 2023).

Despite the relatively small impact of the ECP against the overall UK economy (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014, p.51), the ECP was much welcomed in the UK in a backdrop of increasing budgetary constraints at local authority level, and the propensity of UK policies and their budgets to be short-term. The seven-year cycle, consistency, and clear guidelines (if complex) enabled predictability of the allocation and delivery of the funds. Features that were sorely absent in the UK. €17.2 billion was allocated to the UK in total, and of which €5.8 billion was made up of the ERDF, and €4.9 billion (Brien, 2021). According to the list of beneficiaries of the ERDF and ESF 2014-20202 programme, Leeds City Region, which the Wakefield District is a part of has benefited from a total of around £122 million from both funding sources which supported 61 different projects (Gov.UK, 2022b). The extent of EU funding to a region and their benefit has been felt acutely at the local authority level. The previous Wakefield Council leader, Peter Box evidenced in the Communities and Local Government Committee in 2012 that the ERDF had amounted to close to £120million for the district since the 1990s (House of Commons, 2012). The scale of the ECP has also been emphasised especially in contrast to the new funding that was made available to replace the ECP after Brexit. The Shared Prosperity Fund was earmarked for just three years, totalling £2.6 billion by the Conservative government (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022). In contrast, it was estimated that the UK may have received up to £11.2 billion[17] in the 2021-2027 programme period if it had remained in the EU (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, 2019).

In Wakefield, it was felt that it had lost access to a project that was large in scope and ambition, and uncertainty remained over whether the offer from the UK was able to match the amount of funding the region lost out on (Local Authority Staff A, 2022). Thus, the benefits of the ECP in the UK, and in the context of Wakefield was felt acutely by those delivering the funds. They were in a unique position to be able to compare the EU funding to that of the cuts from central government and thus despite difficulty adhering to the changing guidelines and needing to continuously find creative solutions to project-specific issues (Local Authority Staff B, 2022), the overall view of the impact of the ECP in Wakefield was positive (Interviewee C, 2022; Local Authority Staff A, 2022;

[17] Adjusted from €13.8 billion using the exchange rate at 2019 value.

Local Authority Staff B, 2022; HE sector staff, 2023). While the benefits of the ECP was clear among those who were directly involved in delivering the ECP, the same was not the case for the general public. The reason for this lies in the passive promotion of the ECP and the fact that it was a challenge for the public to feel direct benefits of the ECP.

6.5 Passive promotion of the ECP

As noted in the previous section on the output legitimacy, knowledge and satisfaction towards the ECP varied considerably. Section 6.4 showed that the EU focused its attention on improving the "value for money" argument by seeking more academic evaluations and introducing stricter guidelines. While the verdict has been mixed, in the case of Wakefield and the UK more broadly speaking, the ECP was understood as an important source of funding that otherwise would not have been accessible according to those with experience directly handling the funds and projects (Interviewee C, 2022; Local Authority Staff A, 2022; Local Authority Staff B, 2022; HE sector staff, 2023). However, the EU often struggled with gaining the right publicity and struggled to find clear advocates for its activities, especially in the UK. This was arguably a result of a combination of lack of media coverage and passive promotion.

6.5-1 Media coverage

Ursula von der Leyen (2022) commented in her speech on the ECP it "rarely creates big headlines". In general, coverage of the ERDF and ESF has been extremely limited. To test out how frequently ERDF and ESF were covered in the media, this thesis used two sources, the British Newspaper Archives and Advanced Google Search. The British Newspaper Archive was selected as it offers more historical data on the news coverage of the ECP, compared to an Advanced Google Search. The oldest coverage of the ERDF was an article by the *Derby Daily Telegraph* on 24 October 1975 which hailed the fact that "Derbyshire gets slice of Euro aid", and the latest coverage in the archive was that of an EU-funded research into employment of older actresses on 06 December 2007 in *The Stage* (The British Newspaper Archive, 2023a). The limitation of this method is that not all articles have been archived in the British Newspaper Archive, and thus there are publications that are not counted. This meant that articles that were uploaded on the cite was inconsistent between different publishers. For example, articles from the Wakefield Express were only available for articles written before 1918, and thus records

for 1973-2016 were missing from the search. This is why the search was conducted country wide rather than narrowing the search to just the West Yorkshire region or Wakefield. With this limitation in mind, the search resulted in 802 entries between 1975-2009 that makes explicit mention of the ERDF either as articles or as advertisement for roles pertaining to the funds, and of which only 59 articles were on the front page (The British Newspaper Archive, 2023b), giving credence to the idea that the ECP lacks widespread coverage as was argued by von der Leyen and local authority staff in Wakefield (von der Leyen, 2022; Local Authority Staff A, 2022).

Advanced Search Google was used to find articles that were available on news article websites that mentioned the ERDF. The news sources selected for this search was the *Wakefield Express*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Express*, *BBC News*, and the *Guardian* to provide a representative sample of local and national coverage as well as balance between editorial stances towards Brexit. The articles were categorised as negative, positive, and neutral. Negative coverage was defined as articles that either criticised the ERDF or the EU for its funding, as well as articles focused on the negative impact of the EU-funded project itself even if it does not place the blame on the ERDF. Positive articles were defined as coverage that either claimed the ERDF has helped a region or project, or articles that focused on the positive impact of the ERDF-funded project itself. Neutral articles were defined as articles that either were not focused on the ERDF or the ERDF-funded project itself, as well as articles that simply mention the ERDF as part of a wider story that they were reporting on rather than as a primary focus of the article. The definitions were left broad so that the categorisation could be done based on the content of the article rather than based on simple keywords.

To narrow down the search result so that each article could be categorised based on content, the search was minimised to articles that made explicit mention of the "European Regional Development Fund" rather than broader terms such as "EU funding". For some sources such as the *BBC News* the parameter was set at articles published before the 2016 EU referendum as when combined with articles published post-referendum the search result yielded 803 articles, far more than the other sources which generally produced less than 100 articles.

The search result for regional papers such as the *Wakefield Express*, showed that only three articles were published before the 2016 EU referendum on local EU-funded projects, and they mainly consisted of articles from 2015 on funding towards the Carnegie Library, Drury Library, and Kirkgate Station (Pantry, 2015; Drysdale, 2015; The Newsroom, 2015). Coverage in general was slightly higher in the post-Brexit period (2016-2023) despite this only covering just one EU programme period of 2014-2020. The local coverage was unsurprisingly limited since Wakefield did not receive high levels of EU funding. The limited coverage especially prior to the EU referendum indicates a general lack of local interest. Articles from *Wakefield Express* avoids negative coverage of EU funds, so if local residents were to be exposed to Eurosceptic news, it would have most likely come from national news.

Some of the outright negative coverage was found among articles published by the *Daily Mail*, the most read newspaper source in the UK (Jigsaw Research, 2020). There were 47 articles in total that specifically mentioned the ERDF in their articles between 2008 and 2021 (Advanced Search Google, 2023d).[18] Results show that overall, 44.7 per cent of articles published by the *Daily Mail* could be categorised as overtly negative, 31.9 per cent of articles were neutral, and 23.4 per cent were positive. However, one of the issues was that the majority of the positive coverage were published *after* the 2016 EU referendum with just a single article published before the referendum to be positive in its coverage. Negative coverage jumps to more than half (55.6 per cent) of coverage before the referendum to be negative. Thus, prior to the referendum readers would have been exposed to more negative coverage.

Similarly, the *Express* was selected as a representative sample of a news outlets with Eurosceptic editorial stance. It had an even stronger negative coverage than the *Daily Mail* with 72.4 per cent of articles having an explicit negative coverage (Advanced Search Google, 2023e). Compared to the *Daily Mail*, it continued to publish articles on the ERDF even after the 2016 referendum with the articles mainly focused on the impact of Brexit on the ERDF. Coverage of the *Express* was an outlier among the other publications with clear Eurosceptic positions throughout its publication with few purely factual or neutral

[18] 2008 was the earliest article found through Google Advanced Search, and 2021 was the latest article found.

publications. Such coverage provides a justification to the concerns among those delivering the ECP that the media coverage tends to amplify only when projects are failing (Local Authority Staff A, 2022).

The same search was conducted for *BBC News*, but the search was limited to before the 2016 EU referendum at 61 articles (Advanced Search Google, 2023c). The *BBC News* coverage was overwhelmingly factual (91.8 per cent), and four articles were dedicated to providing information on the ERDF all published in 2016 just before the referendum which indicates the sudden need to educate the public on EU funding with the approach of the referendum. Articles published in the *Guardian* on the other hand were mostly either outright positive or neutral, with just two articles out of 34 articles identified as being negative (Advanced Search Google, 2023f). This shows a wide mixture in coverage of the ERDF from the strictly factual (*BBC News*, *The Guardian*), less positive coverage (*Daily Mail*), to outright negative coverage (the *Express*).

The results of the media coverage provide insight into how the public was exposed to predominantly neutral or negative coverage as opposed to positive ones. EU funding is almost never mentioned in the headlines making it potentially less visible to the public. Furthermore, explanation of what the funds are and that it is part of a wider EU regional policy only appeared in the run up to the 2016 EU referendum. In other words, only those with the keenest eye would have been able to spot that local projects were funded through the ECP, and even then, they would have had to know or actively seek out information as to why the EU may be interested in providing such funds.

In sum, media coverage of the ECP was in general lacking and did little to inform the public on the work of the EU and its funding in the UK. Combine this with the fact that the public has little knowledge of the ECP to begin with and mostly exposed to either neutral and factual coverage or negative coverage, it further supports the idea that the complexity of the ECP may have done little to combat negative perceptions of the EU and its funding. The next section analyses how the EU attempted to promote the ECP and how the guidelines pertaining to the promotion of the ECP was received among those handling the ECP in Wakefield.

6.5-2 EU guidelines on promoting the ECP and perceptions in Wakefield

Considering the increasingly prominent role the ECP was playing in the overall EU budget and the continuous reforms to the funding allocation, delivery and assessment, changes to guidelines on how to promote the ECP attracted surprisingly little debate. The main requirement for EU funded programmes were for the European flag and the logo of the funds (ERDF, ESF, and for projects that received both ERDF and ESF funding, ESIF) were to be displayed at a "prominent position" on both websites, materials, and sites that received EU funding as was stipulated by the European Union Implementing Regulation 821/2014, Chapter II Article 4 (HM Government, 2019). Thus, when it comes to visibility, the ECP may seem to be in a relatively strong position considering the requirement of prominent placement of the EU logo. However, as was discussed in the previous sections, in general the public had a poor understanding of the ECP (Willett et al., 2019; Neal et al., 2021).

In an interview with local authority staff from Wakefield, one reflected that they only understood the full scale of the impact of the ECP as a result of being directly involved in the delivery of the funding (Local Authority Staff B, 2022). The use of logos was perceived more as another example of compliance with the guidelines and it was not expected that it would change the public's view of the EU (Local Authority Staff B, 2022). This was because it was not expected that the public would understand the full scale of the funding, what it was meant to achieve, and how critical it was to have such funding from logos alone.

The interviewees emphasised the importance of knowledge as they argued that they were able to recognise other EU-funded projects when they encountered the EU logo (Local Authority Staff A, 2022; Local Authority Staff B, 2022). The logos alone may not immediately signal to the public of the impact of the ECP in their district as "you don't necessary question where the money is coming from for everything" and one cannot "know about absolutely everything that has been happening [in their local area]" (Local Authority Staff B, 2022). Echoing this point, a staff from a HE sector in the Yorkshire region noted the potential challenge of coming across EU-funded capital programmes in less urbanised areas (HE sector staff, 2023). Furthermore, this requirement of EU flags to be displayed on EU-funded projects was repeatedly weaponised in publications such as

the *Express*. At least four articles from the *Express* criticised the EU for penalising organisations for failing to display the EU flag (Advanced Search Google, 2023e). Thus, the guideline on the ECP did not have the intended effect of promoting the ECP to the wider public as most would have struggled to understand what the logos meant, and may not have simply had fewer opportunities to encounter them.

6.5-3 The local context

Another key point is to consider the context in which the ECP was implemented in. The public did not have the most favourable view of the effect of the ECP not only because they were unaware of the funding or there were changes that could be made to the ECP to increase its value for money performance, but because they felt their region had deteriorated. This is where the sense of relative decline helps us to understand why people may not have felt that EU membership, and by extension the ECP, brought significant positive impact to their region.

A study on the relationship between the ECP and public support by Crescenzi et al. (2019, p.3) found that the support for the ECP is most prevalent in regions where there was tangible improvement in the lives of residents. In their study, they used Wales as a case study, one of the regions in the UK that benefited the most from EU membership and EU funds. Crescenzi et al. (2019, p.23) concludes their research by pointing out that a mere transfer of EU funding is insufficient in cultivating a positive view of the EU among residents. They find that the funding needs to also be coupled with direct impact on the economic prospects of the citizens in the area such as significant reduction in unemployment figures for it to have an impact (Crescenzi et al., 2019, pp.24–25). Similarly, EU-wide research has found that people living in areas in which they feel the economy has worsened tended to also be less likely than those who believed their local area's economy has improved to believe that the ECP had a positive impact based on interviews with citizens across 15 EU member states including the UK (López-Bazo and Royuela, 2019, p.82). The problem is thus citizens are unlikely to develop a sense that their regions have benefited from the ECP when there are tangible socio-economic problems that are persistent and has not improved.

Wakefield provides a prime example of such a location. As was presented in the Chapter 4, former mining communities such as Wakefield has gone through a tumultuous shift in

not only how their local economy function, but changes to their community. After the mines were shut, new employment opportunities struggled to materialise. Government support for former miners and their families were present in the form of redundancy pay, and encouragement of early retirement. However, when it came to the tools of support for the future redevelopment of these communities, they were often not place-sensitive.

Schemes were focused on the individual such as training programmes and support for entrepreneurism which took little account of the endogenous constraints of former mining communities which lacked both supply-side factors such as a labour force with formal education, experience in entrepreneurism, and a link to market or good transport as were fundamental according to Krugman (1991). The strong sense that the region was better in the past is further amplified when hopes for the future did not materialise. The loss of well-paid local employment with relatively low entry costs was not followed by an equivalent opportunity to replace its loss as was discussed in the Chapter on Wakefield. In such a backdrop, without active promotion of the ECP either through the EU or the British media, the end result was likely to follow the findings of Crescenzi et al (2019) and López-Bazo and Royuela (2019). In sum, the adverse local context may have also dampened the idea that the ECP was having a positive effect in the area.

6.6 Conclusion

Few would argue that the EU system is easy to understand, however, the problem of the complexity may have inadvertently resulted in the benefits of EU membership to be muddled and may have taken the wind out of attempts to explain the system as well as make the case for EU membership among the British public. In a backdrop of a permeation of Euroscepticism throughout its media, culture, and politics, the work of building output legitimacy was always going to be an uphill struggle.

The EU's response to the criticism over the ECP was to focus on improving the value for money argument and the promotion of the ECP remained relatively passive. The promotion of the ECP struggled with the limited media coverage in the UK, difficulty in linking the EU logos to the aims and amount of funding that went into projects, as well as the mismatch between the local realities of relative decline and the aim for greater regional equality under the ECP. In essence, people in places like Wakefield that had

gone through deindustrialisation and suffering from relative decline were not in a position to feel that their local area had seen improvement as a result of ECP. This chapter focused on how public perception of the ECP could be formed. The next chapter will focus on how the multi-level governance structure of the UK (or lack thereof) may have had an impact on the delivery of the ECP.

Chapter 7 European Cohesion Policy and Multi-level Governance

7.0 Introduction

The previous chapter argued that one of the reasons why the ECP failed to become a source of output legitimacy for the EU was due to its complexity and passive promotion of their activities which created a barrier against public understanding and support as a result. Following on from this, this chapter will analyse another component of the ECP which has attracted much academic debate in the past, namely the development of the multi-level governance structure. The multi-level governance structure provides another lens through which to analyse the impact of the ECP in the UK, and how the limitations of the decentralisation process may have resulted in the inability of local authorities to address the issue of relative decline. It also provides an opportunity to analyse the theory itself and provide empirical evidence to assess the gap between the extent of the impact of the ECP in the development of multi-level governance and the challenges in accomplishing this under the rubric of the governance structure of the host state.

The key questions discussed in this chapter is whether multi-level governance does indeed emerge as a result of ECP, and if so, does this allow for a stronger bottom-up approach to regional development policy in the UK. The second question explored in this chapter is to identify what governance structure developed as a result of the decentralisation process within the UK, and whether such multi-level governance structure provided sufficient budgetary and political powers for a robust regional strategy to form to unlock the full potential of the ECP. Ultimately, these questions are a way to answer the main research question which is to explore the impact of the ECP in "left-behind" areas. In the previous chapter, the impact was on public perception, but in this chapter, the focus is on the impact upon the governance structure.

In the development of a multi-level governance structure, two concepts provide key role – the partnership clause and the additionality clause. The partnership clause and prior current literature on the multi-level governance indicates that in practice, the ECP facilitates the development of multi-level partnership, not multi-level governance, as there remains severe limitations in the bottom-up approach from forming as was envisioned in the multi-level governance theory. The additionality clause and partnership clause, to borrow the phrase of Bache (2010, pp.71–72) provide technical

and political rationale for the development of multi-level governance (or more accurately multi-level partnership).

However, the multi-level governance theory needs to be analysed within the context of the UK governance structure which is widely understood to one of the most centralised country in the developed world (McCann, 2016). The highly centralised nature of the UK governance structure is despite efforts of multiple decentralisation processes. In the case of England, which is the focus of this paper, this process has resulted in the creation of the Regional Development Agencies [RDA] under New Labour, and subsequently the Local Enterprise Partnerships [LEP] and the Combined Authorities which replaced the RDAs under the coalition and conservative governments. This paper argues that the patchwork of decentralisation process and limited political and fiscal powers devolved to these institutions heavily curtailed the ability of local and regional authorities from forming robust regional policies which hindered the impact of the ECP.

The final section will combine the multi-level governance theory in the context of a fragmented decentralisation within England to analyse whether the ECP enabled a bottom-up approach in terms of regional development policy. This chapter will use a combination of policy paper analysis, archival data, and interview data to assess the multi-level governance theory in the context of Wakefield. This chapter contributes to the multi-level governance literature by providing empirical evidence to the theory. The conclusion drawn from the analysis is that while in theory the ECP has both the technical and political tools to develop a multi-level governance structure, the empirical evidence at least in Wakefield suggests that the influence of the ECP in allowing a bottom-up approach to regional development policy is conditional, influenced by the extent of the decentralisation has been achieved in the host state. The theoretical implication to this is that the development of a multi-level partnership or governance will continue to be "uneven, unequal, and unstable" as described by Hooghe (1996, p.122).

7.1 Multi-level Governance and the ECP

In parallel to the development of the literature on assessing the ECP, a growing set of literature focused on the theory of multi-level governance. The origin of the discussion over the multi-level governance structure of the EU can be traced to the work by Marks (1992, p.211). In his work, Marks (1992) argues that the 1988 reform to the structural

funds stipulated the involvement of all three parties, the EU, the national government, and local authorities in the inception, management, and delivery of EU-funded projects. This was envisioned to create a truly bottom-up approach to regional policy development and encourage greater decentralisation in the process in the recipient state. Yet, Marks (1992, pp.212–214) also cautions against misplaced optimism for such multi-level governance structure to form either a new mode of EU-wide governance structure or result in a decline of the role of the state. Instead, it was envisioned that there will be considerable divergence in the multi-level governance structure which will reflect the governance structure of each Member State. For example, highly centralised states would be less likely to devolve power even with the EU funding due to its structural conditions which provides greater barrier against the development of a multi-level governance structure.

This proved insightful as despite the increased optimism within the academic literature over the formation of a truly bottom-up governance approach as a result of the ECP, in most cases this failed to materialise. This section will first introduce the concept of the multi-level governance theory in relation to the ECP, followed by an explanation as to why such forms of governance failed to materialise in the case of the UK. To this end, this section will explore how attempts towards decentralisation under the New Labour government in the form of the Regional Development Agencies [RDAs], the Local Enterprise Partnerships [LEPs] created under the Coalition government, and the more recent creation of the Combined Authorities as part of the City Deal have all been limited in their attempts to decentralise. This section will argue that the failure of decentralisation through successive UK governments has resulted in limiting local authorities' ability to form their own regional policies. In turn, this section argues that lack of such wider regional policies at the local level may explain why contrary to the multi-level governance theory, the ECP has failed to create a "bottom-up" approach to regional development in the context of the UK.

7.2-1 Multi-level governance or multi-level partnership?

The theory of multi-level governance in the context of EU studies has been widely discussed in the academic literature. This section will discuss how academics envisioned the ECP to influence in the development of a multi-level governance structure, and

argue that the concept would be better understood as partnership rather than governance. The multi-level governance idea believes that the EU pushed countries in most cases hitherto firmly controlled by the central government to adopt a governance structure that elevated the roles of local governments, local authorities, and local private and public sectors in the decision-making process. The way in which this was achieved was through the delivery of the ECP based on close collaboration between different stakeholders. The origins of such a push towards increasing the involvement of local actors can be traced back to the reform act in 1988 (Council Regulation (EEC) No 2052/88 of 24 June, 1988) which gave more power to regional authorities. The act states as follows (Council Regulation (EEC) No 2052/88 of 24 June, 1988 No L 185/10):

Whereas Community action is intended to be complementary to action by the Member States or to back up national measures; whereas, in order to impart added value to their own initiatives at the appropriate territorial level, close consultation should be instituted between the Commission, the Member State concerned at the competent authorities designated by the latter at national, regional, local or other level, with each party acting as a partner…

The specific definition of a partnership between the supranational body, national government, and local authorities was enthusiastically interpreted in the academic field as an "introduction of 'bottom-up' approach to regional policy design, implementation and monitoring" (Bailey and De Propris, 2002, p.409). There were beliefs that the ECP will bring in a new way of regional policy development in which the "two processes of decentralization—institutional and economic—are mutually reinforcing" (Nanetti, 1996, p.72).

However, in practice, rather than a purely bottom-up approach, the way in which the ECP was delivered meant that it was more of a combination of top-down as well as bottom-up approaches. This was achieved by strengthening the role of both the supranational body (the EU) and the subnational powers such as local authorities on specific policies (Hooghe and Marks, 2010), in this case the ECP or regional development policy. There was indeed greater involvement of "regional and local authorities (and non-governmental actors)" in the design, delivery, monitoring, and assessment of the ECP (Bachtler and Mendez, 2020, pp.246–247). This works in practice by first the

European Council setting general guidance on project priorities for the budget allocated for ECP (Bachtrögler et al., 2019, p.107). This is followed by EU member states drafting their own “national strategic reference framework” which in turn needs to be approved by the European Commission (Bachtrögler et al., 2019, p.107). The national strategic reference framework is where the priorities for the national government of the member states are identified. For example, in the case of the UK while the strategic framework is created at the central government level, the delivery of the funds are controlled by devolved authorities in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland (HM Government, 2014, pp.3–4). A “senior stakeholder Board” is established, and they are the ones in charge of the Operational Programmes in England (HM Government, 2014, pp.191–192). This involves a wide range of different stakeholders such as “representatives from local government, LEPs, small businesses, the voluntary sector, higher and further education establishments, environmental groups, equalities bodies, UK Government and, in an advisory capacity, the European Commission” (HM Government, 2014, pp.191–192). The assessment of the projects are then conducted by the central government (HM Government, 2014, p.198). Thus, there is significant involvement at multiple different levels of governance, but the increase in involvement does not necessitate a development of a two-way discussion. Ultimately, the local authorities rarely have direct access to EU institutions. During the interview, Wakefield local authority staff noted that during the delivery of the ECP, they had no audit from the EU (Local Authority Staff B, 2022). The idea of a multi-level governance structure emerging as a result of the ECP was thus questioned. However, this did materialise in EU member states such as the CEECs which were able to establish new regional institutions in order to better absorb ECP funding according to Barca et al. (2012).

Thus, in the absence of well-established structure of local governance, the ECP may have been able to provide a nudge towards the strengthening of such governance, and in the case of several CEECs promoted the creation of an additional tier of governance (Hooghe et al., 2020, p.199). Bache (2008, p.31) also takes the position that in the context of the UK, the ECP resulted in the development of multi-level partnership by pointing out that much of the control was maintained at the central government level despite increased involvement of local authorities, private and public sector in policy development. A

multi-level partnership rather than multi-level governance may more accurately describe the power relations as well as the policy development process of the ECP since local authorities and regional governments are part of the process but with limited say in terms of the budget or the overall strategy of the ECP which continues to be controlled at the national government and EU level respectively. If multi-level partnership formed a crucial part of the delivery of the ECP, then the additionality clause played an equally important role in ensuring the presence of the EU in policy delivery at the ground level and protecting the sovereignty of the state.

7.2-2 Additionality clause

Setting aside whether to call the arrangement between the EU and EU member states as a multi-level governance or multi-level partnership, the current arrangement closely mirrors a balancing act between increasingly the role of the EU in the context of governance of Europe and protecting the sovereignty of the EU member states. Such balancing act needed to also take into consideration that the ECP's main purpose continues to be that of supporting both regional cohesion as well as economic growth (Bachtler and Begg, 2017, p.746). In short, the scope of the ECP is at once broad and focused so that it does not impede on the natural growth of the recipient country or its regions.

One of the key characteristics of the ECP that attempted to maintain a healthy balance between these competing demands was to have the *additionality clause*, which stipulates that the EU funding is to be in *addition* to national-level funding. The aim of such an arrangement was to ensure that the ECP was used to increase public expenditure (Šlander and Wostner, 2018, p.734), but also ensure that this does not result in the ECP replacing either public or private funding (Edverdeen et al., 2006; Anon, 2006). This was achieved by a requirement of projects receiving EU funding to find non-EU match funding *prior* to applying for EU funding (Gov.UK, 2019). The additionality clause was thus introduced to address concerns over potential crowding out effects of the ECP of other funds in the absence of the ECP (Leleux and Surlemont, 2003; Gagliardi and Percoco, 2017; Becker et al., 2018, p.146). In other words, the concern for the EU is that the ECP funding may unintentionally inhibit a natural flow of private sector and to a lesser degree other public sector funding. In order to minimise such risks, the

additionality clause encouraged organisations to exhaust all other funding options available nationally before seeking ECP funding.

However, the downside to the additionality clause is that the benefits of the ECP can become harder to explain and its influence diluted. With half of the funding from national sources such as the Lottery Fund, Arts Council, and local councils in the context of the UK, it can be difficult to differentiate the benefits of the ECP from the contribution of other institutions. From an assessment standpoint, this resulted in frustrations as quantitative analysis of the impact of the ECP needed to be hedged, creating greater challenge when explaining the benefits of the ECP to the wider public – a point which will be further explored in section 7.4 of this chapter. Despite the challenges, the EU is not alone when it comes to designing policy that requires the representation of recipient needs to avoid political disagreements – for instance the accusation that the funds are centred around the interest of one party over the other. Active inclusion of recipient states is sought in the case of international aids such as the Japanese Overseas Development Aid – which is achieved by requiring the proposal to be submitted by the recipient country in what is termed the "request-based approach" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2003). Thus, the ECP is not unique in terms of requiring co-funding as a way to ensure the active involvement of recipient states and avoid criticism that the funds are in some way benefiting the EU or that projects are selected based on EU interests.

Furthermore, political calculation remains a key component of the ECP. Returning to EU regional policy, the partnership clause outlined in the previous section has also been analysed as a result of political values rather than one that is purely based upon technical or evidence-based approach. Bache (2010, pp.71–72) argues that the partnership clause of the ECP "has a technocratic rationale, [however] its development was informed by a particular set of (social democratic) values that contrasted and sometimes conflicted with conceptions of partnership in some member states that were informed by different political values". In both the "request-based approach" and the "partnership clause", there is a combination of technical policy rationale and that of political rationale. In a similar vein, the ECP's additionality clause also allows the technical rationale of ensuring that it does not inadvertently crowd out investment, but

also strengthens the argument that the projects being funded should ideally be in line with local needs. In short, the multi-level partnership and additionality of the ECP provided fertile ground for both strengthening the top-down and bottom-up approaches in addressing regional development. In addition, the partnership and additionality clause provide both technical and political rationale that results in a balancing act between the EU's, the states', and local interests.

Thus, theoretically the ECP provides both technical and political incentive for the development of multi-level partnership (if not multi-level governance). However, policy interventions are rarely void of influence of the structural context in which they are implemented, and the end result may not necessarily be in accordance with policy rationale. The following section will analyse the changes to the UK governance structure through its multiple attempts at decentralisation. This chapter will focus on English decentralisation and how the process had an impact on the formation of regional policy at the local level.

7.3 Multi-level governance and the UK governance structure

The previous section explored how the ECP was believed to accelerate decentralisation among EU member states by formally incorporating the roles of the lower-level authorities as the primary sources of the design, delivery, and assessment of the ECP through the partnership and additionality clauses of the ECP. However, how much impact did the introduction of the ECP have in facilitating such multi-level governance in the UK? The UK arguably exists in the two extremes. On the one hand, the UK has been criticised for its highly centralised governance structure and high levels of regional inequality which was argued as one of the worst in Europe (McCann, 2016). Despite the strongly centralised governance structure of the UK, there were signs that "[h]orizontal partnerships at subnational level became an established part" in western Europe (including the UK) (Bache, 2010, p.66). Furthermore, the UK regional governments have been credited for having the experience and capacity to successfully absorb EU funding in full, in comparison to other EU member states which struggled to use all of the funding sources available (Crescenzi and Giua, 2018). However, there is a distinction to be made between the ability of regional government to absorb EU funding, and whether

the process can be characterised as a bottom-up approach as envisioned by Bailey and De Propris (2002, p.409).

While it is true that different tiers of government at local, national, and supranational levels are indeed involved in the delivery of the ECP, there remains a power imbalance between the different levels of governance. This was an expected outcome according to Hooghe (1996, pp.121–122) who first described the relationships between the different tiers between the supranational, national, and local governments as "uneven, unequal, unstable" and "a compound of co-operative and unilateral strategies" in relation to the ECP. Some such as Edverdeen et al. (2003, p.6) went further by claiming that the structure was more akin to a top-down approach, noting that the budget was ultimately controlled at the supranational level.

However, while the ultimate decision-making power as well as budgetary control rests with the EU, the design, delivery, and assessments are all completed at the local level. Local authorities are responsible for collecting the bids from the local area as well as designing some of the proposals themselves. Assessment of the delivery of the projects are done by the Managing Authorities which are the Department of Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government with little input from the EU-level at this point. Thus, there is clear active involvement from the bottom. On the other hand, works such as Blom-hansen (2005) argued that the EU's relatively limited role in ECP implementation meant that there was greater priority given to national-level policy rather than that at the EU-level.

However, there is also an agreement that degrees of decentralisation, how much political and financial power is given to the local government level may be heterogeneous, and thus differ widely between EU member states, resulting in widely different manifestations of the multi-level governance structure throughout the EU (Hooghe, 1996; Blom-hansen, 2005; Bache, 2010). This chapter adds on to this discourse that the different political structures of member states may affect the levels to which multi-level governance structure materialise, using the case of the UK. In turn, this chapter will argue that in the case of the UK, we do not see the formation of a robust multi-level governance structure due to the limitations in the decentralisation efforts of successive UK governments. It traces this to the ontological inconsistencies of the

policies on decentralisation such as the City Deals and the creation of the LEPs. This has led to a problem of uneven capacity at the local authority level which inhibited them from being able to harness the ECP in facilitating regional growth. The next section will address the numerous decentralisation efforts of successive UK governments to illustrate the changing structure of UK governance.

7.3-1 Decentralisation

Although authors such as McCann (2016) argued that the UK was one of the most centralised countries in the developed world, this is not to say that the British system has not changed. This section focuses on how the decentralisation process took place in the UK, and how despite such efforts, the UK is still widely understood as a highly centralised state. This section mainly finds that the decentralisation of the UK has ultimately resulted in a complex patchwork of different regions with different levels of decentralisation. To begin, this section focuses on the decentralisation of power through the process of devolution. Devolution, the push to have more local autonomy in the past three decades have presented a more complex governing system in the UK. The devolution of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland under the Scotland Act 1998, Governance of Wales Act 1998, and the Northern Ireland Act 1998 stipulating powers to raise local taxes, health, education, transport, sports and the arts, and agriculture to name a few (Civil Service, 2016).

In England, after a fizzle out of interest over devolution due in part to the failed referendum in the North East in 2004, the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 revitalised interest in devolving powers within England, resulting in the formation of combined authorities that possessed powers over transport, policing, and housing (Travers, 2021). England currently has 26 directly elected mayors with more continued to be negotiated, further contributing to the diffusion of political power throughout the country. The impact of devolution and the introduction of elected mayors are made visible in selected cases. For example, post-Brexit discussions between the devolved governments and the central government increased, even though the First Ministers were often left uncertain as to the degree to which such meetings had material impact (McEwen et al., 2020, pp.634–635).

The patchwork of devolution deals also presented some problems over the COVID-19 response. There were inconsistencies and disagreements over whether restrictions related to containing the spread of the virus should be made at the central government, national government, or the Combined Authority level. This came to head when there was a public clash between Andy Burnham, mayor of Greater Manchester and First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon over the travel ban imposed during the pandemic (Mistlin and Carrell, 2021). The question over devolved power came to the forefront arguably during the recent COVID-19 pandemic in which sharp disagreements over restrictions of movement was turned into a political matter most notably by the First Minister of Wales Mark Drakeford, First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon, and Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham. All three had pushed back against national government-level COVID-19 rules by proposing alternatives, pressuring for more funds, or urging caution against lifting restrictions too quickly. At the time, this helped elevate public awareness of the roles of devolved authorities and allowed the public to witness a more local governance structure.

However, despite such high-profile cases which illustrates the accelerating decentralisation process of the UK, its governance structure has remained durable and remains firmly centrally oriented. The evidence for such analysis usually points to the budget allocation which remains firmly under the control of the Treasury (Bache, 2008, p.88; Huggins, 2014, p.8). Indeed, the limited budget has been a recurring problem in the UK's attempt to fully decentralise. According to calculations by the Institute for Government (2020), even in Scotland which has the greatest tax raising power out of all the devolved regions, the majority of its tax revenue at 61 per cent comes from the central government, making the UK the most centralised country among advanced economies. In addition to the limited control devolved institutions have over their finances, the repeated changes of the delivering bodies, described as a "churn and reinvention" (Norris and Adam, 2017), the constant "pendulum swing" between favouring regionalism and localism (Pike et al., 2016, p.10), and the tendency of government pursuit for devolution widely varying depending on the Cabinet member responsible (Ayres et al., 2018, p.862) has severely limited the UK from full

decentralisation. Additionally, such volatility poses the question over the ability of devolved powers from pursuing long-term regional policies.

The academic literature on the topic of decentralisation have shifted from debating whether or not fiscal devolution had a positive or negative impact (Rodríguez-Pose and Ezcurra, 2011) and whether political devolution is desirable or undesirable (Mookherjee, 2015), to arguing more recently that there needs to be an appropriate level of both political and financial devolution so that devolved institutions have sufficient resources to deliver on their devolved powers (Rodríguez-Pose and Vidal-Bover, 2022). It has been argued that too often this is not the case and the gap between promises of devolution and the tools in which to deliver them has meant that devolved institutions continue to struggle with the greater mandate and limited powers (Ayres et al., 2018).

The following section will outline how the evolution of English devolution from the New Labour government, the Coalition Government, and the Conservative Government have all attempted to devolve some power to the sub-national level, yet ultimately retaining crucial power at the central level. The key example of this is the shift from RDAs, LEPs, to Combined Authorities. Tracing the historical shift of decentralisation is critical in the discussion over the ECP as these institutions form the locus of power over the delivery of the ECP and its constant changes poses the danger of loss of knowledge. The following section will argue that much in line with the above academic literature, the present devolved institutions, in particular in England (here using the example of West Yorkshire) has not been given the right amount of budget and authority to enact on their devolved powers. This is, the section on regional policy will argue, another reason as to why the ECP has been unable to facilitate a truly multi-level governance structure in the context of the UK.

7.3-2 RDAs, LEPs, and Combined Authorities

This section explores the RDAs, LEP, and Combined Authorities, how they reflect different attempts at decentralisation while leading to a segmented and limited decentralisation, ill fit to delivering regional policy and thus unable to address the issue of relative decline.

RDAs were established under the New Labour government under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. The RDAs were intended to form a bottom-up

approach rather than one of top-down approach from the central government which placed higher responsibilities as well as power to the regions to form their own regional policies as well as being in charge of delivering EU-funded projects (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2002). It was also expected that they would work to meet targets outlined both regionally and nationally. The RDAs were established in each of the nine NUTS-1 areas in England consisting of London, South East, South West, East of England, East Midlands, West Midlands, North East, North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber. As of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, the responsibility of administering the ECP was devolved to each governing authority. While the creation of RDAs were in part a necessity as an administrative body for the delivery of the ECP (Webb and Collis, 2000), it was also championed with great vigour by then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott who was interested on a personal basis in regional development (Tomaney, 2002).

The RDAs were in a unique position in encouraging private-public partnerships. One of the key roles the RDA provided was to be the facilitator of networking between firms and thus encourage them to learn from each other (Morgan, 2007, p.S157). Its size also meant that within it they housed their own dedicated EU policy division (Local Authority Staff A, 2022). Those who made the transition from working for the RDAs to the LEPs on EU funding note that the guaranteed budget, the existence of a specialised division within the organisation that dealt with the complexities of EU funding combined, allowed for better planning and better formation of a regional strategy that is hard to replicate at the current local authority level (Local Authority Staff A, 2022). RDAs initially faced several criticisms to its operation. Since the NUTS-1 regions were established in accordance with the European standard, the boundaries were critiqued for disregarding functional boundaries (Pearce and Ayres, 2009, p.539). Its budgetary size as well as territorial size was also the focus of criticism especially from the Coalition government of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat, which ultimately decided to abolish the RDAs altogether.

In terms of the budget, the RDAs were allocated a substantive amount, and in particular the fact that the money was guaranteed made it a stable source in which to develop regional policy. The RDAs were provided a budget of £2.5billion in ERDF for the

programme period 2000-2006, as well as the Rural Development Programme for England which amounted to £3.9billion between 2007-2013 (The National Archives, 2012). However, the large scale of the budget attracted criticism from the then Business Secretary Vince Cable, who under the Coalition government had argued that RDAs were "wasteful", and proposed instead that the money should be more targeted to struggling regions such as the North of England (Groom et al., 2010). This criticism was in reference to the large territorial boundary of NUTS-1 regions, as places such as West Yorkshire were grouped in with diverse regions such as East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire and York under Yorkshire and the Humber (Eurostat, 2016). This arguably made it difficult for the funds to be targeted to specific areas within the NUTS-1 region. Then Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne was also supportive of the idea of scrapping RDAs, having also believed that the RDAs were underdelivering (Anon, 2010). These perspectives were in line with wider austerity policy at the time of fiscal tightening in the aftermath of the financial crisis and the pursuit of reduced government expenditure.

It was under the Coalition government that the RDAs were replaced by the LEPs during the Coalition government in 2012. The thinking behind the creation of the LEPs is presented in the 2010 White Paper, *Local Growth*. The problems identified were two-fold, 1) insufficient private sector led regional economic growth, 2) territorial boundaries unreflective of economic activities (HM Government, 2010). This changed the scale, budget, and the makeup of the board leading regional authorities. In terms of scale, the LEPs were formed, at least in theory, in line with economic activity, and resulted in 39 LEPs to be formed even if it did not cover all of UK. There were also to be a higher share of board members from the private sector, so that economic growth will be led by the private sector.

However, problems arose with the way in which LEPs were established. Since the government argued for an organic formation of the LEPs, they were created through a bidding process, which created confusion and uncertainty over the roles the LEPs were meant to play at the local level (Pugalis and Bentley, 2013). Another source of contention was the budget source. LEPs were required to bid for pots of funding such as the Regional Growth Funds (HM Government, 2010, p.31), as opposed to the RDAs

which were publicly funded and thus had a set budget which allowed for more certainty (Bentley et al., 2010). The bidding procedure for central funding also ensured LEPs were kept broadly aligned with central government interests (Broadhurst, 2018, p.337), providing partial devolution to regional policy development. The LEPs also lacked statutory duty which was presented as freedom to act in the local interest, but had the unintended consequence of providing greater confusion over the credibility of the role of LEPs (Bentley et al., 2017, p.202). Taken together, there was serious concerns over the ability of the LEPs to successfully deliver on the ECP based on their lack of legal authority, capacity, experience, and inability to create their own strategies (Huggins, 2014). After a decade of being in place, recent funds such as the Local Growth Fund is being administered mainly through local authorities and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, presenting an uncertain future for the role of the LEPs in supporting local growth according to the National Audit Office (2022, p.38). This signals further confusion over the roles that decentralised institutions play in enabling regional economic growth.

More recently, as of 2023, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt has announced that the LEPs will be scrapped. The reason given for this change has been to "accelerate devolution in England and hand more power to local governments and mayors" (Foster and Staton, 2023). If the LEPs are indeed sidelined in favour of greater political and financial decentralisation towards local authorities and Combined Authorities, this would spell another change in the ever churn of regional policy in the UK. One obvious concern here is, what could come next? At the rate the UK government goes through different regional authorities, it would not come as a surprise if in the next general election there would be another announcement of a return of a rebranded RDA. If so, the same problems over the loss of institutional knowledge will likely ensue, and signal a lack of desire from the UK government to pursue a long-term strategy on tackling regional development issues.

In short, the uneven development and transition of the RDAs, LEPs, and Combined Authorities highlight how the decentralisation process has been inconsistent and unstable in the UK and especially in England. This shows that there are structural

problems in the UK that are harder to solve and that will have an additional impact on the way the ECP is to be delivered.

At the ground-level, criticism towards the transition from RDAs to LEPs were centred around the issue of a lack of knowledge transfer between the two systems. Those employed under the RDA were let go, with few staying on to the LEP (Local Authority Staff A, 2022). This meant that despite the RDA having operated for twelve years, its expertise was lost with its abolition. While data pertaining to the ERDF was transferred over to the Department for Communities & Local Government (now the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government), and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Portfolio Management Office and its archives (Yorkshire Forward, 2012, p.4), less tangible knowledge such as knowledge held by experienced staff were harder to retain.

This was a point raised by the Federation of Small Businesses in Yorkshire (2010) during a committee meeting – the abolition of the RDAs "removed a cadre of dedicated and experienced people with detailed knowledge (and the skills to use that knowledge) of the needs of all the areas of Yorkshire where ERDF can be spent". Institutional knowledge was thus lost in the process of trimming down government expenditure, a point that was lamented both by those who were employed in the RDAs and those accessing their services. This in turn meant that the LEPs needed to start building its knowledge anew. In short, LEPs had both budgetary constraints and institutional memory loss, resulting in pressure towards their capacity of producing regional policy.

In addition to the challenges posed by the transition from RDAs to LEPs, funding towards local government more generally was heavily slashed as part of the austerity policy under the Coalition and subsequent Conservative governments, but the impact of these cuts was not uniform across the country. Places like Wakefield which had limited alternative sources of income due to the relatively weak state of its local economy and a relatively high proportion of its population requiring welfare support meant the majority of its budget (around 63 per cent) depended on central government grant funding (Smith et al., 2016). This made the reduction of its budget by around a quarter severely weaken its service spending power as a result of cut backs of central government funding (Gray and Barford, 2018).

A similar story is repeated in the case of City Deals in which local authorities submitted proposals for decentralisation of infrastructure and financing. The backbone of the City Deal rests on the idea that regional growth will be best obtained through successful cities spearheading growth (Overman and Rice, 2008). A case for City Deals was presented in a consultation document titled *Unlocking Growth in Cities*. The document emphasised the important roles cities play in ensuring local growth and encouraged them to negotiate with the central government for new powers and additional funding by making a case for their growth policies which are tailored to their needs (HM Government, 2011). In return, greater risks are to be shouldered by the cities, and greater bottom-up approach to finding solutions to local economic issues (HM Government, 2011, pp.1–2). Leadership from the cities was another focal point of the document (HM Government, 2011). In the case of Leeds City Region, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority was to take on such leading roles (Leeds City Region, 2012). The formation of Combined Authorities was followed by the creation of Mayoral Combined Authorities [MCAs] which allowed some of the Combined Authorities including the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to elect its own mayor in 2021, which were intended to provide political accountability, representation and democratisation of the structure (HM Government, 2018).

However, Combined Authorities were also formulated in patch works by selected local authorities which further accelerated regional divergence. Due to selective devolved policy-making powers (O'Brien and Pike, 2019), Combined Authorities were only able to gain partial control over limited policy areas. Decentralised policy areas also differed wildly depending on the Combined Authority in question (Schneider and Cottineau, 2019, p.96). For example, the West Yorkshire was given partial control over their transportation policy. This meant that their transportation plans remained susceptible to changes in planning and funding allocations from the central government. Limitation of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority in playing a central role in their own transport plans was placed in the forefront when large transport plans such as the eastern leg of the HS2, which included Leeds, was cancelled alongside the scrapping of creating a high-speed rail network between Leeds and Manchester (the Northern Powerhouse Rail or HS3 in colloquial terms) (Burn, 2022). Reaction by the West Yorkshire Mayor, Tracey

Brabin was one of “frustration and confusion” (Dickinson, 2022), showcasing the vulnerability of subnational governments in pursuing their own policies from cut backs from central government. Despite the power to manage bus networks being devolved to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, it still relies on central government funding to implement changes. For example, most recently it was announced that in the second wave of Levelling Up Funds, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority secured £41 million as a “Bus Enhancement Package” (Gov.UK, 2023b).

On the one hand, the region being successful with any of their bids should be welcomed considering numerous cases of failed bids (BBC News, 2023b). On the other hand, there is a problem if one of the few examples of a successful bid is that of a project that has already been devolved as well as having secured funding from other pots of funding such as the Transforming Cities Fund, and Transport Fund which were secured back in 2018 and 2015 respectively (Hiblin et al., 2021; West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2022, p.94; West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2023). In short, not only are powers devolved to West Yorkshire limited, but the funding bids tend to prioritise projects that have already secured funding in the past. This means that even when new funds are announced – the most recent example being the Levelling Up Fund, devolved authorities need to be strategic in the funding proposals meaning that they tend to prioritise projects that are more likely to secure funding (i.e., those with a track record of success).

In sum, the creation of the LEPs and Combined Authorities have contributed to segmented and limited decentralisation. Piecemeal devolution deals have given some powers at local level. Yet fundamentally they still need to seek funding, in particular from central government which curtails their ability to have control even in sectors that they are supposedly having control over such as transport. Discussions continue over which levels of authority should be responsible for delivering regional economic growth. This confusion over who is taking leadership and where the budget is coming from combined increases the structural weakness to the multi-government structure, inhibiting the development of a truly bottom-up approach. This has had a knock-on effect to local authorities’ ability to formulate cohesive regional policy which makes the most use of the ECP.

7.3-3 Regional policy, its formation and direction

In a climate of limited budgetary control and fragmentation of political boundaries as shown in the previous sub-sections, local authorities also face severe limitation in terms of their ability to form their own regional policies. As specified above, devolved institutions such as the West Yorkshire Combined Authority have been devolved limited powers, and have even weaker control over funding sources which are often procured through funding bids which are inherently unreliable and short-term. LEPs lack statutory duties which places confusion over its direction and how far it can go in terms of coming up with their own regional policy. The combination of lack of certainty over the amount of funds available, lack of statutory duties, and limitations in devolved power means they are constrained in terms of long-term regional policies they can pursue, a point hitherto missing in the multi-level governance literature.

As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, the additionality clause of the ECP reflects the need for the ECP to reflect regional policy. In other words, the funding needs to reflect how the region aspires to grow. However, such regional policy does not naturally materialise and require local authorities to plan them which requires manpower as well as time. This is why one of the limitations in designing a regional policy plan has been problems related to capacity. Capacity here refers to both budgetary, timescale, as well as staff numbers and this applies directly to the implementation of the ECP.

In the case of Wakefield, among those responsible for handling the ECP, it was felt that there was insufficient time to develop a comprehensive regional policy to better situate the ECP within a wider Wakefield policy direction (Local Authority Staff A, 2022). This was contrasted from the time of the RDAs, or Yorkshire Forward in the case of the Wakefield area, when there was a specialised European team within the Yorkshire Forward which was responsible for delivering ECP (Local Authority Staff A, 2022) as well as formulating their own “regional strategies” (Yorkshire Forward, 2012, p.14) for the Yorkshire and the Humber region overall. The feedback from local authorities has thus been that to decide on how the ECP is to be used, local authorities need to be able to formulate regional policy to help provide a framework to make such decisions.

Not all shared this sentiment that the RDAs were in the best position to be handling EU funding. Tom Riordan the chief executive of Yorkshire Forward argued that the ERDF posed "[t]he hardest challenge" for Yorkshire Forward, and the Yorkshire and Humber Chambers of Commerce argued that the RDA should be focused more on designing regional strategy and focus less on its delivery as this had the danger of the Yorkshire Forward to "move away from its original role" (House of Commons, Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Committee, 2010, pp.11–12). However, despite the concerns the Yorkshire Forward given the primary role of developing its own regional policies for more than a decade (Local Government Chronicle, 1999) provided an important source of an attempt to create long-term cohesive strategy for the region. The budgetary source for the Yorkshire Forward being a "single pot" was also welcomed as providing "a high degree of flexibility" (House of Commons, Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Committee, 2010, p.23). Thus, the ability of regional authorities such as RDAs to formulate regional strategy relied on their ability to formulate long-term plans, and clear role to formulate such strategies which were supported by secure funding in the form of a single source fund from the central government in addition to EU funding. Current lack of regional policy formation and direction further shows comparatively weak position local authorities are placed within the multi-level governance structure at present. This in turn means there is questions over whether local authorities in such countries could utilise the ECP to strengthen their position in pursuit of a true multi-level structure.

In sum, the multi-level governance structure of the UK has gone through substantive change in the past more than two and half decades. Going from the RDAs which favoured larger regional boundaries (at NUTS-1) working under statutory guidelines but one that had secure funding and ability to formulate long-term strategy for the region, to LEPs which incorporated more business influence but one that struggled from reduced political power, insecure budget, and boundaries that may reflect economic activities but presented a patchwork as it was left under the discretion of local authorities to create. The Combined Authorities brought with it some political power, but it remains constrained by insecure budgetary sources and lack of consistency when it comes to the deals agreed between it and the government. Neither the LEP nor the Combined Authorities have the capacity to formulate long-term strategies for their local

areas as was the case under the RDAs. Such context provides a challenging environment in tailoring EU funding through the ECP to wider regional development policies. In sum, the multi-level governance structure of the UK has arguably been weakened in the context of at least England in recent years despite the continued announcements of City Deals being agreed.

7.4 Multi-level governance and Wakefield

The preceding sections have explored the wider implications of decentralisation in the context of England, using the changes between the RDAs such as Yorkshire Forward and the subsequent introduction of LEPs and Combined Authorities to illustrate the point of its impact in the West Yorkshire region. It was the way in which decentralisation was pursued rather than a question over centralisation/decentralisation that meant sub-national authorities tended to lack both political and financial power to pursue long-term strategies aimed at making a difference in the regions. This arguably weakened the ability of local authorities to combat issues related to relative decline which was explored in Chapters 04 and 05.

Not everything provided difficulties for Wakefield, and arguably under certain measures, the local authority enjoyed greater political representation and thus greater decentralisation than other local authorities. Wakefield, being part of the West Yorkshire region did gain some advantage from the multi-level governance structure that was forming through decentralisation. Unlike some of the other regions in the country, it had one of the first City Deals to be reached between the government and the Leeds City Region (O'Brien and Pike, 2015), and gained West Yorkshire Mayor. However, when it comes to the development of multi-level governance, the role of the EU was not as strongly felt in the region. The empirical evidence from the case of Wakefield shows not only the limitation of the formation of multi-level governance structure through decentralisation, but also indicates key limitation to the partnership clause in enabling stronger link between the ground-level and the EU-level governance. This section will argue that despite the technical efforts made in facilitating a bottom-up approach to regional development, the ECP is unable to overcome the barriers of distance when it comes to fostering closer cooperation with those on the ground. This section argues that this lack of direct network has the danger of weakening the EU's ties

to local authorities, civil society groups, and local businesses that benefit from the ECP. Their absence has further implications to the idea of the ECP as a source of output legitimacy as recipients may not be able to recognise that they are being supported by the EU.

In terms of decentralisation and its impact on Wakefield, the region has benefited from being part of the Leeds City Region in attracting extra public funding such as the Northern Power Investment Fund, business support from the LEP, and the Combined Authority making successful bids to national-level funding such as the Towns Fund, Shared Prosperity Fund, and the Levelling Up Fund to name a few. While the Wakefield District may benefit from such funding, it also argues that not all benefits of funding offered to the Leeds City Region will go towards supporting services in the Wakefield District (Local Authority Staff A, 2022). When it comes to the development of a multi-level governance structure, the ECP arguably played a limited role in this regard. Wakefield local authority staff did not feel that the ECP led to a development of such multi-level structure (Local Authority Staff A, 2022; Local Authority Staff B, 2022). When it came to direct dealings with the EU, none had met staff from the EU in the UK (one staff did visit Brussels while working for Yorkshire Forward) (Interviewee C, 2022; Local Authority Staff A, 2022; Local Authority Staff B, 2022). Communication was with the two Managing Authorities, the Department of Work and Pensions, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Local Authority Staff A, 2022). This meant that from the inception and assessment of the ECP funded projects in Wakefield, there was no direct involvement of the EU in the entire process in the case of Wakefield. While audits may take place at random which are undertaken by the EU, the lack of routine involvement of the EU at the local level means that at the local authority level there is little in terms of a sense that a multi-level structure is developing as a result of the ECP.

When it came to civil society groups, it was even harder for such organisations to be aware of the influence of the EU. The People Enabling Area Transformation [PEAT] project was part of a Community-led Local Development [CLLD] programme. The aim of the CLLD was to facilitate local partnership in developing economic development strategies in the region (European Commission. Directorate General for Employment,

Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2022, p.13). In the case of Wakefield, the CLLD was delivered "in partnership with 14 local delivery partners", and "led by a Local Action Group (LAG), made up of individuals from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, and local residents" (Forever Consulting, 2022b, p.4). Despite key involvement of local actors, for those delivering PEAT, it was felt that the local residents and local third sector groups that they supported did not fully understand that this was an EU project. Since all the services were provided by Wakefield council, it was more likely that participants viewed it as a Wakefield Council service (Interviewee C, 2022). This ties into the point raised by Wakefield authority staff that the public tend not to question where the funds come from (Local Authority Staff B, 2022). Furthermore, the complexity of the application process of EU funding meant that without the intermediary intervention by experienced staff from Wakefield Council, it was considered highly unlikely that the local third sector services would be capable of handling EU funding (Interviewee C, 2022).

Thus, the connection between local civil society groups and the EU was relatively weak in the case of Wakefield. In other words, funds were available, but in reality the kind of organisations that could seek and gain funding through the ECP without some kind of help from the local authority remained few. As a result, this limited the number of organisations that could directly benefit from EU funding, and further diluted the idea that help came from the EU due to the stronger involvement of the local authority in comparison to the EU in the day-to-day handling of the funding from the ECP. This was exacerbated by the complexity of EU funding requirements as was discussed in the previous chapter. However, this chapter adds on to the discussion presented in the previous chapter by arguing that in addition to this, a lack of direct contact from the EU may have further created a distance between the EU and staff on the ground which may explain the lack of a multi-level governance structure from emerging.

Since the services were provided through local authorities, recipients of the funds would have linked the support to have come from local authorities as opposed to the EU who provided the funding. While this problem may not be replicated in other regions necessarily, this provides partial qualitative explanation for the lack of pro-EU sentiment deriving from the ECP as well as the limitation to the development to a multi-level governance structure in recipient regions identified in the academic literature. This

inability to link together the funding source (EU) with the services or projects that the public access may be an addition to the puzzle in the broader literature on the ECP and Brexit and how they were not linked. In short, empirical evidence presents further questions to the multi-level governance theory and this chapter argues that for such a structure to develop, the current tools available for the ECP is insufficient.

7.5 Implications for the multi-level governance theory

What are the implications of this to the delivery of the ECP in the future? The first is that perhaps there needs to be more active involvement of the EU at the local level for a stronger multi-level governance structure to emerge. The theory of multi-level governance has theorised the possibility of greater bottom-up involvement as well as more recently a possibility of responsibilities being passed around the different tiers of governance (Jeffery and Peterson, 2020). This was indeed an experience one of the interviewees had when the problems were passed between the UK government and the EU (Local Authority Staff A, 2022). Additionally, the case study of Wakefield indicates that it is unlikely that the public will be able to understand the full extent of the EU support when the entire service is delivered by the local authorities. Once again, in theory there should be more involvement from different stakeholders from the private and third sector in delivering regional policy as was voiced by Charbit (2020). However, in practice, this was harder to do for organisations unaccustomed to handling ECP. Ostensibly, what this means is that the ECP is likely to have a narrower involvement of non-state actors in practice.

Second, the domestic context matters in terms of the degree that the ECP could contribute to regional development. If the recipient country lacks a robust devolved authorities at the local authority level, they are unlikely to be able to develop their own regional policies or strategies that will benefit from the ECP. This ability requires both political and financial decentralisation as was argued by Rodríguez-Pose and Vidal-Bover (2022). Thus, one of the implications to the multi-level governance theory is that the level of success of such governance structure from emerging may rely on local context and remain extremely heterogeneous. In sum, building on to the existing multi-level governance theory, this section has argued that there is a need for a more active involvement of the EU and a greater favourable local context for such a structure to take

root. These findings support the need for future research on the theory to seek empirical evidence to support some of the hypotheses of the theory itself.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored first the theoretical basis of the development of a multi-level governance structure based on the two clauses of the ECP – the partnership clause and the additionality clause. In theory, these two clauses were to provide both a mixture of top-down and bottom-up approaches to regional development policy formation in the recipient regions. However, even in the academic literature it was understood that the structural relationship between the different levels of governance can be best understood as multi-level partnership as opposed to governance as the degree to which lower tiers of the governance structure were able to have a say in the policy process was limited.

This chapter has attempted to test the multi-level governance theory using empirical evidence from the case study of Wakefield and using a combination of policy documents on decentralisation and interview data from those who handled EU funding in Wakefield to analyse how the ECP had an impact on the multi-level governance structure in the UK. The patchy decentralisation process of the UK meant that English devolution remained constrained in terms of its political and financial authority. This, the chapter argues, curtailed the ability of regional authorities from developing their own regional policy, a point that has been supported by both interview data and Commons papers. In the backdrop of shaky multi-level governance structure developed as a result of patchy decentralisation, the impact of the ECP was not felt to have contributed to the development of a more robust multi-level partnership relationship. Lack of EU presence in the delivery or the assessment of the ECP meant that neither the local authorities nor the local recipients of the funds were likely to have pieced together the EU funding to their own personal benefit.

This finding has both implications to the multi-level governance theory and the research into the relationship between Brexit and the ECP. This chapter argues that one qualitative explanation as to why there is little link between the Leave vote and the ECP lies in the inability of the public to link together the EU funding with having benefited either themselves or their region, and that they are more likely to have linked the

benefits to the institutions (in this case Wakefield local authorities). Furthermore, for the ECP to encourage the development of a multi-level governance structure, it requires more active involvement of the EU in the delivery of the ECP at the local level. While this may not have been possible due to concerns surrounding sovereignty, the capacity of the EU, or that it may go against the principle of partnership and additionality of the ECP. However, this chapter argues that if the EU views the ECP as a crucial output legitimacy tool and one that would develop a multi-level governance structure, more visible contribution of the EU in local areas may be needed.

Chapter 8 ECP and Wakefield, logistics and the arts

8.0 Introduction

The previous chapter argued that one potential reason behind the limited impact of the ECP was the patchwork of decentralisation processes which did not allow for the development of a comprehensive regional policy. This chapter turns to consider the impact of the ECP in Wakefield. Wakefield district was not by any means the highest recipient of EU funding through the ECP, as argued in the Chapter 7. However, the district was nonetheless in desperate need of funding as it tried to move away from its historical legacy of the mine closures.

As was explored in Chapter four, Wakefield and other former mining areas did receive some support from the government. However, the challenge posed by the closure of the mines was heavily spatially concentrated and so severe that funding that came to such places tended to be woefully limited in their capacity in enacting real change. Another challenge that emerged especially for local authorities was "what future did Wakefield want to pursue?", a question this chapter aims to answer by analysing historical attempts and interview data of local authority staff tasked to answering precisely this question. Regeneration efforts in former coal mining regions had a combination of factors that made reinventing regional specialisation difficult. Coal mining communities were developed for centuries with only the coal mining industry and their related manufacturing sectors in mind which meant they were physically isolated, making it difficult for people to access new opportunities. The remoteness also made it difficult for such regions to attract new workers and investment from elsewhere. Businesses that came immediately after the mine closures were attracted mainly by the cheap land and low wages, leaving locals who stayed with little choice but to join workforces that were low-paid and low-skilled such as the warehousing and logistics sector. Miners and mining communities tended to have little in terms of formal education and qualifications. Re-training and re-skilling were not easy, and was particularly hard for older miners who saw little point in competing for jobs with other younger candidates. Among those who were handed lump sums of redundancy payment it was common to use it to buy houses locally (Bennett et al., 2000), further tying former miners and their families to the local area. In sum, it was the closure of the coal mines that contributed to the relative decline of the local community which is reflected in the high levels of people without skills, lack of well-paying and highly-skilled jobs, and despite relatively higher levels of employment and an average unemployment rate, the region suffers from higher-than-average levels of people out of work due to health issues. In sum, the closure of the coal mines revealed how reliant the local community was to this single industry, making the transition that much harder. In the aftermath of the coal mine closures, large numbers of local residents lacked any formal qualifications, a lack of well-paid and highly skilled jobs, and despite relatively higher levels of

employment and an average unemployment rate, the region suffered from higher-than-average levels of people out of work due to health issues.

In the backdrop of such economic structural weakness, a top-down approach under the Thatcher and Major government struggled to make substantive difference in changing the fortunes of former coal mining communities. New Labour were equally finding it difficult to address the same issues when they took charge. What emerged from this context was the significance of a bottom-up approach, one led by local authorities. Starting from the 1990s, former coal mining local authorities started to identify the EU as a critical source of additional funding. This prompted the development to the RECHAR programme, and has since led to the use of the ECP to help fund regional development policies. In the case of Wakefield, the ECP was used perhaps most successfully in developing its arts industry. This chapter will explore the present and future of the district, the challenges related to redefining its future, as well as the impact and limitations of the ECP in forming such futures. This chapter is split into four main sections. The first section explores an early example of a local led initiative in the form of the Coalfield Communities Campaign and the RECHAR programme which was developed as a result of the campaign group's successful lobbying at the EU-level. The second section explores how the logistics and warehousing sectors emerged as a key industry due to the "second nature" strengths (Cronon, 1991) derived from the good transport networks that developed as a result of transporting coal in Wakefield. However, the sub-section will explore how the sector's fragility and high prevalence of immigrant workers from the EU which elevated competition may have unintentionally resulted in a rise in Euroscepticism before the 2016 EU referendum. The third section explores how the Wakefield local authority's gamble of focusing on the arts industry with the support of ECP funding helped create a virtuous cycle of attracting further investments. The fourth and last section will discuss how the key lessons from this chapter are the importance of further decentralisation and focus on ensuring local residents have basic skills qualifications to make the most of the local opportunities that are emerging.

8.1 Initial moves: The Coalfield Communities Campaign and RECHAR

Chapter 4 on Thatcher and the coal mine closure argued that the main issue with Thatcher government's plan after the coal mine closures was the lack of a place-based, bottom-up approach in finding a future for former coal mining communities. However, the lack of place-based support forthcoming from the central government promopted local authorities to find an alternative source of support. One early example of this is the Coalfield Communities Campaign, and its relationship with the EU in developing the RECHAR programme which will be the focus of this section. Seeking support from Europe stemmed from the fact that the devastating impact of mine closures and the cost of deindustrialisation was felt equally in other European countries. Often, the problems were similar in nature, such as a sudden surge in unemployment in a highly concentrated areas, limited transferable skills and alternative job opportunities to smooth over the transition for many former miners. In any case, this is a relatively lightly explored topic in the literature on coal mine closures (for exceptions see Fothergill (1995), Bache (1996), and Kay (2000)). Beyond the campaign group being one of early attempts of tackling place-based issues through collaboration with the EU (at this point the EEC) illustrates the significance of a local led approach in regional development.

8.1-1 The Coalfield Communities Campaign, forging new ties

In the aftermath of the coal mine closures and its widespread impact in former mining communities, local authorities from former coal mining communities grouped together to form the Coalfield Communities Campaign. The campaign group was formed by "54 local authorities which were in localities which had at the time present or past connection with coal mining industry" in 1985, and its membership increased to 91 local authorities in six years later (Turner, 1994, p.622). The local authorities were mixed in terms of political leanings with both Conservative and Labour Party representation which helped develop their credibility as a campaign group (Fothergill, 1995) as it avoided it from being labelled as either a Conservative or Labour campaign. The cross-party campaign group made up of local authorities facing the same problems presented an important unifying voice to the dispersed communities, giving them the ability to take their lobbying activities to the EU (Turner, 1994, pp.631–632). Wakefield council was one local authority that was actively involved in this campaign group. Having lost

“20 collieries and 20,000 jobs” since 1985 as a result of the mine closures (Kojan, 2003), there was a pressing need for them to find additional funding sources to help turn the community around.

The impact left after the coal mine closures in Wakefield is best evident when one looks to the coalfields in relation to the Index of Multiple Deprivation [IMD]. Even limiting the number of coal mines in operation in the district to those under the NCB, Wakefield District alone had 24 mines. In addition, there were some mines such as Kellingley colliery which is located in the border between Beal in Selby (North Yorkshire), and Knottingley in Wakefield. These coal mines were spread across the entire district. Figure 8-0-1 shows how areas with former coalfields are more likely to be in areas that to this day in the higher deciles of the IMD (Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, 2019a). The link between coal mines and the adverse impact its closures have had on the local population thus continues to this day. Reflecting the urgency felt by the local authority, records of one of the council minutes dating back to the summer of 1985 shows that council members had travelled all the way to Brussels as part of the Coalfield Communities Campaign group (City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, 1986).

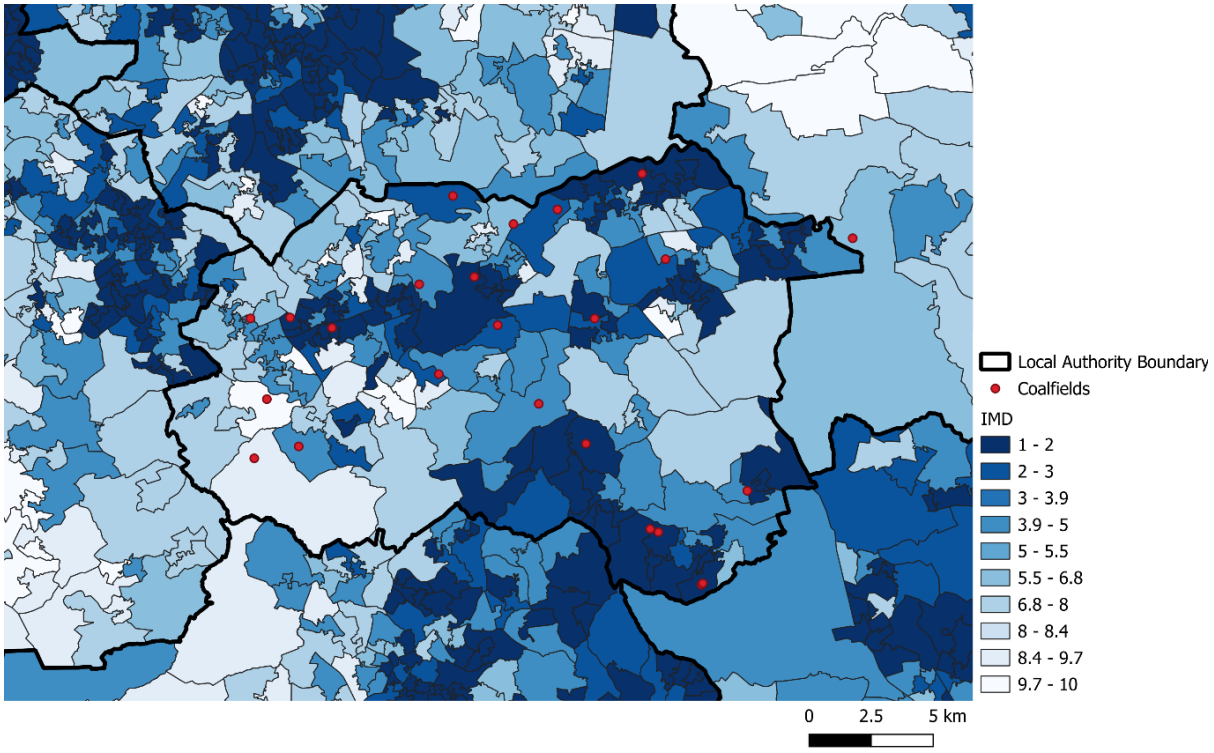

FIGURE 8-0-1: WAKEFIELD DISTRICT COALFIELDS AND IMD. THE DOTS REPRESENT THE COALFIELDS THAT WERE OPERATED BY THE NCB. THE IMD IS EXPRESSED IN 10 DIFFERENT LEVELS, FROM MOST DEPRIVED (1) TO THE LEAST DEPRIVED (10). THE FIGURE INDICATES THAT THE MAJORITY OF FORMER COAL MINING AREAS IN THE WAKEFIELD DISTRICT ARE ALSO AREAS WITH HIGH LEVELS OF DEPRIVATION. DATA SOURCES: IMD DATA WAS RETRIEVED FROM THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT (2019A), LIST OF COALFIELDS WERE RETRIEVED FROM THE NORTHERN MINE RESEARCH SOCIETY (N.D.), THE LOCAL AUTHORITY BOUNDARIES WERE RETRIEVED FROM THE ONS GEOGRAPHY (2022A), AND THE LOCATION OF THE COALFIELDS WERE RETRIEVED FROM THE HUDSON INSTITUTE OF MINERALOGY (2023). THE KELLINGLEY COLLIERY IS INCLUDED IN THE MAP EVEN THOUGH IT IS PART OF NORTH YORKSHIRE DUE TO ITS CLOSE PROXIMITY TO KNOTTINGLEY IN THE WAKEFIELD DISTRICT.

The campaign was thus strongly supported by Wakefield Council, which submitted a motion to parliament to present the research results together with Barnsley Council and the Coalfield Communities Campaign (UK Parliament, 1990). The Coalfield Communities Campaign had some unique advantages that previous key stakeholders such as the NUM lacked – its pragmatic approach in pursuing financial support rather than stopping mine closures, the presence of non-militant local authorities amidst their membership helping legitimise their cause, and perhaps most importantly, a sympathetic ear from the EU (then the EEC) (Turner, 1997). This cocktail of favourable conditions nevertheless implied that former coal mining communities struggled to find support from the Conservative governments under Thatcher and Major in comparison to the EU (Turner,

1994; Turner, 1997). Timeline wise, this was also a period in which discussions over tackling regional inequality as an issue that required a European wide response (see Chapter 6 section 6.3 for details on this point). Thus, the muted interest from the UK in comparison to the generally greater interest from the EU spurred local authorities to take the campaign at the EU-level.

The UK was arguably one of the winners of the RECHAR programme with six English regions, one Welsh region, and five Scottish regions being eligible for funding, and as a result of the programme some of these regions also became eligible for Objective 2 funding (regions in transition) in an acknowledgement that they required further assistance (European Commission, 1990, p.24)[19]. The programme was split between RECHAR I (1990-1993) and RECHAR II (1994-1997). The budget allocation for RECHAR I was £1.37billion[20] and RECHAR II amounted to £523.32m[21] in today's prices (CORDIS, 2014). To put this figure in context, the rough number of residents in former coal mining areas was around 3.3m[22] according to the 1991 Census, and if the total figure of RECHAR I and RECHAR II are combined, it will amount to around £52 per local resident per year of the duration of the RECHAR programmes (1990-1997). It was estimated that the UK received 45 per cent of the total budget allocated to the programme (Fothergill, 1995, p.197), which roughly amounts to £617.32m for just RECHAR I programme period

[19] The regions are as listed in (European Commission, 1990, p.24): Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, North-East England, North-West England, Yorkshire, South Wales, Kirkaldy, Central Scotland, Bathgate, Midlothian, Cumnock and Sanquhar.

[20] This data was calculated by taking into account prices in 1992 and the current exchange rate. The EU data shows RECHAR I as €970m in 1992 prices (CORDIS, 2014). The Bank of England Database on the historical exchange rate has €1 as £0.7290 as of January 02, 1992 (Bank of England, 2023b) – this calculation leads to £707.13m. This is the equivalent of £1.37bln in today's money using the inflation calculator of the Bank of England (2023c) which has £1 in 1992 as equivalent to £1.94 in 2022.

[21] This data assumes that the €400m on the EU website to be in 1997 price rather than 2014 price when the website was last updated (CORDIS, 2014). Exchange rate on 02 January, 1997 was £1 = €0.7519 (Bank of England, 2023b), which yields £300.76 in 1997 price. £1 in 1997 is equivalent to £1.74 in 2022 (Bank of England, 2023c), and taking into account this yields £523.32m.

[22] This population number was derived from first defining which local authorities are coal mining communities. In total, this thesis defined 21 local authorities as former coal mining communities. This definition was built on the study by Abreu and Jones (2021), who defined such communities based on local authorities with more than 10 per cent of workers in the energy & water industries which includes coal miners in the 1981 Census. In addition, Abreu and Jones (2021) used local authorities in proximity to coal mines using The British Geological Survey. However, as this thesis did not have access to this data, it simply used the former definition of local authorities with more than 10 per cent of workers in the energy & water sector in the 1981 Census (Office for National Statistics, 2023b). The 21 local authorities are listed in Appendix A. Based on this data, the population size of former coal mining communities used population data from the 1991 Census which is the closest to the RECHAR programme which spanned 1991-1997.

alone.[23] In turn, the Coalfield Communities Campaign was instrumental in providing its support to the European Commission when it had a dispute with the UK government over its financial commitment regarding the additionality clause between 1991 and 1992 (Kay, 2000). While the success of the European Commission backed by UK local authorities against the UK government was interpreted as a sign of a new bottom-up governance structure (Marks, 1993, pp.400–401), such victories remained the exception (Pollack, 2003). A detailed account on the dispute between the European Commission and the UK government over funding of RECHAR can be found in the work by Bache (1996) and will thus not be repeated here. The significance of the Coalfield Communities Campaign and the RECHAR programme that it helped bring about is twofold. One, it showcases what a local led initiative can achieve in terms of delivering a place-based policy. Two, it is one of the early examples of how local authorities can work with the EU in pushing for greater support for places facing relative decline. Even if the kind of multi-level governance failed to materialise as argued in Chapter 7, it did give a blueprint of how local authorities can utilise EU funding in pursuit of their own interests.

In any case, after the delivery of RECHAR, interest towards former coal mining communities seemed to dip. Perhaps this was understandable as the industry shrank to employ just 10,315 workers in 1993 (Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2021) a fraction of the 28m of employed people (Bank of England, 2023a), and with it the number of former miners that needed immediate support dwindled. In terms of what happened to the Coalfield Communities Campaign, in 2007 it was incorporated into the Industrial Communities Alliance, a lobby group representing industrial areas more generally (Industrial Communities Alliance, 2022). However, despite the receding interest towards the coal mining industry in the UK, places like Wakefield continued to contribute to future discussions over transitions away from coal and the unique challenge such transitions pose. For example, as recent as 2019, the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change [CCMI] (a “consultative committee of the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community)”(European Economic and Social Committee, 2010)) held a round table discussion on this very issue in Wakefield with a presentation

[23] The author assumes that Fothergill (1995) is referring to RECHAR I as the publication year pre-dates the end of RECHAR II which is 1997.

from the former Coalfields Communities Campaign organiser, Steve Fothergill to a group of participants from mainly CEECs (European Economic and Social Committee, 2019). Thus, while the Coalfield Communities Campaign is now history, its legacies that started with local authorities including Wakefield Council is still continuing dialogue with the EU, and the lessons learned from their experience still feeds into debate over the future of former coal mining communities.

In short, the Coalfield Communities Campaign and the RECHAR programme were early examples of the importance of local led initiatives that was made possible through EU funding, a theme of this chapter. The next section explores how logistics was seen as a key industry in the future of Wakefield, focusing on the unique strengths presented by the region's coal legacy. However, the burgeoning logistics sector also brought with it some of the same problems related to low pay, but also presented a fertile ground for Euroscepticism to grow as competition from workers from CEEC sowed discontent.

8.2 Logistics, Wakefield's future?

8.2-1 Strengths and weaknesses of the logistics sector in Wakefield

In a backdrop of entrenched relative decline, local led attempts such as the Coalfield Communities Campaign was a rare success story to come out of the former coal mining local authorities with the support of the EU. However, local authorities such as Wakefield district that historically relied upon the coal mining industry found themselves in search of a new future. Projects such as the RECHAR programme, Coalfield Regeneration Fund, and Coalfield Enterprise Fund, and the ECP were in part used to reclaim land and newly develop former coalfields in preparation for new businesses to emerge. What comes after coal was a question that such local authorities faced, one which the answer was often elusive. This section explores how the logistics sector was initially identified as a potential solution to the problems related to relative decline, and why that was the case.

Local authorities were responsible for generating a post-coal future vision for their local communities. In order to accomplish this, they were encouraged to identify key strengths of their local area that ideally brought employment opportunities in sectors that had a long-term future and that was well-paying. This follows a well-established neo-classical position that regions need to "specialise in economic activities in which

they hold a comparative advantage" (Pike et al., 2006, p.65). Of course, in reality this was much harder to implement. Effective consideration of local "strengths" needs to take into account what funding opportunities are available. It requires successfully satisfying the key criteria of "value for money" treading the fine line between showing that the project would not have gone ahead without the public funds, but also that the jobs created and protected were of sufficient value. However, in former coal mining communities devasted by the impact of the mine closures, identifying such local "strengths" proved to be a challenge and often led to new problems.

In the case of Wakefield, one of the strengths identified was the logistics sector. As was noted in Chapter 5, the district became home to extensive transport networks mainly as a result of investment in transporting coal extracted from the local mines. This follows what is known as the "second nature" geography discussed in the geographical literature (Cronon, 1991). The "second nature" geography refers to geographical advantages developed through the construction of man-made infrastructure such as roads and rail network (as opposed to the "first nature" geography which refers to natural terrains) (Cronon, 1991). Wakefield's transportation network is a key example of "second nature" advantages that owes much to its historical development as a coal mining community. This is expressed in Figure 8-0-2 as the motorway, road, and rail network all goes through the former coalfields. The transportation networks and its central location within the UK makes Wakefield an ideal location for the logistics and warehousing sector to develop. This is by no means unique to Wakefield. Coal mining communities in general are remote, but well-connected by transport links – a legacy of the mines and the cheap land and wages makes it an ideal place for such industries to flourish. According to the National Audit Office's (2009, p.28) report on coalfield regeneration, they estimated that in former coal mining communities "commercial floor-space grew 80 per cent faster than the national rate" between 1998 and 2006, and that warehousing accounted for "31 per cent of commercial floor-space", indicating the success enjoyed by the logistics and warehousing sector in such communities.

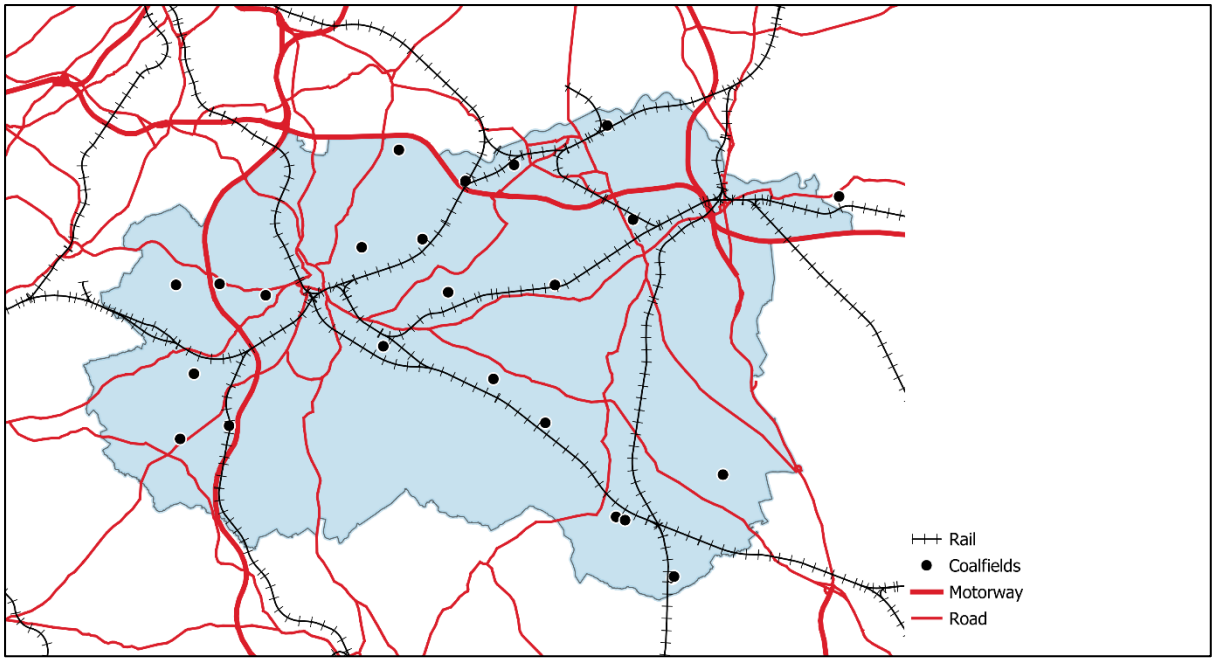

FIGURE 8-0-2: WAKEFIELD RAIL AND ROAD NETWORK IN RELATION TO COALFIELDS. DATA SOURCES: RAIL, MOTORWAY, AND ROAD DATA RETRIEVED FROM MCGARVA (2017), LOCAL AUTHORITY BOUNDARIES RETRIEVED FROM ONS GEOGRAPHY (2022A), AND COALFIELD DATA RETRIEVED FROM THE HUDSON INSTITUTE OF MINERALOGY (2023) AND NORTHERN MINE RESEARCH SOCIETY (N.D.).

External funding played a key role in clearing land in former coal mining communities to attract businesses to build warehouses. In the case of Wakefield, it was able to utilise not only the ECP, but also the Northern Powerhouse (the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund, its funding source has received around £140m from the ERDF in 2014-2020 programme period (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2018; Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund, 2023)) to clear up land and provide brownfields to attract major companies such as the *NEXT* and *Amazon* to set up warehouses in their local area (BBC News, 2022). To this day, the sector continues to grow in the area. For example, where the Kellingley Colliery used to exist, there are now plans to create Konect 62, a large-scale warehouse more than 1million square feet in size (Healey, 2022). These warehouses became the new source of local employment for residents.

On paper, the sector is a good fit for the area – the industry offers employment opportunities with low or even no skills required. Logistics industry seeks areas with cheap land prices, good transport network such as close proximity to main roads, ports, and airports, and a combination of a large labour force and low wages. For example, in an eight page brochure of Konect 62 it boasts of the gross weekly pay in the region being

£48.8 cheaper than the UK average, and a map showcasing the length it takes on a van to reach major cities and ports emphasises the good transport links (Konect 62, 2023). The high turnover rates also allow it to be an employment option for residents as there is a constant demand for new labour. Data from 2017-2018[24] from the ONS shows that just 60 per cent of those employed in the sector remain with the same employer after a year, and within two years 7 per cent of workers would have left the industry, slightly higher than the average over the entire workforce which stands at 6 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 2019). Taken together, the demand and supply gelled, creating a new form of employment for local residents. In the sense that an employment option exists on one's doorstep, it offered a similar route into work as did the coal mining of the past.

However, despite optimism for this new sector, there are still considerable concerns regarding its long-term viability. The sector faces high-levels of danger from automation, which means the work will increasingly be focused on a smaller number of mid to high-skilled workers who can operate a machine rather than it being predominantly made up of low-skilled labour (Klumpp, 2018; Hawksworth and Berriman, 2018; OECD, 2021). The threat of job-losses and an increasing demand for skilled labour is reminiscent of the shift towards the mining industry from a large number of low-skilled miners to a restructured one in which miners became skilled workers operating new machinery as described in Chapter four. Thus, there is a question over how reliable the logistics sector will be for the long-term future of the district.

In short, focusing on Wakefield's local "strength" of good connectivity that developed through its "second nature" geography naturally pushed them towards focusing on the logistics sector even though it presented similar concerns over the long-term future of such jobs. As well as future concerns, the logistics sector was also a source of the threat of Euroscepticism to grow – a point which will be the focus of the following section. The next section argues how the logistics sector may have been a source of competition between local residents and those from CEECs, and that this tension provides an additional source of Euroscepticism to take hold in places facing relative decline.

[24] Most recent data that has not been affected by the COVID-10 Pandemic.

8.2-2 Warehousing and logistics and the question of immigration from Central Eastern European Countries

The pressure of immigration, and especially that from CEECs were highly concentrated in the logistics sector, providing partial explanation to the high levels of Brexit support in Wakefield. Immigration is generally understood to have a positive impact in the host economy, resulting in increased employment for native-born workers, filling in employment gaps in sectors facing labour shortage such as healthcare and agriculture, and they are less likely to burden public services as they tend to be young, healthy, and in employment (Wadsworth et al., 2016). In turn, public opinion in the UK shows a mixed picture of the British attitude towards immigration. On the one hand, the British more generally have a high tolerance of those from different backgrounds such as race, religion, and immigrants. According to the World Values Survey (Haerpfer et al., 2022), even before the 2016 EU referendum just 14.2 per cent of British respondents said they did not want "immigrants/foreign workers" as their neighbours, lower than the average across 54 countries in the world which stood at 21.5 per cent in 2009.[25] Just 5.6 per cent said they would have a problem with neighbours speaking a foreign language, significantly lower than the 14.7 per cent average (Haerpfer et al., 2022). Generally speaking, levels of mistrust towards immigrants are low when compared on a global scale.

However, there was a strong desire among the public for immigration levels to decrease. In a survey by the International Organisation for Migration (2015), they found that 69 per cent of British respondents wanted immigration to decrease in 2012-2014, a period when the issue was at the height of public concern (YouGov, 2021) [Figure 8-0-3]. This, however, does not mean that British public are opposed to the concept of immigration per-se. Instead, they make a distinction between the desirable and less-desirable forms of immigration (Hellwig and Sinno, 2017). While some studies such as one by Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) cautions against the idea that labour competition leads to anti-immigration sentiment, citing that preference over high-skilled immigration was evident at every skill-level, there is a distinction in preference over the type of

[25] The next survey to include the UK was conducted in 2018, and the 2009 survey is the most recent survey before the 2016 EU referendum.

immigration as well as differences between skill level in the UK. Although there are several ways in which the public distinguishes between the desirable and less-desirable immigration, one such distinction is made between the high and low-skilled immigration. While the public are generally supportive towards the idea of using immigration to fill in vacancies in skilled work, they become more hostile when it comes to low-skilled immigration (Ford and Heath, 2014). Additionally, attitudes differ depending on the skill level of the public when it comes to perception of immigrants. According to the British Social Attitudes, 61 per cent of low-skilled respondents had a negative view of immigrants, while negative perception was relatively low towards high-skilled immigrants with just 22 per cent expressing negative views (Ford and Heath, 2014, p.81). Furthermore, this distinction existed in 2014, when immigration overtook the economy to be the most pressing issue for the British public (YouGov, 2021). In sum, the British public prefer controlled migration with greater preference towards higher skilled immigration, and lower-skilled Britons are the most supportive towards controlling immigration figures. Warehousing and logistics sector is one example of a sector that may present competition over low-skilled work between British workers and immigrants.

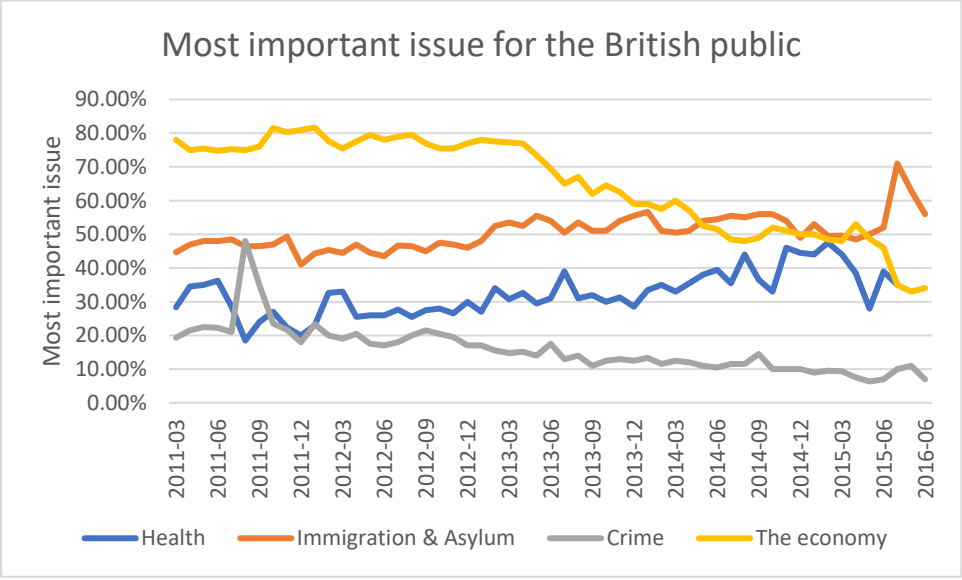

FIGURE 8-0-3: MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR THE BRITISH PUBLIC BETWEEN 2011 AND 2016. DATA SOURCE FROM YOUGOV (2021).[26]

[26] For the purpose of data visualisation, the paper selected the top four topics from the earliest record (March 2011) and just before the 2016 referendum (June 2016). This meant that the figure has omitted the following issues from its visualisation: tax, pensions, education, family life and childcare, transport,

Warehousing and logistics sector, while often measured separately are closely connected in terms of their business practice with the goods being stored in warehouses then distributed by the logistics sector. Work in these sectors tend to be lower skilled with around 67.9 per cent of logistic jobs classified as either low or medium-skilled (Logistics UK, 2021, p.13), and a plurality (45.0 per cent) of warehouse work are categorised as either elementary or machine operation (Kik et al., 2019, p.25). It is precisely these types of work that workers from CEECs are often found in. The majority of workers from CEECs are in elementary professions and machine operations with 51 per cent of them in either profession (Office for National Statistics, 2017a). They tended to work longer hours (a plurality of 44 per cent of workers worked between 40 to 49 hours per week), but were paid 27 per cent less than the national average and nearly 70 per cent were employed in lower-skilled work (Office for National Statistics, 2017a). Thus, workers from CEECs were mostly in low-skilled work but work longer on lower wages. In places such as Wakefield where the logistics sector was flourishing, there were tensions over perceived competition from such workers. In the Wakefield district, the 2011 Census showed that Polish residents made up close to a quarter of all foreign born residents in the area (The Migration Observatory, 2013).

It is important to emphasise here that the impact of immigration is heterogenous, and different local authorities and communities are better or worse prepared for increased immigration. Wakefield local authority was particularly vulnerable against immigration. Research by the Home Office using the same 2011 Census data had attempted to categorise local authorities by the number and type of immigrant in their local area as a proportion of the population as well as socio-economic conditions of the area to assess their capacity to cope with caring for their foreign-born residents (Poppleton et al., 2013). According to this, Wakefield district was categorised as an “Asylum Dispersal Area” described as to “[c]omprise mainly industrial towns characterised by low turnover [of immigrants], high proportions of supported asylum seekers, high worklessness and social housing levels” (Poppleton et al., 2013, pp.11–12). While the Home Office report falls short of explaining what kind of pressure immigration may pose upon such local

welfare benefits, the environment, housing, defence and security, Afghanistan, defence and terrorism, Britain leaving the EU, and don’t know or none of these (YouGov, 2021).

authorities, they were correct in identifying that different types of immigration, as well as different characteristics of host local authorities matter in understanding the different levels of pressure a rise in immigration may present. Thus, local authorities such as Wakefield were in a particularly vulnerable position when it came to their ability to cope with increased immigration. It is thus important for such local authorities to be equipped with sufficient tools to handle immigration.

However, such nuanced and legitimate challenges over immigration are quickly swept aside when tabloids publish articles aimed at sensationalising and capitalising on such simmering tensions. Although some characteristics of Polish immigrants were initially more positive with a focus on "positive work ethics" for instance, this was subsequently weaponised as a source of threat to British jobs (Rzepnikowska, 2019, p.66). One example of this is an article by the *Daily Mail* which claimed that "[b]usloads of Polish workers" were sent to a *NEXT* warehouse in South Elmsall located in the Wakefield District, and this was presented in sharp contrast to the reality that "more than 200,000 are on the dole" (Robinson, 2014). The allegation that large multi-national companies such as *NEXT* had exploited cheap land in areas with high deprivation levels with a promise of local employment, only to fill vacancies with foreign workers reflected concerns residents had over the prospect of heightened competition for local work. It also encapsulates why there was stronger desire for greater control over immigration when considering that there was a perception that local employment opportunities faced heightened competition as a result of a globalised workforce. While anger brewed at the idea of foreign workers coming and taking jobs, it was equally felt that such jobs were undesirable. Indeed, warehouse work is notoriously repetitive, tedious, physically demanding, and the work involves long hours with little pay (Office for National Statistics, 2022d). Thus, there was both hope and disappointment towards work that replaced the coal mines, and in particular the competition posed by immigrants from CEECs created challenges in combating Euroscepticism.

While the question over immigration and Brexit were often not necessarily directly related to EU immigrants (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017), in places like Wakefield with relatively little prior experience with foreign-born residents and a weak economy created higher tensions with the newly arrived immigrants from CEECs. To begin with,

the foreign-born population make up a small proportion of the population of Wakefield. Between 2000-2016, the total foreign-born population was small, making up just 2 per cent in 2000 and despite growth by 2016 they only made up just 9 per cent of the total population [Figure 8-0-4]. However, within this small foreign-born population, there was a disproportionately high proportion of those from CEECs. Since its accession, EU immigrants in Wakefield was defined by those from CEECs[27]. On average, between 2005-2016, 77 per cent of all EU-born residents were from CEECs, and in 2010 this figure was as high as 91 per cent [Figure 8-0-5]. Thus, despite the relatively small proportion of foreign-born residents in the Wakefield district, the disproportionately high proportion of immigration from CEECs meant that they stood out in the district. In short, while generally speaking concerns over immigration expressed among Leave supporters were not necessarily targeted towards just EU immigrants and were often conflated with asylum seekers from non-EU countries, this does not mean that we can completely ignore the influence of high concentration of EU migrants, especially from CEECs in how Euroscepticism may have developed within a given local context. The next section digs a little deeper into how the local residents in Wakefield viewed the work opportunities brought by the rise in warehousing and logistics sector in comparison to past work such as the coal mining industry and argues that despite perceived threat from immigrants from CEECs taking such jobs, there was also little appetite for the locals to take on such work.

[27] CEECs and EU 8 are treated as synonymous here. EU8 consists of Eastern European states that joined the EU in 2004, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The ONS categorise Romania and Bulgaria as EU2, and Cyprus, Malta, and Croatia are defined as EU other (Office for National Statistics, 2017b).

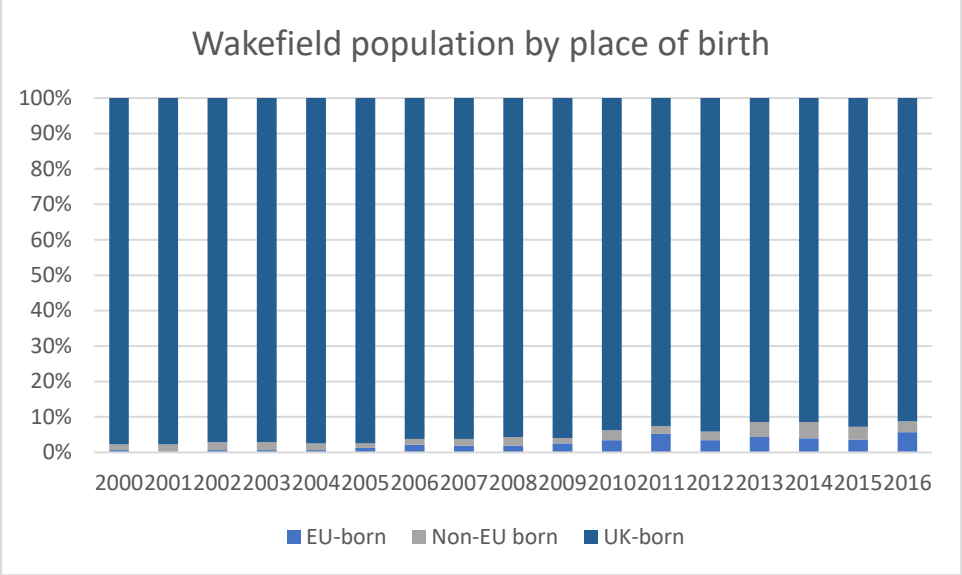

FIGURE 8-0-4: WAKEFIELD POPULATION BY PLACE OF BIRTH. DATA SOURCE FROM OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS (2022B).

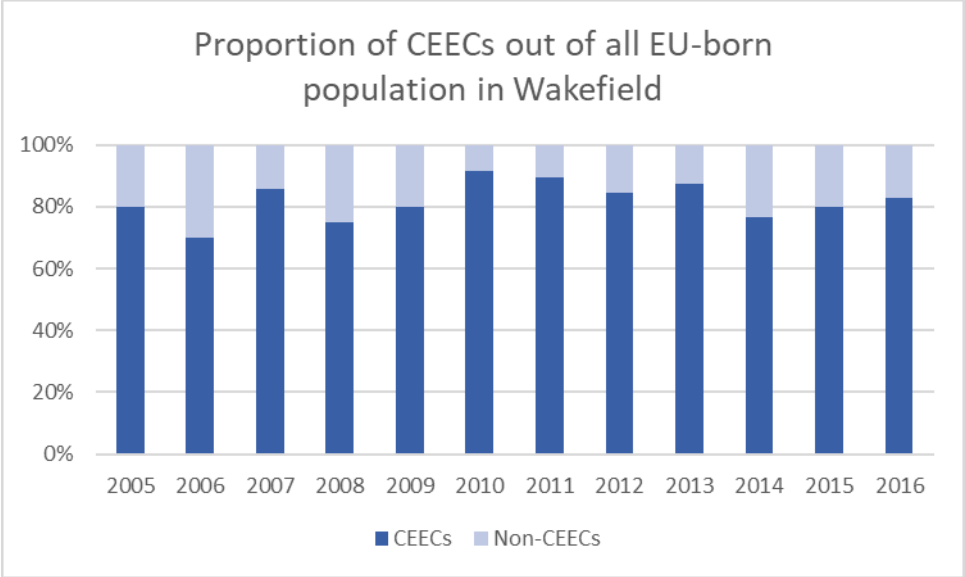

FIGURE 8-0-5: PROPORTION OF CEECS OUT OF ALL EU-BORN POPULATION IN WAKEFIELD. DATA SOURCE FROM OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS (2022B).

In sum, the logistic and warehousing industries brought with it an element of competition for local job opportunities between Wakefield residents and immigrants from CEECs, a point that was sensationalised through media coverage that played into the precarity of limited employment opportunities. It helped create the link between EU immigration and relative decline, a dangerous cocktail of genuine concerns over the local economy and scapegoating of immigrants from the EU.

8.2-3 The logistics sector, does it spark joy?

The previous section discussed how a sense of competition for limited local employment opportunities in the logistics and warehousing industries may have contributed to Euroscepticism to grow in Wakefield prior to the EU referendum which was further fuelled by media portrayals. However, even though such line of argument gives credence to the sentiment of "they are taking our jobs", academics have been quick to point out that immigrants are often employed in sectors that usually struggle to fill vacancies. In other words, immigrants take on jobs that are undesirable and hard to fill with British workers. This thesis has traced the sentiment of relative decline from the moment of the coal mine closures in Wakefield. Analysing the changes that befell the district allows us to better understand how local residents, especially the older generation who were the most likely to vote in favour of Brexit, experienced relative decline. This section argues that local employment opportunities unlocked through the logistics and warehousing industries struggled to instil a sense of local pride, a sentiment that was prevalent in the coal mining industry. This lack of sense of pride, while elusive and difficult to quantify, provides a key explanation in understanding the source of a sense of relative decline in places such as Wakefield. This section argues that available accounts from local residents repeatedly discuss the current economic realities in reference to the past (coal mining), and pride to one's work is a key feature.

To put simply, the new economic opportunities found in the logistics and warehousing sectors were failing to spark a sense of pride. This reflected strongly in the words by local residents, especially those who were older and have a reference point to the past and can feel the sense of decline on a personal level, even if they do not directly experience the changes. For example, in a BBC Four programme presented by Professor Anand Menon (he himself is from Wakefield), illustrates this point vividly. In the programme, he is accompanied by a local resident and the Chief Executive Officer of a local charity called Berni O'Brien (BBC Radio 4, 2021). She laments that Wakefield "sort of became a sad place" compared to the 1980s as what she called the "coal dole" went away (BBC Radio 4, 2021). This is not to say that she does not see any improvement in the area since the mine closures. She is aware that "lots of industry were setting up" in the wake of the mine closures, but reflected that the new opportunities were "more like

warehousing", implying that this kind of work was less desirable as "the work wasn't based around communities anymore" (BBC Radio 4, 2021). A similar sentiment of disappointment over the new industries setting up in Wakefield, such as the logistics sector, has been expressed by the Labour Council leader Denise Jeffery. Jeffery is visibly frustrated with the type of private sector investment that Wakefield was attracting, stating "somehow we seem to just end up with… we get the investment, but we get logistics and large factories with not too many jobs and that's the problem, they are low paid jobs, they are not highly skilled jobs" (BBC Radio 4, 2021). Furthermore, the programme points out that despite the good transport networks for the logistic and warehousing industries, this does not necessarily translate to greater mobility for local residents to take up local jobs.

"You might have to travel for two hours just to come and get a very basic job that might not really pay enough for you to make it feel worthwhile or valued." (BBC Radio 4, 2021)

The point that the work may not "feel worthwhile or valued" (BBC Radio 4, 2021) is pertinent when compared with the sense of pride many former miners felt towards their work. Such sense of pride does not mean that former miners necessarily liked their work. Many are quick to point out the danger and unpleasant nature of the work itself, as well as expressing a desire for better work for their children outside of mining, a sentiment shared even by the head of the NUM Joe Gormley (Anon, 1975). However, there was a sense of pride towards work that had been for the longest time the engine of the economy. The knowledge that they were a vital part of the British economy was often at the root of such sense of pride (Turner, 1995; Mattinson, 2020). Such sentiment was much harder to form in new sources of employment in which workers felt they were part of a cog of a larger economic machine, rather than being its engine.

The geographical advantage of such work being close by can also be offset if local residents cannot travel to work. Lack of unreliable or non-existent local public transportation has been identified as one obstacle against Wakefield residents applying for roles in warehouses (BBC Radio 4, 2021; Parsons, 2021). Driving is the most common way of travel in the area with 63 per cent of local workers driving to work (Office for National Statistics, 2011; Wakefield Council, 2018, p.8), and in such an environment getting around the district is sometimes as challenging as traveling outside the district

(Parsons, 2021). This means that accessing work opportunities both locally as well as outside the district poses major challenges to those who do not drive or cannot afford to drive. One of the vicious cycles that is a real threat to Wakefield residents from low-income backgrounds is to find short-term work, and lose access to benefits which makes it difficult to access benefits once again due to being "successful" at finding work, or that other work opportunities are a challenge to seek due to the lack of public transportation. However, if Wakefield is to have better public transportation, they also need to be cheaper so that they remain affordable to residents (Wakefield Council, 2018). Thus, despite the logistics sector being able to utilise the geographical strengths of the district, it falls short of becoming a viable alternative source of long-term employment for local residents as the work does not offer the same level of pay nor community spirit that the coal mines brought. In contrast, it may have contributed to a sharper divide between local residents and workers from CEECs who were perceived as competition.

In short, the logistics sector was on the one hand seen as an important source of employment for local residents after the mine closures as the district struggled to re-invent itself. It made sense to focus on the logistic sector as it required cheap land, good road network, and a large labour source that was eager to work. The Wakefield District was able to capitalise on its location as being in roughly the middle of the country and make use of its road networks that developed as a result of coal mining, and it had a working population with generally limited skills and qualifications. However, workers from CEECs presented a new source of competition for such work in an area facing relative decline, a point that was further amplified through the tabloids. As was evidenced in Chapter 6 on public perception, there was little in terms of positive coverage of the benefits of the ECP, and in such a climate the competition from workers from CEECs would have more likely shaped public perception on the benefit (or lack thereof) of EU membership. The prevailing sense that the jobs that came into the region to replace coal mining work were often low paid and elicited less sense of pride in the work may explain why regions such as this felt "left behind". To end this section on a more positive note, the EU referendum result and the high levels of Brexit support coupled with the high prevalence of CEEC residents in the district prompted the local

authority to investigate what were the barriers towards better integration of the immigrant population in the district. There was some sense of relief when their studies found that rather than deep seated xenophobia, the biggest challenge was mainly to do with the limited opportunity of communal interaction and language barriers (Wakefield Council, 2022). While this presents long-term challenges in helping to facilitating better integration between different groups of people in the district, it also indicates that with effort this is an obstacle that can be overcome. Turning back to the question over what comes after coal, and the district's quest to find employment opportunities that not only brings higher income, but also work that has the potential to instil a similar sense of pride and ownership that the coal mining sector provided is arguably critical in mitigating regional decline. In that sense, there are limitations in what the logistics industry can offer. The next section will analyse how the local authorities, with the help of the ECP looked to the arts to reinvent the region, creating a virtuous cycle of investment following further investment.

8.4 The arts, a viable future?

If the logistics sector was a safe choice for Wakefield District to focus on based on its "second nature" advantages, the shift towards the arts was a risky gamble, one that required local led initiative. As the Labour Council leader for Wakefield described looking back, "[w]e invested heavily. We took a risk and I think it has paid off" (BBC Radio 4, 2021). A former mining community may not conjure the image of being a heart of art, and it certainly is far from being at the front and centre as the main industry for the region. Indeed, at present there are still few in this industry making up a small proportion of those employed in Wakefield. Less than 2 per cent of Wakefield residents are employed in the arts sector, which amounts to roughly 2,500 people in the sector (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). However, this is one of the growing sectors in the district that is hoped to morph into a new local employment opportunity. This section argues that the recent focus on the arts is a prime example of a local led initiative using the support from the ECP in forging a new regional development policy for Wakefield. The case study on the focus on the arts in Wakefield informs the main lessons pertaining to decentralisation and the ECP, namely how greater political and financial decentralisation is key in allowing local authorities to take risks, and how the problem

over skills remain the main barrier against the full realisation of the potential of the area. This section will first analyse how the arts and creative industry have become an important pillar of regional development. This will be followed by a discussion on the role the ECP played in creating the springboard of the arts industry in Wakefield through projects on three key projects, *The Hepworth Wakefield*, *The Arts House*, and *Yorkshire Sculpture Park*. The third section will explore developments in the business parks have benefited from this new focus in the arts using the Production Park as an example.

8.4-1 Reimagining of the arts as the driver of regional growth

The relationship between art and the economy has shifted considerably throughout the years from one of patronage to drivers of regional growth. Initially, the relationship between the public sector and the arts was understood as one of protection. The Arts Council, established by the economist John Maynard Keynes was one example of public funds being used in support of artists and their endeavours while limiting central government involvement in the cultural sphere (Upchurch, 2004). The 1980s saw the addition of the private sector as a key funding source, and increasingly it was incorporated into local urban policy (Andres and Chapain, 2013, p.165). Underpinning this push was the assumption that by investing in the arts it will result in a further spillover effect, allowing regions to further attract skilled employment (Peacock, 2000, p.185). Although as Arts Council England (2020, p.7) pointed out, that EU-funded arts projects tended to be underestimated in terms of their impact as they tended to be driven by “individuals or small businesses”, there are additional values that the arts and culture may be capable of offering to regions. Bille and Schulze (2006, p.1072) argue that culture-led regional policy are able to create four distinct values, “option, existence prestige, and bequest values”. The option value refers to new opportunities in the local area unlocked as a result of the introduction of the arts and culture sector. The existence value is the value of the new image of the area created through the physical infrastructure (Bille and Schulze, 2006). The prestige value speaks to the sense of local pride that can emerge as a result of cultural investment. Finally, the bequest value points to additional cultural services that locals may be able to enjoy as a result of the growth in the arts industry (Bille and Schulze, 2006). These four values are additional to

the benefits of work and investment that comes from a culture-led regional development (Bille and Schulze, 2006).

In the past couple of years, the sector has been key to transforming fortunes of different parts of the UK. One prominent example of this is Belfast, Northern Ireland. It has enjoyed much success by offering filming location for HBO *Game of Thrones*, *Line of Duty*, and Netflix *Rings of Power*. Their success in attracting such high-profile projects has been attributed to the diversity of its landscape, compact location, multiple world-class studios, and tax incentives, resulting in revenues for the area in the millions (Webber, 2021; Glynn, 2022). There are also smaller scale examples of regeneration attempts. The Local Government Association (2019) argued that such "culture-led regeneration" could be a vital source of employment, strengthen local pride, and overall have a positive impact in the region using 15 case studies on local authority-led art projects. This section identifies financial and political decentralisation as advocated in Chapter 7 as what allows local authorities to take on risks which ultimately enables the development of unique regional policies that can harness the latent potential of the region. This paper argues that the ECP becomes a crucial source of funding in enabling such policy development.

8.4-2 The Hepworth Wakefield and The Art House

The Hepworth Wakefield and *The Art House* are two key examples of traditional arts in Wakefield that benefited from ECP funding, providing a springboard in which the district gained benefits from further funding in the arts industry. *The Hepworth Wakefield* was named after Barbara Hepworth, an artist and sculptor originally from Wakefield but who's career took her to the international stage. This admittedly loose connection the region had with the artist nevertheless was able to take root. The process of creating the art gallery began in the early 2000s, with capital investment from the ERDF playing a key role in supporting the construction of the museum (Arlyst, 2022). *The Art House* was established earlier in 1994. It benefited from ERDF funding in 2013 when they were looking to further expand their premise and provide studio space for artists as well as business support for local artists (The Art House, n.d.). Art was, like Payne (2021) noted in his book on Red Wall seats which included a chapter on Wakefield, not initially an obvious sector to look into for regeneration efforts. It was only when interviewing local

authority staffs at Wakefield Council that the level of importance placed in the arts became apparent. When asked about the lasting legacy of the EU funding in the Wakefield district, *The Hepworth Wakefield* and *The Art House* were the two examples offered as being a "lasting legacy" in the region by the Local Authority Staff (2022; 2022).

The two establishments fit neatly with the four values that Bille and Schulze (2006) discussed. Local authority staff discussed how the two art institutions provided both existence and bequest values (Bille and Schulze, 2006) to the district. *The Art House* was presented as one of the key examples of how the establishment of a physical location "enables activities to happen in the district that otherwise wouldn't happen" (Local Authority Staff A, 2022). *The Art House* currently house the One to One Development Trust which is a film production organisation which opened in 1985 and a recipient of EU funding (Reid, 2020). The additional space has allowed *The Art House* to offer services beyond art to support disabled individuals as well as refugees and asylums seekers (Local Authority Staff A, 2022). Thus, the physical infrastructure allowed more than one services to be provided, opening up future possibilities of additional funding to be used in the area that not necessarily relates to the arts. Both *The Art House* and *The Hepworth Wakefield* are located in proximity to the Wakefield Westgate train station. *The Hepworth Wakefield* benefits from such proximity to a train station. Additionally, having "Wakefield" in its name allows it to establish a prestige value (Bille and Schulze, 2006) for the district as it helps foster an association between the art and the district. These establishments are also complemented by the *Yorkshire Sculpture Park*, which while it did not directly receive EU funding in its creation (Euclid International, 2017), there were attempts at securing EU funding. For example, in 1999 there were discussions of using ERDF to help fund a visitor centre for the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (Planning Regulatory Board, 1999, p.314). Subsequently in 2005 it was successful in receiving ERDF funding through Yorkshire Forwards (RDA) to create its Underground Gallery (Green, 2008, p.48). These developments point to a virtuous cycle that develops as a result of securing ECP funding. Securing one source of funding helps in making similar cases for other projects in the future, and in particular the physical infrastructure developed as a result of ECP funding allows for greater diversity in terms of how the funds could be used, as well as attracting different funding pots for non-art related projects.

8.4-3 Production Park

There are also opportunity and prestige values as a result of cultural investment and the Production Park in the Langthwaite Business Park located in one of the most deprived areas of the Wakefield District is a prime example of this. The Langthwaite Business Park itself has a long history which pre-dates the ECP. It was established by Harold Wilson, who was at the time the President of the Board of Trade under the Atlee government in 1949 (Langthwaite Business Association, 2022). The business park has survived to this day, and it is home to several EU funded projects. For example, the PEAT project which provides business support for the Wakefield District is located within the Langthwaite Business Park having received both ERDF and ESF funding (a relatively unique arrangement). Within the business park there is the Production Park which is home to the ERDF-funded XPLOR, an entertainment technology and production centre that specialises in virtual productions. XPLOR is delivered by the Academy of Live Technology (formerly Backstage Academy) which is located next door again within the business park. The Academy of Live Technology and XPLOR together are prime examples of a successful merging of the arts and culture on the one hand, and engineering on the other. The academy offers degree-level courses in niche skills such as visual effects for live events, and XPLOR has been able to attract international clientele for its services. In the proposal for securing ERDF funding for XPLOR, the bid made direct reference to the district's strong link to the arts industry based on its proximity to *The Arts House*, *The Hepworth Wakefield*, and the *Yorkshire Sculpture Park* (Forever Consulting, 2022a, p.7), one of the main reasons why the project was successful (Wakefield First, 2022). This example slightly expands on the definition of an opportunity value presented by Bille and Schulze (2006) as the benefit extends to additional opportunities for securing further funding for different projects.

Even going back to the original definition of an opportunity value as expressed in the work of Bille and Schulze (2006), the establishment of both training and job opportunities in the arts industry provides key routes into the industry for local residents. The below is a quote from one of the local authority staff on their view of the arts and creative industry that is being established Wakefield and how it presents a key opportunity value to the region:

“[I think it is a n]ew industry for people to look at and say ‘Oh, I can actually work in this industry in my hometown’, so that just got endless benefits, really.” (Local Authority Staff B, 2022)

Such opportunities are critical in the area in which the Production Park is located in. The area in which the Langthwaite Business Park is located in is South Kirkby, one of the most deprived areas in the Wakefield District (Office for National Statistics, 2021a). As shown in Figure 8-0-6, 61.5 per cent of the ward is categorised as IMD deciles 1-2. The Langthwaite Business Park’s location is circled in red, and it is located in IMD decile 3, some of the most deprived areas in the whole of the UK.

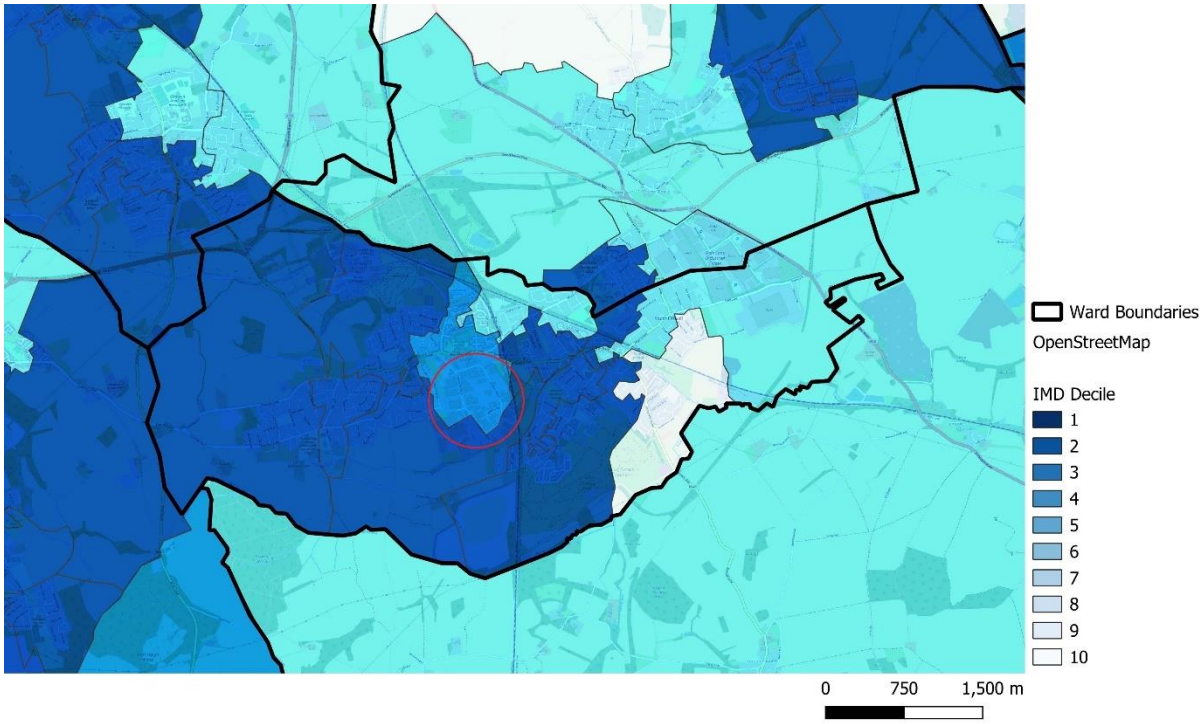

FIGURE 8-0-6: SOUTH ELMSALL AND SOUTH KIRKBY INDEX OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION. DATA SOURCE FROM MINISTRY OF HOUSING COMMUNITIES & LOCAL GOVERNMENT (2019A). THE IMD DECILE IS SCALED 1-10 (THE HIGHER THE NUMBER THE LOWER DEPRIVATION LEVELS ARE). THE LOCATION OF THE LANGTHWAITE BUSINESS PARK IS CIRCLED IN RED, IMD DECILE 3. THE WARD BOUNDARIES WERE RETRIEVED FROM ONS GEOGRAPHY (2022B).

Unlike the logistic and warehousing industries, the arts industry has helped diversify the local employment opportunities and provides a prestige and pride to one’s occupation and place that presents a viable alternative to the blank left by the decline of the coal mining sector.

In terms of virtuous cycle created through the opportunity value that such cultural investment provides with the help of the ECP, this is a trend that is likely to continue even after the ECP funding ends. The success *The Hepworth Wakefield* has been directly attributed to a subsequent successful bid for the region in recent years post-Brexit. The current development of the Rutland Mills in a former derelict area in the Wakefield District was made possible by successfully persuading developers to work on a project in Wakefield rather than Manchester, citing the proximity to *The Hepworth Wakefield* (BBC Radio 4, 2021). Success brings further success with the Rutland Mills further securing £20 million funding, of which £4.9 million will come from the Levelling Up Fund (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2021b; Gov.UK, 2023d). Thus, *The Hepworth Wakefield's* example shows that even once the EU funding ends, it can leave a lasting legacy to the region in the forms of facility as well as being used as evidence for future funding bids. This could be in the form of more EU-funded projects such as the XPLOR project, or further private and public investments such as the development of the Rutland Mills.

In sum, the examples of *The Hepworth Wakefield*, *The Art House*, *Yorkshire Sculpture Park*, as well as the Production Park are key examples of a virtuous cycle created through the ECP funding. The opportunity value presented by investing in the arts have enabled an otherwise heavily deprived area an opportunity to re-invent itself and attract further investment. This arguably would not have been possible without a locally led initiative to take a risk in investing in the arts. The fruits of the initial investments were not one that was immediate and required long-term sustained investment. The following section explores some of the key lessons that can be drawn from the impact the ECP had in the Wakefield District, namely how it was made possible through political as well as financial decentralisation, and how the question over skills may still pose a considerable obstacle against local residents from taking full advantage of the opportunities available.

8.5 Lessons from the ECP funding in Wakefield

The previous section argued how a locally led risk-taking policy initiative which focused on the arts paid off in the end for Wakefield, allowing it to make the most of ECP funded projects in attracting further investment. This section attempts to identify some key

lessons that can be derived from Wakefield's example, presenting two lessons that could be extracted that has wider applicability.

8.5-1 Decentralisation still key to success

Decentralisation, as argued in Chapter 7 remains critical in ensuring the positive impact of the ECP as well as for the future of regions struggling from relative decline. In line with the present regional development discourse, regional capacity building is key to allowing regions to thrive, and that this is achieved by a combination of political *and* budgetary devolution (Rodríguez-Pose and Vidal-Bover, 2022). This is a point that was supported by Local Authority Staff A (2022) who shared that under the RDA it was easier to develop a distinct regional policy as they had both the time to gather information, sufficient staff to undertake research inhouse, and rely on a single funding pot that they do not have to bid for. Thus, the financial stability provided by single-pot funding and political decentralisation gave them the power to pursue a unified regional policy. It is thus critical for local authorities to have capacity to develop their own regional policies that take into account their local strengths by having the tools, the staff, and the time to develop such policies. At present, they continue to be heavily reliant upon central government funding (Atkins and Hoddinott, 2020) and repeatedly need to compete for funding pots with other local authorities which make it a challenge for them to develop such cohesive regional policy. The constant churn and patchwork of decentralisation process also means that staff who are involved in projects but are not full-time employees of local authorities result in danger of key expertise and knowledge to be lost between projects (Interviewee C, 2022). In a recent example of the Shared Prosperity Funds, local authority staff expressed dissatisfaction with the short turnaround time they were given which meant that they had little time to develop a regional policy that made the best use out of the extra funding (Local Authority Staff B, 2022). This was echoed in the National Audit Office's (2022, p.9) report which argued that "multiple funding pots and overlapping timescales, combined with competitive funding, create uncertainty for local leaders" which is detrimental in achieving "levelling up". In short, further political and financial decentralisation that ensures local authorities have both political and financial stability will be key in the development of long-term regional policy as well as help encourage local authorities to think outside the box, enabling them

to take policy choices that may seem risky but has the potential of maximising the benefit of available funding. While the development of the arts industry in Wakefield were clear examples of new opportunities, it remains the case that for local residents to take full advantage of such opportunities we return to the problem regarding obtaining basic skills identified in Chapter 5.

8.5-2 It's the skills, stupid!

This chapter has highlighted the tentative success enjoyed by the arts industry in the Wakefield district, and how this was made possible by ECP funding and a risk-taking by Wakefield Council. *The Arts House*, *The Hepworth Wakefield*, *Yorkshire Sculpture Park*, and Production Park are key examples of successful art projects that have enabled the district to attract both private and public investment. However, despite the high hopes that are placed in the arts industry in re-imagining the former coal mining community to embrace a new form of employment that entails high-skills, decent income, and pride in their work, we inevitably return to the same problem. Lack of skills remains a major obstacle against local Wakefield residents from benefiting from the new opportunities that while may not a perfect replacement to the jobs lost in the coal mining sector still provides a better future than that offered by the logistics sector.

Chapter 5 also discussed the problem over skills, arguing that a worryingly high proportion of local residents lack even the basic skills requirement (GCSE C in English and math) in becoming an apprentice. The same problem will be likely to plague the arts industry. The Academy of Live Technology offers degree-level qualifications in the digital arts, which will require higher qualifications to meet the entry requirements than becoming an apprentice. Even in hairdressing certification courses offered by Screen Yorkshire, which Production Park is part of, requires a "degree" or "another relevant Hair and Make-Up qualification" to join a 3-month course (Screen Yorkshire, 2023). Thus, accessing local opportunities is increasingly becoming competitive and require ever higher skills to begin with. This presents mounting pressure upon those who leave school without any qualifications. Thus, we return to the need for drastic improvement in the basic skills such as increasing the number of people with at least GCSE C's in core subjects. The Sunak government announcement to have the public learn math in some shape or form until 18 (Prime Minister's Office, 2023) is a reflection of the increasingly

narrowing opportunities to those without the basic skills, and thus it is a welcome intervention. There is thus a pressing need to ensure that at both the regional and national level the public are given the opportunity to obtain at least a pass in their GCSEs so that more local residents are able to access job opportunities.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by presenting how after the mine closures, Wakefield Council played a central role in developing a lobby organisation to argue for greater financial support for former coal mining areas, successfully resulting in the creation of the RECHAR programme. However, despite optimism that this will herald a new form of multi-level governance structure, since the late 1990s when the programme ended, interest towards former mining communities had dwindled. Re-inventing a future for former mining communities proved to be a challenge, but one of the industries Wakefield District focused on was the logistics sector. This made sense from the perspective of the district's "second nature" strengths (Cronon, 1991), such as its good connectivity through road networks and a cheap labour force. However, the logistics sector created tensions within the district as local residents competed with workers from CEECs who tended to be over-represented in such industries and made up a significant proportion of EU-born residents in Wakefield. Such tensions were amplified through the British media. Moreover, the logistics sector fell short of providing an ideal alternative to the level of income and sense of pride that the mining industry was able to elicit. Wakefield Council decided to take the risk and invest in the arts as an alternative form of regional development starting in the early 2000s with the financial support from the ECP. This investment continues to create a virtuous cycle to this day as the region is able to secure further funding in the arts by using past funding projects as a its springboard. Such an example shows that the ECP is often not enough to bring about successful regional development policy, and that it needs to be further backed by decentralisation that allows for a leap of faith to be made to bring real change in an area. Furthermore, these opportunities will remain out of reach to many local residents if they do not at least obtain a pass in GCSE. As with the difficulties with apprenticeships, local residents are in danger of failing before they even start if they are unable to pass GCSEs and this creates an early bottle neck to future opportunities. Thus, positive change in regional

development requires both a bottom-up and top-down approach that are aimed at empowering left-behind areas suffering relative decline.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the main findings from this thesis as presented in the previous seven body chapters (Chapter 2-8). Through the mixed method approach conducted under the framework of CR, this thesis has found that in terms of the impact of the ECP in "left-behind" areas, it was positive but limited, suffering from passive promotion from the EU, and ultimately leading to Wakefield residents failing to feel the positive impact of the ECP.

Digging deeper into this answer to the research question, there are several potential answers to the sub-research questions. For instance, as to what impact if any positive impact left by the ECP, it is the legacy of the virtuous cycle of funding that the ECP leaves in Wakefield. As to explaining why "left-behind" regions may have voted Brexit, this thesis finds that the concept of relative decline may help explain this by bridging the gap between the existing literature in Brexit.

These answers to the main question and sub-research questions provides clear and unique contributions to the three main literatures of this thesis – namely the literature on Brexit, Euroscepticism, and the ECP. On the Brexit literature, this thesis argues that the addition to the politicisation of Euroscepticism, the inability to address the problem of relative decline was the missing key that ties together the economic and cultural explanation of Brexit. Passive promotion of the ECP by the EU, and the inability to overcome the saturation of Eurosceptic thought in the UK builds on the argument that British Euroscepticism grew not because of innate cultural differences, but because the ECP was passively promoted in the face of strong politicisation of Euroscepticism.

The main contribution this thesis makes to the literature on the ECP is that despite the limitations due to passive promotion, its positive impact is its capability of leaving a legacy of virtuous cycle of funding. These findings were drawn from the mixed method approach, using CR as the overall framework of the thesis. The mixed method included research direction made based on the "swim along" method developed by Denton et al. (2021), or in the case of this thesis, living and sharing experience with local residents in Wakefield. This thesis thus builds on the growing literature that analyses policy using a CR lens (Yeung, 1997; Easton, 2010; Newman, 2023).

The conclusion will also discuss the limitations of this research project, which relates predominantly to data gathering and access to key actors. This thesis has attempted to address these limitations mainly through its methodological design such as the use of a mixed method approach to increase interview data and check the validity of the data gathered through cross-examination with publicly available documents on projects receiving ECP and socio-economic indicators through the Office for National Statistics. The CR theoretical position also supports the single case study approach and will argue that while not every finding from this research is generalisable due to the critical role played by the structural context (in line with the CR position), there are some generalisable findings. For example, the importance of the concept of relative decline in understanding the Brexit vote, dangers of a passive promotion of the ECP, and the ability of the ECP to leave legacies of a virtuous cycle are not necessarily exclusive to Wakefield.

The findings from this research project will also inform potential future research into "left-behind" areas and the ECP. This chapter thus expands on the aforementioned answers to the research questions, contributions this thesis makes to the three literatures on Euroscepticism, Brexit, and the ECP, and implications for the future. This thesis concludes by calling for a need to learn lessons from Brexit, so as to make Brexit work. The following section will first provide the answers to the main and two sub-research questions.

9.1 Answers to the research questions

This thesis set out to answer the main research question, "*What was the impact of the ECP in "left-behind" areas?*". If the answer were to be distilled into a single sentence, it would be "positive but limited". While the impact of the ECP is hard to quantify especially in places like Wakefield which did not receive high levels of funding, its impact is also difficult to ignore. Interview data as well as papers from the Commons Library make it clear that for the local authority facing reduced funding from the central government, stable funding from the EU allowed them to access money that would have otherwise not been made available for them (Brien, 2021; Local Authority Staff A, 2022; Local Authority Staff B, 2022). This is why this thesis argues that the impact of the ECP was positive yet limited in "left-behind" areas.

One of the sub-research questions was "*What, if any, were the positive impacts of the ECP in Wakefield?*". Once again, interview data helped give direction to answering this question. The ECP's legacy in places like Wakefield was to leave behind a virtuous cycle of funding. By attracting initial funding through the ECP for the arts sector, Wakefield has succeeded in attracting further investment in the arts even after Brexit – thus success ushered in more success. Recipients of the ECP agreed that for the ECP to have a visible impact for people to notice as well as providing a lasting impact, capital investment was preferred as well as being in more visible areas (Interviewee C, 2022; Local Authority Staff A, 2022; Local Authority Staff B, 2022; HE sector staff, 2023). Local authorities played an essential role in identifying strengths as well as local needs, but this required time and resources to ensure that the collection of such local knowledge was accurate, for without such insight, local authorities would not have been able to develop their own regional policies (Local Authority Staff A, 2022; Local Authority Staff B, 2022). This echoes what the academic literature says about decentralisation. For example, the work by Rodríguez-Pose and Vidal-Bover (2022) argued precisely this issue by stating that local governments require both financial and political power to deliver on their policies. Thus, for local authorities to make use of their local knowledge, they require stable funding in addition to greater decentralisation to allow them time to formulate their own regional policies.

The other sub-research question was "*Why did "left-behind" areas such as Wakefield vote Leave?*". The concept of relative decline, this thesis argues, is the key that was missing from previous research that analysed a similar question as to why Leave vote was strong in "left-behind" areas. The literature had already identified that the places that predominantly voted Brexit were not necessarily places that were the poorest, nor were the people who supported Brexit those exclusively from low-income backgrounds (Clarke et al., 2017b). This thesis argued that to answer this question one must look to historical factors in understanding how present sentiments may have developed. It found that the decline of the coal mines did not only spell the end of employment in the local area, but a loss of relatively well-paying and respected professions. It argues that the loss of the sense that the local area was the engine of the British economy seriously hurt the pride of the local area, contributing to the fossilisation of the perception that

the situation was deteriorating. This explains why it continues to be hard for local residents to move on. Aside from the perceptions, the fact that the new jobs that came after the decline of the coal mines in Wakefield were predominantly casual, low-paying and monotonous employment usually in the logistics sector provides some empirical evidence to support such views. This further coincided with the growth in immigration from CEECs who were often blamed for heightened competition over limited local job opportunities, a point raised in Chapter 8.

In sum, the ECP provided a positive but limited impact in "left-behind" areas such as Wakefield. The ECP in turn suffered from a passive promotion of its benefits which was further undermined in the face of a Eurosceptic media landscape and politicisation of Euroscepticism through parties such as UKIP. The sentiment of relative decline further fuelled the perspective that the status quo was not working for people in "left-behind" areas which explains why people were willing to take a gamble on voting for Brexit. In other words, there was nothing to lose in the eyes of Wakefield residents, which is likely to have been shared among other "left-behind" areas. The next section outlines how these answers to the research questions contributes to the existing literature.

9.2 Contributions to the literature

This thesis makes some key contributions to the three literatures outlined in Chapter 2. Beyond this, its mixed method approach and use of CR further contributes to the methodological literature discussed in Chapter 3. This section will outline the unique contribution this thesis makes for each literature by discussing how the concept of relative decline, passive promotion, and legacies of a virtuous cycle each contribution to the literature on Brexit, Euroscepticism, the ECP, and CR.

9.2-1 Relative decline and Brexit

The main contribution this thesis makes to the Brexit literature is by linking together the economic and cultural explanations for Brexit by using the concept of relative decline as a bridge between the two. Relative decline is able to do this as it simultaneously acknowledges the socio-economic indicators such as wage and skill level to state that "left-behind" places such as Wakefield faces unique challenges using data from the Office of National Statistics, forming empirical evidence. The problems identified in this thesis is that Wakefield suffers from relatively high levels of people without

qualifications (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). Since the new industries that entered former coal mining communities were relatively low paid, this led to a sudden decline in wages in the area (Strangleman, 2001). Relative decline also acknowledges more cultural arguments that are difficult to quantify such as sense of pride that coal mining brought and the lack thereof in the new industries that came after the closure of the coal mines. The concept of relative decline thus validates both the real impact of the closure of the coal mines as well as the perceived impact it had on the local community. The way in which these issues were then linked to the EU is closely related to the Eurosceptic media which helped connect in the minds of local residents their genuine concerns for one's local area to that of blaming EU membership for such issues.

This thesis thus attempts to address the issue found in the Brexit literature which is to simultaneously extract genuine concerns of "left-behind" areas while contrasting them to how perceptions then morphed into Euroscepticism. For example, this thesis finds that immigration from CEECs, and in particular Poland, was indeed high and rapid in the case of Wakefield (Office for National Statistics, 2022b), which created a change in the community at a faster rate than places accustomed to immigration. The fear over job losses, in the context of Wakefield, was perhaps made worse by issues of isolation and limited job opportunities, thus making the idea of "foreigners taking jobs" more believable as the competition for lower skilled work was indeed a problem (Poppleton et al., 2013). In addition, the traditional path into employment such as through vocational training is increasingly a less likely option for especially young people in "left-behind" areas due to the increase in skills required before joining and the perpetual problem of low pay as argued in Chapter 5. As such, the concerns felt by local residents were real, even if the idea that those concerns will be solved by leaving the EU was not necessarily true.

Although this thesis used the concept of relative decline in analysing Wakefield, future research in other "left-behind" areas will be able to use this concept of relative decline in analysing different places to help bring together quantitative and qualitative research. It is expected that findings would share some similarities but differ depending on the historical background of the area as well as how these areas developed. In more general terms, the concept of relative decline and using it to analyse both quantitative and

qualitative data is hoped to bridge the gap in the two methodological approaches. In sum, the main contribution this thesis has to the Brexit literature is bridging the gap between economic and cultural explanations of Brexit by using the concept of relative decline.

In addition to legitimising both real and perceived concerns, the concept of relative decline allowed this thesis to explore the historical background of a single local authority in an attempt to understand its present problems. Problems related to wages would have been difficult to comprehend without the understanding that coal mining as a profession paid well. Considering Brexit was supported by mostly older people, tracing the historical development of an area was necessary from the perspective of this thesis. The current literature on Brexit are predominantly focused on modern issues such as the growth of immigration or austerity (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017; Fetzer, 2019). While some have discussed more historical factors such as the impact of the British Empire (Saunders, 2020), what was missing was a focus on the local context.

This was made possible by the single study approach taken by this thesis and a focus on historical factors unique to former coal mining communities such as the impact of the *Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Coal Payment Scheme* (Anon, 1984) as was the focus of Chapter 4. Additionally, the analysis of the influence of Thatcherism in the policy response debunked both the idea of UK exceptionalism and provided nuance to the debate over Thatcher era policy especially in coal mining communities. The thesis found that the decline of coal was universal, and that despite the direct conflict between the NUM and the Thatcher government, efforts were also being made on the side between the government and trade unions to help bring an end to the dispute. The major issue was thus the limitations of neoliberal policy in addressing regional development issues and a lack of place-based policies.

In sum, this thesis traced back contemporary issues related to the socio-economic conditions of Wakefield to its historical past as a coal mining community– namely the problem related to isolation and skill deficit. In short, one of the contributions this thesis makes to the Brexit literature is by identifying one of the reasons behind the link between “left-behind” places and the Brexit vote to be one of relative decline and how by looking back to the history of such locations, one could understand how local

residents came to feel that the status quo was not working for them. Thus, the concept of relative decline helps bridge the gap between the cultural and economic explanations regarding Brexit. The next section will discuss the contributions this thesis makes to the literature on Euroscepticism.

9.2-2 Passive promotion, complexity, and Euroscepticism

This thesis has sought to expand on the existing literature on Euroscepticism in the UK by focusing on three factors that led to the prevalence of Eurosceptic views in the UK. One, as outlined in Chapter 2, the rise of Euroscepticism was not natural or organic, but one that was a culmination of heightened political representation and media representation. Two, Euroscepticism has been linked in the existing literature to that of lack of knowledge, but this thesis goes further by arguing that this was further exacerbated by the complex nature of the ECP itself. Three, related to the previous point, the passive promotion of the ECP may have made it difficult to explain its contributions to the local area as well as left room for Eurosceptic voices to crowd out Europhile ones.

The Euroscepticism literature already finds that the growth of Euroscepticism required active politicisation of Euroscepticism (Forster, 2002; Usherwood, 2002; Ford and Goodwin, 2014b) as most of the public were simply uninterested in the EU initially to form a strong opinion (Usherwood, 2002, pp.218–219; Curtice, 2016a; YouGov, 2021). This politicisation of Euroscepticism was growing while few took up the mantle to promote an active Europhile position (Anderson and Weymouth, 1999; Oliver, 2016; Glencross, 2016), leaving room for the Eurosceptic media to formulate the narrative regarding the EU (Daddow, 2012). Thus, in terms of the prominence of Euroscepticism in the UK, this thesis echoes previous studies on the topic (Usherwood, 2002; Ford and Goodwin, 2014b) by arguing that there was nothing natural or organic in the way Euroscepticism took hold in the UK.

What the literature on Euroscepticism has so far not focused on was the idea that the EU and in particular the ECP was complex and difficult to explain to the general public. Perhaps this omission comes from a certain acceptance that the EU is complicated and difficult. Few would argue against the idea that the EU is complex and overly bureaucratic (with the EU often described as a technocracy as a result (Radaelli, 1999;

Behr, 2021)). This thesis has attempted to trace such complexity through the historical development of the ECP. It argues that in an effort to improve the "value for money" of the ECP, throughout the years it created different funding sources as well as themes to better suit ever changing needs. However, such efforts came with the unintended consequence of projects being created to fit the funding bid rather than tailoring it to the needs of the local area (Local Authority Staff A, 2022; Local Authority Staff B, 2022). Thus, the complexity of the ECP at times made it difficult in reality to implement the funds for projects at the ground level.

Another issue related to the complexity of the ECP was the difficulty in combating Eurosceptic coverage. Using the example of the success of the "£350 million" argument, this thesis argued in Chapter 6 that in the context of growing concerns over public finances (Curtice and Ormston, 2015, p.116), the idea of funnelling £350 million per week to the NHS was understandably appealing for the general public, especially in places like Wakefield where healthcare pressures were relatively high (Office for National Statistics, 2021b). In terms of the £350 million claim, this thesis argues that even when corrections were made by Sparrow (2016) that the figure was closer to "£136m a week", the fact remains in the minds of the public that millions of pounds were being sent to the EU that could be used for the NHS. This thesis thus argues that it is precisely such claims of half-truths and figures closely linked to genuine concerns of the public that became difficult to untangle.

This leads us to the third and final contribution this thesis makes to the Euroscepticism literature – that the blame partially rests on the passive promotion of the EU. Such passive promotion is both evident in Chapter 6 which analysed the British media coverage of the ECP at national and local media as well as right-wing and left-wing media. This thesis found that the media promotion was either neutral or negative with little positive coverage on the topic of the ECP. This problem was further raised in the interviews conducted by the author. Recipients of the ECP noted that while they followed EU guidelines by placing the EU flag on materials that received EU funding, the flags alone failed to convey the fact that the region the region had benefitted from EU funding (Interviewee C, 2022; Local Authority Staff A, 2022; Local Authority Staff B, 2022). This finding further supports earlier findings in the work by Crescenzi et al. (2019)

which found that funding alone did little to change people's perception of the EU, and that it required tangible direct benefit for local residents to translate into a positive view of the EU. In sum, this thesis argued that the allocation of the ECP and displays of the flags alone could not combat the negative coverage the ECP received through the British media (Daddow, 2012) as well as the aforementioned politicisation of Euroscepticism (Forster, 2002; Usherwood, 2002; Ford and Goodwin, 2014b).

This finding not only contributes to the existing literature on Euroscepticism (Usherwood, 2002; Usherwood and Startin, 2013), but also provides insight to future ECP projects by arguing that the promotion of the ECP needs to be more active rather than passive. This will be of particular importance in specific country context where Euroscepticism is more prevalent. For example, countries such as Italy, Poland, Hungary and France where around a third of voters supported political parties disposed to Euroscepticism according to a recent working paper from the European Commission (Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2023, p.9). These four states have also benefitted immensely from EU membership as well as the regional funding the EU provided. Italy has high regional inequalities with a severe north-south divide, meaning that the ECP provides much needed financial relief. Hungary benefits from high levels of funding through the CF which is to the tune of €22 billion for the current 2021-2027 funding period, and so much so that it has been used as a bargaining chip by the EU over concerns of human rights abuse (Abnett and Strupczewski, 2022). It is also no secret that France benefitted from the CAP as a major agricultural state (European Parliament, 2021). The policy implication from this thesis is that it should not be taken for granted that EU funding would lead to pro-EU sentiment. Instead, there needs to be a sustained and active promotion of the ECP which entails more active involvement between the EU and the local level. In short, this thesis offers contributions to both the academic literature as well as advice for future ECP in terms of combatting Euroscepticism. The next section explores the contributions this thesis makes to the ECP literature.

9.2-3 Legacies of a virtuous cycle and need for political as well as financial decentralisation: Lessons for the ECP

The main contributions this thesis makes to the existing ECP literature is two-fold, one that one of the positive impacts the ECP has had in the local context was to create a

virtuous cycle of further funding. Two, echoing the findings from Rodríguez-Pose and Vidal-Bover (2022), the need for both political as well as financial decentralisation to maximise the impact of the ECP.

The current literature on the ECP is focused predominantly on the "value for money" and the multi-level governance theory. The contribution this thesis makes to each strand of literature is by arguing that in addition to the pursuit of "value for money" helped create an ECP that was too complex and at times inflexible to the needs of the local area, another way the ECP has impacted local authorities is by providing a virtuous cycle of funding. Using the case study of Wakefield, in Chapter 8 this thesis has shown that the use of the ECP was used as to invest in the arts sector which in turn contributed to regional growth (Peacock, 2000; Bille and Schulze, 2006). The success of Wakefield in attracting the ECP to fund the development of *The Hepworth Wakefield* and *The Art House* (Reid, 2020), further compliments the *Yorkshire Sculpture Park* which also succeeded in receiving ECP for its Underground Gallery (Green, 2008, p.48). These projects were described as a "lasting legacy" for Wakefield, providing "endless benefits" for future generations of residents (Local Authority Staff A, 2022; Local Authority Staff B, 2022). Such initial success strengthened Wakefield's ability in attracting further funding as Wakefield was able to use the existence of these arts institutions to fund The Academy of Live Technology and XPLOR which explicitly mentioned the existence of *The Arts House*, *The Hepworth Wakefield*, and the *Yorkshire Sculpture Park* as evidence of strong links to the arts (Forever Consulting, 2022b, p.7).

More recently, Wakefield is also expected to gain funding from the Levelling Up Fund to support the renovation of the Rutland Mills (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2021b). This thesis is not the first to note the success of the arts industry in Wakefield as this was picked up in the book titled "*Broken heartlands: a journey through Labour's lost England*" by Sebastian Payne (2021) and a radio documentary called "*Levelling Up Wakefield*" which was presented by Professor Anand Menon (BBC Radio 4, 2021). The unique contribution this thesis makes is to link this success to that of the ECP, and to argue that such an example shows how the ECP could facilitate the introduction of a virtuous cycle of funding where one funding leads to further fundings in the future. Admittedly, this process not only takes time, but also requires some risk-taking

behaviour from local authorities. As the Labour Council leader for Wakefield noted, “We took a risk and I think it has paid off” (BBC Radio 4, 2021). This relates to the second contribution this thesis makes to the ECP literature, that in order for local authorities to find their local strength, it requires some risk-taking behaviour. To do so, and thus for the ECP to be most effective, local authorities require, once again as argued by Rodríguez-Pose and Vidal-Bover (2022), political as well as financial decentralisation.

This argument that both political and financial decentralisation is necessary is related to mainly the multi-level governance theory, but also more generally to the decentralisation literature in the UK. In the case of Wakefield, the decision to invest in the arts was a risk, and arguably such risk-taking behaviour was made possible at a time under the RDAs which benefitted from an explicit mandate to design and deliver regional policies with the benefit from “single pot” funding available to them (House of Commons, Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Committee, 2010, p.23; Yorkshire Forward, 2012, p.12). This combination of political as well as financial decentralisation, it was argued, gave Wakefield the necessary human resource capacity and time to develop its own strategy, something that was argued to have become harder in recent years due to the lack of financial security and time to develop regional policies (Local Authority Staff A, 2022; Local Authority Staff B, 2022). This indicates that for the multi-level governance structure to work, countries need to ensure greater decentralisation as at present, the structure is more akin to a multi-level partnership rather than multi-level governance.

In short, the main contribution this thesis offers to the multi-level governance literature is to argue that on the ground level, local authorities require greater financial and political decentralisation to maximise the impact of the ECP by taking risks in finding a new niche for their own local economy. In terms of the benefits of the ECP, the creation of the legacies of a virtuous cycle of funding has been a key success for Wakefield.

9.2-4 Contributions to the methodology and CR literature

This thesis adopted a single case study approach and used mixed methods in its analysis. It differed from previous research on the topic of each literature by having a strong historical component to its analysis. For example, when analysing Brexit through the lens of relative decline, historical factors became the focal point of analysis such as the

development and the decline of the coal industry in Wakefield. By using the unique structure and agency approach offered by CR (Archer, 1995), this thesis was able to maintain consistency while utilising different methodological approaches in answering the research questions. It joins other policy-related research that used the CR as its main framework of analysis (Yeung, 1997; Newman, 2023) by adopting the CR approach in the study of Brexit. This thesis would be, to the best knowledge of the author, the first to use the CR approach in analysing Brexit.

The mixed method approach provides a basis for future research to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches, overcoming the limitations of both approaches in the process. This thesis reiterates the importance of using a single framework (in the case of this thesis, CR) to ensure that consistency is achieved in the arguments presented as well as the data being used. This thesis has used a wide range of different data sources such as government policy papers, socio-economic data from mainly the ONS, interview data, and archival data to name a few. This approach has allowed the thesis to analyse the research question from multiple different angles.

In sum, this thesis contributes and expands on the existing literature on Euroscepticism, Brexit, the ECP, and CR. The findings from this thesis generally complement existing ones, but also offers new perspectives such as the use of relative decline in the Brexit literature, dangers of passive promotion of the EU in the Euroscepticism literature, and the creation of a virtuous cycle in the ECP literature. The following section will explore in more depth the limitations of the thesis.

9.3 Limitations of this research

Despite best efforts, this thesis has several limitations that need to be addressed. The impact of the pandemic meant that this research project faced severe difficulty in data gathering, especially elite interviews proved difficult at a time when face-to-face interactions were limited. The specific issue posed by the pandemic was the difficulty in accessing key networks in the local area. For example, it was only after pandemic related restrictions were lifted and the author was able to take part in workshops and seminars that potential interviewees became accessible. The face-to-face interactions allowed the author to overcome the issue of lack of personal connections to Wakefield local

authority as it gave the opportunity to discuss the research project and create links with potential interviewees through snowballing effects.

As noted in Chapter 3, response rates to interview calls via email was low at below 30 per cent. In addition, it was not possible to approach certain groups such as the private sector as part of the elite interview. These limitations were overcome by using interview data from other research such as the "Levelling up Wakefield" – a documentary on Analysis BBC Radio 4, and using archival data from using sources such as the Margaret Thatcher Foundation. Access to such secondary interview data has permitted the exploration of views of certain individuals who would have otherwise been inaccessible to the researcher considering the restrictions of time, costs, geography, and pandemic-related restrictions on movement and interaction. Furthermore, the interview data was triangulated with other data to corroborate findings. For example, the interview data discussed ECP-funded projects in Wakefield, but the exact timeline, the amount of funding, and the linkage between the funded projects received was done through checking local newspapers and the websites of the projects. These approaches taken together helped the thesis overcome the limitations of the low response rates to interview calls.

There is also the difficulty in the generalisability of this research due to the single case study approach. For example, because Wakefield was chosen as a case study for this research, a significant proportion of the research focused on the coal mining industry which would not be necessary if the research project focused on another region in the UK. Although some may argue that the findings are not generalisable to the whole of the UK (such as the impact of coal mining), it does provide some insight for other "left-behind" areas, especially places that underwent post-industrial decline. One counter argument to this is that the philosophical position that underpinned this research, CR, does not necessarily pursue generalisability of findings as it places significant importance to the pre-existing structural context. As noted by Easton (2010), generalisability under a single case study approach underpinned by CR is limited by design. Thus, generalisation of findings from this research is limited due to the specific research method approach adopted.

However, despite such limitations, this thesis also had unique benefits that future studies may find useful in their own studies on the "left-behind" areas. One key advantage this research project had was the first-hand experience of the author who lived in Wakefield for the entire duration of the research project (five years in total), which allowed personal relations to grow, and obtain insights from day-to-day activities and conversations. This is another kind of limitation of this research as from the perspective of replicability as the direction of the research relied on spontaneous discussions with local residents.

Furthermore, while this thesis does not argue that it is necessary for every research of this nature to be conducted through full immersion in the local area, taking some time to live in the area of research does provide some unique insights that would be hard to find through the existing literature or data alone. In the case of this research project, personal experiences shaped the direction of the research, if not the findings. For example, the decision to research vocational training and its viability in Wakefield was informed by having personally known a local resident struggle to start an apprenticeship programme. The decision to analyse the wages of coal miners in comparison to currently available jobs was also informed by talking with a former miner. This echoes calls from Denton et al. (2021, p.4) who argued for a "novel swim-along method", a method in which the researcher becomes part of an in-group, and through immersion and shared experience in the same space, gain information that would have otherwise been inaccessible. This research did not collect data directly through living and discussing with local residents. However, it is important to acknowledge the fact that such discussions greatly informed the direction of this research. In this way, at least some of the local perspective underpins the research findings from this project which will be difficult to replicate. This is at once a limitation of this research as well as its perhaps greatest strength.

In sum, the limitation of this research consists of the low interview response rate and the inability to generalise all of the findings due to the single case study approach. Despite these limitations, this thesis strived to overcome potential problems related to data collection and generalisability by gathering secondary data and by presenting unique findings through CR and the "swim along" method that would have been

incapable of finding had the thesis pursued generalisability as its main objective. Both the limitations and strengths of this thesis presents insight into what shape future research could take on the topic of regional development and the ECP.

9.4 Future research

This thesis is by no means the ultimate research on Brexit or the ECP. The use of a single case study approach was intended to provide guidance to future research that may be interested in analysing the impact of the ECP in local contexts or researching "left-behind" areas post-Brexit. To reiterate, this thesis has shown the importance of the history of the local area in understanding potential roots of Brexit as well as Euroscepticism. Arguably, in the process of finding answers to the research questions, new questions emerged as a result. This provides scope for future research, and this will be the focus of this section.

9.4-1 What do you do with a problem like Wakefield?

"What do you do with a problem like Wakefield?" was mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis. This question, which could be taken as rather flippant, is underpinned by a strong foreboding that there is in fact no easy solution to the socio-economic problems faced by places like Wakefield. This was the uneasy reality that this thesis has comes to terms with in the process of conducting this research project. In particular, Chapter 5 has illustrated how some of the solutions such as increasing the number of apprenticeships to tackle the problem of lack of qualifications is a major challenge. The reason for this does not lie with lack of political will nor lack of trying. The vocational sector has continued to feature in political manifestoes, it has undergone changes perhaps most notably under the Thatcher and New Labour governments to try and make it a more appealing option for young people. However, despite such continued efforts, it continues to move further away from offering a route towards social mobility.

The problem with skills that this thesis has found was that too many are failing in the current UK education system in achieving even the minimum requirements for routes into a secure career, which apprenticeships are part of. Chapter 5 has illustrated how even in a traditionally working-class area like Wakefield, an apprenticeship route continues to be unattainable for some of the most disadvantaged people in the area. Thus, if apprenticeship is not a solution to social mobility in an area like Wakefield, what

could be? This is a question that continues to evade a clear answer and further research is needed in digging deeper into what continues to place a barrier to apprenticeship, and what could be done to solve this issue. An answer to such questions will partially answer the question "What do you do with a problem like Wakefield?". Based on the findings of this thesis, the answer under current conditions is that one simply does not solve such a problem.

9.4-2 What comes next after the ECP?

The focus of this thesis was to analyse the impact of the ECP. However, since the UK left the EU, it can no longer access the ECP, the obvious following question is, what could replace it? The UK government has provided a flurry of replacement funds such as the Shared Prosperity Fund and introduced the Levelling Up Fund in acknowledgement of the issues of "left-behind" places that became apparent after the EU referendum. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the living cost crisis and inflation that hit the UK following its announcement of greater funding for local authorities through these funds, the situation for replacements of the ECP have arguably been severely weakened.

There has been a growing sense of disappointment that promises of fundings being kept at similar levels even after the UK's departure from the EU is quickly becoming empty promises. One of the key challenges local authorities faced was the different funding scheme under the Shared Prosperity Fund. On the one hand, the methodology behind the categorisation of local authorities into different levels of funding need was an improvement from the ECP. The ECP used a rather crude measure of GDP per capita in categorising regions at NUTS-2 level. This worked unfavourably for places like Wakefield which was categorised as a developed region under this criterion. The UK Community Renewal Fund (pilot project for the Shared Prosperity Fund) came up with "100 priority places" which were defined using Gross Value Added [GVA], Gross Disposable Household Income [GDHI] per capita, number of people without qualifications, and natural logarithm of working aged population per land area (Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, 2021), an improvement from the methodology for the ECP. While Conservative government funding such as the Levelling Up Fund has attracted criticism that it benefited Conservative constituencies more (Goodier et al.,

2023), it arguably better reflected the real socio-economic conditions of local governments in the UK.

However, the problem was not on the measurement, but on the funding bids themselves. Under the new Shared Prosperity Fund and the Levelling Up Fund, local authorities were competing against each other to access funding. This was further made difficult by the fact that funding available was much smaller than under the EU. For example, the Conservative government promised £2.6 billion for three years, contrast to £11.2 billion for seven years that the ECP would have provided (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, 2019; Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022). Similar problems were identified in a more recent report from the UK in a Changing Europe which found that investment banks in the UK invested only a third of what the European Investment Bank offered (Stewart, 2023). The UK also finally decided to rejoin Horizon Europe which has a budget close to £82 billion[28] (European Commission, 2023b), after it initially announced that £484 million will be set aside to support UK research in 2022 (Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2022). These examples show that in the post-Brexit environment UK was finding it difficult to access even the same level of funding that was available as a member of the EU. The public finance of the UK is always tight and unlikely to improve in the near future. In such context, how the UK handles regional development issues is an important topic for further research. Findings from this thesis indicates that without serious decentralisation efforts that include both financial and political decentralisation, it is unlikely that the future after the loss of ECP will improve the situation.

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided answers to the research questions of this research project. It also provided a summary of the main findings by linking them to how these findings contributed to the wider literature on Euroscepticism, Brexit, and the ECP. Some of the key findings were the importance of the concept of relative decline in understanding Brexit, problems of passive promotion and the sheer complexity of the ECP in helping nurture Euroscepticism, and the virtuous cycle created by the ECP which would require

[28] €95.5 billion converted to GBP (€1 = £0.86).

further political and financial decentralisation. Methodologically speaking, this thesis contributes to the wider literature on CR and methodological approaches by presenting the importance of mixed method approach and adding to the growing literature that uses CR in policy analysis. It also acknowledged the limitations of this research which were mainly to do with data gathering, access to key actors, and challenges to generalisation of the research due to the single case study approach. However, it also discussed how one of the limitations as well as the key strengths of this research was how the author lived in Wakefield for the duration of the research project and interacted with local residents which in turn helped form the direction of this thesis, in line with the "swim-along method" (Denton et al,. 2021, p.4).

In terms of future research, this thesis envisions finding a solution to "left-behind" places and analysing what could possibly help alleviate regional development issues in a post-ECP environment to be a key challenge and therefore significant research interest for the future. The impact of Brexit is expected to continue to garner both academic and wider public interest. The main story of this thesis is one of regret, that lessons were not learned in the aftermath of the closure of the coal mines which ultimately led to a sense of relative decline to take hold in "left-behind" places. For the wider academic community, one of the implications of this research was the need for greater research in "ordinary places". It also suggests that to solve regional development issues, more time and resources will be necessary to better understand such places and to pick up on the local knowledge. If the government is serious in making Brexit work, we need to leave behind the shackles of "left-behind", and give local authorities the power to realise their regional potential. It is hoped that this thesis could contribute to such changes.

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Appendix A

Local authority	1980: Energy & Water	Total in Employment	Percentage of employment in energy & water
Bolsover	902	2,914	31%
Mansfield	960	4,375	22%
Barnsley	2,001	9,196	22%
Ashfield	943	4,699	20%
Newark and Sherwood	764	4,200	18%
North West Leicestershire	609	3,461	18%
Wakefield	2,293	13,254	17%
Doncaster	1,990	11,525	17%
Bassetlaw	703	4,283	16%
South Derbyshire	407	2,936	14%
Cannock Chase	489	3,634	13%
Blaenau Gwent	336	2,669	13%
North Warwickshire	321	2,597	12%
Rotherham	1,266	10,269	12%
North East Derbyshire	526	4,275	12%
Caerphilly	783	6,511	12%
Chesterfield	476	4,048	12%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	1,016	8,778	12%
Northumberland	1,402	12,559	11%
Merthyr Tydfil	216	2,070	10%
County Durham	1,899	19,797	10%

Appendix B

Ethical Review Confirmation Email:

AREA 20-069 - What impact has the European Cohesion Policy had on Euroscepticism in West Yorkshire?

NB: All approvals/comments are subject to compliance with current University of Leeds and UK Government advice regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as any local restrictions where the study is being carried out regarding in-person data collection and travel.

I am pleased to inform you that the above research ethics application has been reviewed by the Business, Environment and Social Sciences (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee and on behalf of the Chair, I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion based on the documentation received at date of this email.