

# Head vs Heart Decisions

## Why Wales Voted in favour of Brexit Despite Economic Disadvantages

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### A glimpse into the strata of Welsh society and their relation to the EU

The people of Wales have always worked in industrial sectors. However, in modern times, these areas play a less important role. A general attitude indicates that the older generation wants to get their *old Wales* back. They feel that EU funding is allocated incorrectly. What they do not necessarily see is that it is used to support the younger generation. What is seen as EU money spent on „shiny buildings“ is actually investment into education which many people benefit from.



Steel plant in Port Talbot, Credits: Ben Salter

### The steel industry struggles facing the Welsh

The whole UK industry has undergone a series of changes with a shift towards a services-based economy and the ongoing process of pronounced deindustrialisation has left Port Talbot and other regions struggling to find their new identity.

Last year Tata Steel workers voted in favour of saving around 8,000 jobs in its UK business and the Port Talbot steelworks. Proposed measures include an investment of £1bn in modernising its operations over the next 10 years. This decision comes at a cost: it is likely to result in a 10% cut to members' pension benefits.



### Port Talbot – a case study

Port Talbot has been receiving a substantial amount of EU subsidies; the departure from the EU means that this funding will be seized. But the potential impact of Brexit on the town's steelworks is likely to significantly exceed just the material loss.

In June 2016 Hollywood actor Michael Sheen returned to Port Talbot to present a *BBC Wales Week In Week Out* documentary on the steel works which are 'the life blood of his home town'. In the course of filming, he followed the lives of people affected by the drastic changes and got a firsthand account of the challenges the workers and their families had to overcome on a daily basis.

In the documentary, Sheen stated: "One thing is for sure, the future of this town and this community is completely tied up with what happens to this steelworks.



Not just economically, but in terms of this town's identity. Who this town is, who these people are."



### Quick Facts about Port Talbot

- It is an industrial town in South Wales, UK.
- Its population is estimated at around 37,000.
- Steel works industry peaked in the 1960s and 1970s – at that time it employed about 18,000 people.
- Currently the number has declined to just about 4,000 employees.
- Nonetheless, it is still Britain's biggest steelworks.

Last June, Neath Port Talbot voted to Leave with a 56% majority:



What is the opinion of the people living in the impacted area as the new details of the effect on the steel industry come to light? Use this QR-code to watch a short interview



Want to check how much you know about Wales? Go ahead and take this quick BBC Quiz: Welsh MEPs, Wales and the EU

### Reasons for the leave vote

Wales feels left behind. Although there is hardly any immigration, some people are worried about it. They want "their" Wales back; a Wales that will not return because times have changed. And this is not the fault of immigration - the steel industry is simply not as flourishing anymore. By voting to leave the EU, they hoped to gain control, to make their own decisions and to be independent of the EU funding and resolutions. The worsening of the industry, the loss of jobs, social discrepancies; all these reasons are causes for people all over Europe to question the state of being in the European Union, and Wales is no exception: the Welsh listened to the populists' ideas and made a choice they hopefully will not regret.



Sources: • Google pictures - [https://www.google.de/search?q=port+talbot&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiRooCtnpbUahVGI5AKHXQTAYSQ\\_AUICCGD&biw=1366&bih=662](https://www.google.de/search?q=port+talbot&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiRooCtnpbUahVGI5AKHXQTAYSQ_AUICCGD&biw=1366&bih=662) • Maguire, Andy - Michael Sheen's return to Port Talbot to fight for steel town <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-36469174> • Mortimer, Caroline. "Wales could disappear into England under hard Brexit, Welsh nationalist leader warns" in The Independent <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-wales-england-general-election-2017-nationalist-plaid-cymru-leanne-wood-a7711031.html> • "Nick Clegg: Why did Ebbw Vale in Wales vote Brexit?" <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-39425373/nick-clegg-why-did-ebbw-vale-in-wales-vote-brexit> • O'Hagan Ellie Mae. "Wales voted for Brexit because it has been ignored by Westminster for too long" in The Independent. <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/brexit-wales-eu-referendum-vote-leave-uk-ignored-by-westminster-a7102551.html> • Pooler, Michael. "Port Talbot broken by steel industry in decline" in The Financial Times <https://www.ft.com/content/b2751878-c10d-11e5-846f-79b0c3d20eaf> • Ruddick, Graham "Tata Steel workers agree to pension cuts to save 8,000 jobs" in The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/feb/15/tata-steel-workers-agree-to-pension-cuts-to-save-8000-jobs> • "Tata Steel. Port Talbot's steelworkers are proud but fearful" in The Economist <http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21696505-view-south-welsh-coast-port-talbot-steelworkers-are-proud-fearful> • Research Briefing, Wales and the EU: What does the vote to leave the EU mean for Wales? Research Service, Legal Service and EU Office. June 2016. National Assembly for Wales Research Service. <http://www.assembly.wales/Research%20Documents/16-037-Wales%20and%20the%20EU%20What%20does%20the%20vote%20to%20leave%20the%20EU%20mean%20for%20Wales/16-037-Leave-English.pdf> • Securing Wales' Future: Transition from the European Union to a new relationship with Europe. Welsh Government. [https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/2017-01/30683%20Securing%20Wales%20-%20Future\\_ENGLISH\\_WEB.pdf](https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/2017-01/30683%20Securing%20Wales%20-%20Future_ENGLISH_WEB.pdf) • Thomas, Stefan. What the town that stands to lose the most from a bad Brexit says now: Port Talbot has had millions in EU funding and its biggest industry is inextricably linked to it in The Wales Online <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/weve-asked-port-talbot-people-12805405> • Wales and the EU Referendum: Estimating Wales' Net Contribution to the European Union. The UK in a Changing Europe. Wales Governance Centre at Cardiff University. <http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/wgc/files/2016/05/Estimating-Wales%E2%80%99-Net-Contribution-to-the-European-Union.pdf> • West, Karl. "Port Talbot struggles to see a life beyond steel" in The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/apr/02/port-talbot-struggles-see-life-beyond-steel-tata>