**Adventure Sport Tourism in Wales: Assessing the role, impact and development of Welsh language use**

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Key words: Adventure Sport Tourism, Welsh Language, Rural Communities, Economy

The value of AST for revitalising rural economies has been widely recognised (Costa and Chalip, 2005). Beyond economic worth, AST provision has long been associated with individual wellness and lifestyle, the educational development of children and adolescents, and a mechanism for teambuilding and co-operation for employers (Finch & Legg, 2019). The aim of this PhD research is to identify and evaluate how Welsh language is currently used within the sphere of Adventure Sport Tourism (AST) and will explore the potential social, cultural, and professional contribution that the language can make in this field. This paper presents the review of literature focused on a current key challenge in Wales, undertaken to develop the research design to explore this further.

Outdoor activity tourism in Wales is booming, contributing up to 6% of the Welsh economy in 2013 and over 8,000 FTE positions (White & Smith, 2014). With 2,700km of coastline and 26% of the land area designated as protected landscapes, Wales’ natural resources for outdoor sports are world class (Muskett, 2019). There is a clear understanding amongst researchers and the global tourism industry that adventure tourism has a major role to play in destinations (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie & Pomfret, 2003), where it can harness the interconnections between sport and tourism (Page, Steele & Connell, 2006).

The Welsh Government’s vision of reaching one million Welsh speakers by 2050 is an important milestone in the development of the future of Welsh heritage. In their ‘Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers’ strategy, the Welsh Government (2017) recognises that communities in Wales are unique but share some common characteristics. One of these is the high population mobility with young Welsh speakers leaving to find jobs outside of Wales, which could have implications for the achievement of targets for increasing Welsh speakers in Wales in the future. It has been identified by policy informers that the communities which mostly encounter this challenge are those which are rural.

The overall percentage of people aged three or over able to speak Welsh is the lowest ever recorded in the Census (2021), however the 2021 Census recorded a change in the age profiles of adults able to speak Welsh. Adults aged between 20–44-years-old are the age group most likely to speak Welsh (16.5%) in 2021. The Europe Assistance Ipsos Survey (2019) found that younger age adventure tourism enthusiasts (18–44-year-old) are more likely to enjoy specialised tourism activities. These figures suggest that the age group most likely to speak Welsh is also the age group most likely to participate, or be employed in the AST environment (Dennison, 2018). Despite this, recent research conducted by Muskett (2019) suggests that the proportion of native Welsh speaking staff employed by AST organisations across Wales was low. It was reported that particularly small numbers of Welsh speakers exist in instructional roles, therefore very few providers of outdoor activities offer sessions through the medium of Welsh.

This research corresponds with the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 about improving economic, environmental, cultural and well-being of Wales through public bodies.

Of their seven goals, this research sits within each one, but more specifically *A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language* goal. This creates a society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation (Future Generations Wales, 2015). In 2023 72% of adults attended or took part in arts, culture or heritage activities at least three times a year (Llywodraeth Cymru, 2023). Additionally, the participation of children in sports outside of the curriculum three or more times a week was higher amongst Welsh speakers at 46% in comparison to 35% with non Welsh speakers (Sport Wales, 2023). This points in the direction that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 can be attained. Although, as this is directly concerned with public bodies, it bears the question will these goals be worked towards by private, third sector and clubs of the AST industry?

The use and value of adventure sport tourism for revitalisation of rural economies has been widely debated (Costa *et al.,* 2006). This is because rural communities have natural local amenities and conditions (mountains, open spaces, wind, waterways) which serve as locations for recreational sports (Chambers, 1994; Roberts & Hall, 2001). There are two types of participation in AST activities, sport-related tourism activities as part of the holiday experience, and extreme adventure sports which comprise a high degree of risk and adventure (Page *et al.,* 2006). This trend has accelerated over the past two decades, particularly in Europe, as policymakers have sought to capitalise on the worldwide growth of tourism to attract new spending to rural economies (Edwards & Fernandes, 1999; Hall, 2004). Adventure Sport Tourism arguably falls into the wider definition of sport-related activities which are popular among holidaymakers (Page *et al.,* 2006), which could contribute to developing a more prosperous economy through increasing job opportunities and drawing more tourism to rural areas.

If participation and demand in rural sport tourism activities waxes and wanes with the seasons, so will employment and cash flow, causing considerable fiscal stress in communities that rely on visitors who come to participate in locally provided sport (Keith, Fawson & Chang, 1996). As a results sport activities may be insufficient to arrest rural out-migration or economic decline (Costa *et al.,* 2006). The net loss of skilled people to out-migration; particularly the under 40’s is commonly referred to as the ‘brain drain’. A recent report conducted by the Welsh Governance Centre (2023) concluded that the growth of middle-to-higher earning roles in Wales has remained stagnant since 2000-01. Interestingly, the roles with the highest median pay are those associated with natural resources and utilities.

Research on how tourism industry impacts and interacts with local/indigenous culture and language is limited but there is evidence to suggest that the socio-cultural impacts of tourism may influence local inhabitants’ attitudes to tourism activities to a greater extent than do its economic and environmental dimensions (Peters, Chan & Legerer, 2018). Relevantly to the Welsh language, the situation within the AST sector might be complex where private companies (who are not obligated to comply with Welsh language standards), activity leaders, demonstrators and tourists may be limited in terms of their capacity to develop the use of Welsh culture and language. The potential of tourism activities in Wales to fully develop an appreciation of Welsh culture and language in rural areas through immersive experiences and creating jobs for the young Welsh to stay within the area is yet to be critically evaluated, and thus serves as the key aim of this PhD research.

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