# Title: The development of the Welsh language in local communities: A critical examination of the policy initiative, *Amdani*

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**Introduction**

This paper considers the ambition to reach one million Welsh speakers by 2050. This target represents a significant challenge which will require new ways of working. Specifically, the paper draws on the experience of a Welsh Government intervention, known as ‘Amdani’. To analyse this policy initiative, we use the conceptual framework of Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Approach (MSA).

**Background to the Research**

If successful, the Welsh language strategy *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers* (Welsh Government, 2017) means that about a third of the country will be able to speak the language within 30 years. This has significant implications for public life (Selleck, 2016) in that Welsh will need to be spoken beyond the traditional settings of home and school. Given the results of the 2021 Census which recorded only 17.8% of adults being able to speak Welsh, this ambitious target suggests that whilst a ‘business as usual’ approach will be insufficient, there are potential pitfalls in implementing novel initiatives. Launched by the Welsh Language Commissioner’s (WLC) office in 2018, *Amdani* was an initiative that aimed to promote the use of Welsh beyond the school gate. The intervention involved the creation and distribution of resources which offered Welsh terminology packs that were circulated to local sports clubs to encourage the language to be used in these settings as part of daily interactions by players, volunteers and officials.

MSA offers an opportunity to understand the development and implementation of public policy (Béland and Howlett, 2016). A particular relevance of Kingdon’s (1984) work is that it recognises policy making as non-rational or linear and draws on the garbage can model of decision-making. The MSA emphasises the fluidity of the policy process which involves numerous actors. It is underpinned by five separate concepts (Figure 1) including three streams referred to as ‘problem, policy and political,’ the policy window and policy entrepreneurs. Importantly, the three streams can operate largely independently of one another and so draw internally on their own logic until a *Policy Window* or opportunity appears. Despite weaknesses (Cairney and Jones, 2016) MSA has been a widely adopted concept with which to analyse public policy.

Problem Stream

Perception that the problem is ‘public’ and needs government intervention to resolve

Policy Stream

Experts examine problems and propose solutions. These are assessed and then narrowed to feasible options.

Political Stream

Factors that can influence the body politic e.g. swings in national mood, exec or legislative turnover and interest group advocacy campaigns

Policy Window

Policy Output

Policy Entrepreneurs

**Figure 1**. Multiple Steams Approach (Adapted from Béland and Howlett, 2016)

**The Research Study**

A case study research design was adopted which utilised qualitative methods for collecting data over a period of 18 months. Data were collected as part of a larger study (for a further related paper see Evans *et al*., 2019) although the data relevant for this paper focuses on the policy informer perspectives undertaken during 2017 and 2018. Ethical approval was obtained from Cardiff Metropolitan University. After Bryman (2016), eleven semi-structured face-to-face elite interviews were undertaken with policy informers, categorised as local informers (n=3), regional informers (n=4), and national informers (n=4). Participants represented organisations involved in promoting the Welsh language and included a local authority, national government organisations, national independent advocacy organisations and Welsh Government itself. Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2021) six stages of thematic analysis was adopted (undertaken manually owing to the Welsh language) andNVivo (version 10 and 11) used to store the data.

**The Findings**

The intervention, *Amdani*, formed part of the interview discussions and revealed a nuanced and complex picture of the role that sport might play in promoting the Welsh language. Brief selected results are presented here and reveal an awareness of the potential of *Amdani* which was explained by one participant who said:

*NOPF 1- ‘Mae Amdani yn esiampl wych lle dwi’n gweld pobl yn defnyddio’r ddwy iaith nol ac ymlaen…Hwnna yw’r normaleithio sydd angen digwydd, yw bod ni yn gweld y ddwy iaith, nid mewn cystadlaeth.’*

*[Amdani is an excellent example of where I see people using both languages back and forth…That is the normalising that needs to happen, is that we see both languages, not in competition.]*

*[Recorded interview, 6/4/18]*

Despite the potential of *Amdani*, one regional policy informer raised a critical weakness of the intervention. They identified that the resource only caters for those who are familiar with and know how to use and speak the Welsh language, but not for those who are unfamiliar with the phonetics. This point is relevant to the communication and consultation related to the roll-out of *Amdani*, and raised questions relating to its effectiveness. Having the knowledge and confidence to pronounce the selected words correctly was a significant challenge highlighted by a regional opinion former (ROF 3):

*ROF 3- ‘One of the things as a non-Welsh speaker, I can see the spelling of the word but obviously I don’t always know how to pronounce it properly. So, my input… [to the Amdani consultation] ... was… [if we] …can we have it phonetically, but … to get their support and... [to]…fit into what they are doing, because you obviously want to align yourself with the WLC and stick with their branding… [without phonetics] … which was a bit frustrating because I know that there are a lot of [sport] teachers like me out there who I know would benefit from the phonetics.’*

*[Recorded interview, 25/10/17]*

This example usefully highlights the importance of engaging key stakeholders in the design of these kinds of policy interventions which needed to be tested robustly by potential users in the community.

The policy informers have raised many key considerations regarding the promotion of the Welsh language from both a policy and community sport viewpoint. Identifying if the environment is correct, then sport could provide key opportunities for developing the leisure use of Welsh. However, the continued strain on sport to deliver several wider social benefits should be considered and remembered.

**Discussion**

As highlighted by the policy informers within this study, there are several challenges related to the Welsh language through the policy output *Amdani.* The multifaceted influences facing the service delivery within sport and clarity concerning roles and responsibilities among organisations with regards to promoting Welsh was complex within the sport system in Wales. Collectively, the policy informers’ aim of creating an environment and culture where organisations work together and share best practice, remains challenging.

The analysis which emerged from the interviews suggests the policy context was not fully examined and tested prior to the implementation of *Amdani*. Although a policy window opened for implementing *Amdani,* there were structural weaknesses which meant that this policy was unable to use sport as a bridge between the minority national language and the dominant language of English. The adapted MSA below demonstrates the complexity of the process, and the multiple considerations which should have been reviewed during the design and delivery of *Amdani.* Noteworthy, our contribution to the MSA is the integration of an *interest stream* which adopts the New Institutionalism Approach and supports identification of possible organizations (examples are provided) which could play critical roles for Welsh language in sport from their formal and informal roles.

**Figure 2.** An Analysis of Welsh Language Policy Implementation

**Conclusion**

The need to develop opportunities for Welsh to be spoken in local communities is a challenge which must be addressed if Wales is to reach its target. The implementation of *Amdani* is an example of a policy response which sought to offer new opportunities to speak Welsh in community sport settings. Interviews undertaken with regional and national policy informers suggested that the implementation of this policy was not sufficiently tested and thus when rolled-out the uptake was partial at best. An analysis of *Amdani* which uses Kingdom’s MSA suggests weak policy implementation which highlighted a lack of examining the policy context in Wales.

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