

## **Influencing community regeneration policy in Wales post-Covid19– an analysis of stakeholder discourse**

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The Welsh economy is forecast to be negatively impacted by the departure of the UK from the European Union and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Munday et al, 2020). As a consequence it is highly likely the work of community development organisations will be much sought after. From 2001 to 2018 community development in Wales was predominantly delivered by the Communities First programme. A legacy fund was provided by the Welsh Government to support a transition period following the closure of the Communities First programme in 2018. The legacy fund was designed to support work in the areas of employability, community empowerment and children's early year development. It can be stated that currently, community development delivery in Wales post-Communities First is fragmented.

The primary purpose of this project is to analyse community development and regeneration discourses in Wales. This analysis is expected to produce a rich seam of insights into the policy requirements to support community development organisations in their community regeneration work post-Communities First and post-Covid19. The research project explores community development stakeholder views. In particular, their views on the role of community development organisations in the regeneration of disadvantaged communities in Wales. Specific attention is be paid to the impact of Covid19 on the work of community development organisations. The creation of an effective interpretation of stakeholder views will contribute to greater stakeholder involvement in policy making.

The context for this research project is community development/regeneration activity in Wales. Welsh area-based initiative (ABI)/regeneration policy has its roots in the land reclamation schemes of the 1960s and 1970s (Welsh Government, 2016). However, land reclamation and property-based regeneration schemes are comparatively expensive. Adamson et al (2012) describe regeneration programmes in Wales being expensive, charged with achieving an 'uphill task'. Further, their economic and social knock-on effects may be limited (Gripaios, 2002). Welsh policy developed into property-based regeneration and subsequently in the late 1980s into education and training. Welsh ABI policy further evolved with the 2001 launch of the Communities First programme. The extent of the economic and social problems facing regeneration programmes such as Communities First may have been too large for the programmes to be successful (Gripaios, 2002).

This research project further explores the evolution of Welsh community regeneration policy described above and propose future regeneration policy developments. Three exploratory case studies have been created, the purpose of which is to better understand the operations, relationships and outcomes of the three community development organisations selected for the project. The withdrawal of the Communities First programme from the community development/regeneration landscape in Wales is likely to have left a void in the creation of social capital and its positive relationship with the creation of social innovation. In support of this statement other research undertaken by the team has revealed, the relationship between Communities First, the local community and partner agencies needs to be regularly reinforced by face-to-face contact. However, because of the closure of Communities First (and now with Covid19 restrictions) face-to-face contact between community development organisations and the community may be less likely to happen. Consequently, there is a danger this may inhibit

the building and maintenance of the varieties of social capital seen to be necessary (a danger identified by Purdue, 2001). This may be particularly important in the case of the need to exchange tacit local knowledge (Barrutia and Echebarria, 2010). Also, Communities First staff exhibited the traits of dealmakers. A dealmaker as described by Kemeny, Feldman, Ethridge and Zoller (2015) is someone who typically lives and works in a community where the network is anchored and has many connections within the network. The dealmaker usually also has the capability to use the network to achieve productive outcomes. In a closed network such as may have been found in elements of Communities First an enabler for accessing/creating bridging social capital also facilitates '*brokerage across structural holes*' (Burt, 2001). The dealmaker function is considered vital to community members accessing resources such as expertise, knowledge and funding.

The case studies have been constructed via a mixed method approach. Namely, semi-structured interviews have been undertaken and an online survey will be carried out. The interviews have been held with individuals with similar functions or relationships in each case study. For example, individuals performing leadership, management, operational delivery and volunteer roles at the community development organisation have been interviewed. Other interviewees include community development organisation stakeholders such as service recipients, project funders, local and national government officers and partner organisations. Data has also been collected via a survey instrument designed around the different types of social capital and innovation identified within the literature. Multiple items included in the survey are associated with each of the different aspects of leadership, sustainability, social capital and typology of innovation (especially social innovation). Descriptive analysis is used to examine differences in the leadership, sustainability, social capital and innovation items for those engaged in each of the three case studies. In order to examine the relationships between leadership, sustainability, social capital and innovation it is necessary to combine the items into variables representing the underlying constructs of interest. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) will be used to generate measures capturing the different aspects and components of leadership, sustainability, social capital and innovation as suggested by the data. This allows multiple regression analysis to be undertaken to study the links between leadership, sustainability, social capital and innovation whilst controlling for other unobserved aspects of the three case studies, in order to establish the robustness of any relationships found.

The outcomes of the research project to date are multi-faceted. For instance, an outcome is a better understanding of the management and leadership styles most likely to create successful, sustainable community development organisations. Other outcomes include an interpretation of the drivers and obstacles to successful community regeneration. For example, the relationship between social capital and social innovation has been evaluated. Finally, an outcome of the research is a series of policy implications for implementation government organisations locally, nationally and internationally.

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