

COMMUNITISATION

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COMMUNITISATION / CYMUNEDOLI

This paper offers ideas about discussing and implementing communitisation in Wales. The ideas are based on Raymond Williams' perspective on the nature of community and the relevance to contemporary community development and the long revolution, particularly in Wales. There are three main parts to the paper, as indicated below.

1. Raymond Williams' views on the potential of community development in Wales.
2. Aspects of current community development.
3. Community development fostering the long revolution.

1. Raymond Williams' views on the potential of community development in Wales.

A number of quotes from Raymond Williams' work convey his views on community development. Below, part of an interview which Raymond Williams gave in 1984 on the theme, 'Decentralism and the Politics of Place'.

"Ideally, a new movement comes out of new ideas being specified in particular places-then there may be a model being expressed which is adaptable to the interests of other places and scales of operation. These can be ideas relating to long- or short-term real interests and the policies which express them. It is perfectly clear that ideas have to federate -it's in the nature of the analysis. The difficulty comes not least because of the existence of the old Labour Party nationalism, its tradition of metropolitan centralism (what I've referred to in a more general context as metropolitan provincialism) and its tradition of short-term electoral politics, and leadership geared to precisely that. It is difficult to produce ideas for a single place; it needs lots of people with skills being brought together. This is very difficult, especially as intellectuals will work in campaigns such as disarmament, the ecological movement and on questions of the economy. But there is little bringing together of these energies. It would happen more quickly-this bringing together- if it happened in a place." {Quoted

from page 210 of Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity. Raymond Williams. Edited by Daniel Williams. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003)}

Additionally, quoted below, are extracts from the same book, from the article, 'Wales and England', written by Raymond Williams in 1983.

“Radical and communal Wales...will be real to the extent that it develops, in plan and practice, new forms of co-operative work and communal socialism, new kinds of educational and cultural collectives, rather than what happens to the Labour or even the Nationalist vote”

“To bring together these two emphases-on the cultural struggle for actual social identities, and on the political redefinition of effective self-governing societies-is, I believe, to indicate a new and substantial kind of socialism which is capable both of dealing with the complexities of modern societies and also of re-engaging effective and practical popular interests.” {Quoted from page 203 of Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity. Raymond Williams. Edited by Daniel Williams. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003)}.

2. Aspects of current community development.

Blaenau Ffestiniog was the second largest town in north Wales in 1900, with a population of about 13,000, but with the decline of the slate industry, the number was more than halved by the year 2000. Today Bro Ffestiniog is economically one of the poorest areas of the United Kingdom. Despite the deindustrialisation, the community cultural inheritance survives to a significant extent and is the basis of the community development model which is pioneered in the area today.

The experience of community development in Bro Ffestiniog highlights the potential of community development in the current period. There are more community enterprises per head of population in the area than anywhere else in Wales. Fifteen of these community enterprises came together as a network under the banner of Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog, which is a community company limited by guarantee. It operates in the communities of Blaenau Ffestiniog, Trawsfynydd and Penrhyndeudraeth and the surrounding villages, which, between them, have a population of about 8,000. The company's aims are to

facilitate co-operation between the community enterprises, nurture new social enterprises, work with small private businesses that are anchored in the community as well as with local and central government. All this in order to further the integrated development of the environment, economy, society and culture of the community.

The community enterprises that are members of Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog include Antur Stiniog, Barnardos, Cyfeillion Croesor, Cell B/ Gwallgofiaid, Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog, Cwmni Opra Cymru, Deudraeth Cyf, GISDA, Gwesty Seren, Pengwern Cymunedol, Seren, Trawsnewid, Y Dref Werdd, Ysgol y Moelwyn / Canolfan Hamdden Bro Ffestiniog. The various activities of these community enterprises include running two hotels, shops, cafes, tourist centre, leisure centre, arts and crafts centre, mountain biking centre, retail, gardening, providing allotments, educational and cultural activities, opera, environmental work, energy conservation, reducing food waste, food banks, log bank, recycling, citizens advice, river cleaning, work with adults with learning challenges, work with young people including regarding homelessness and learning environmental and media skills.

The members of Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog between them employ some 150 people. Analysis of the economic impact of the community enterprises shows that a high percentage of their income comes from trading. Further, a large proportion of that income circulates and multiplies locally. For every pound received as grant or loan 98 pence are spent locally, mainly on wages. Some 53% of the £1.5 million spent on wages remains locally. Nearly half the expenditure on goods and services remain locally and multiplies in the community.

Essential features of Cwmni Bro's experience are the commitment and enthusiasm of voluntary and paid workers who are integral members of the community, community communication and participation and responding to community needs (exemplified in the response to the pandemic).

In August 2018 a new venture, Brocast Ffestiniog, was launched which is a digital community broadcasting service promoting communication between the community enterprises and the community and within the community (see facebook.com/BROcastFfestiniog).

Dissemination of the Model

The integrative model of community development that Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog is pioneering provides a pattern which other communities can adapt and adopt.

Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog responds positively to invitations to visit other communities to explain what has been achieved in Bro Ffestiniog and to discuss the general potential of the model. Dolan is a network facilitating increasing cooperation between Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog and community development organisations in the slate valleys of Nantlle (Yr Orsaf) and Ogwen (Partneriaeth Ogwen).

Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog and Dolan have pioneered a model of community development which interweaves environmental, economic, social, cultural and educational aspects, integrated with the principles and practice of the foundational economy and the circular economy.

Essential characteristics of the development model are a pioneering vision, culture of enterprise, co-production, acting as a catalyst bringing stakeholders together, networking enterprises, sharing resources among social enterprises with concomitant economies of scale, asset based financial independence, research based action, bottom up community led development, non-hierarchical and democratic organisation, flexible response to community needs and the promotion and facilitation of self-reliant cultural change.

Adapting and adopting this model across Wales has the potential to transform our communities and economy. As regards the dissemination of the model it is evident from the characteristics of the model and the lessons from the experience of Cwmni Bro and Dolan that any guidance and learning for other communities cannot be reduced to a mechanistic prescription. Cwmni Bro's model is integrative and holistic; it is about adopting a transformative rounded cultural perspective. Providing guidance for other communities is essentially a form of education and learning. One of the major faults of the Communities First programme was the lack of thought and resources given to learning. Devising and delivering a programme to disseminate the model must have at its core imaginative teaching and learning.

The model has been an exemplar, leading to visits and advice to community organisations on Anglesey, resulting in the setting up of the network Bro Môn. Similarly, with the establishment of the Pembrokeshire, Planed facilitated, community network. Recently a Gwynedd wide network of community enterprises has been established, Rhwydwaith Mentrau Cymunedol Gwynedd, which brings together nearly 40 enterprises. To date 17 of the community

enterprises have responded to a questionnaire about their activities showing that their total turnover is £10,791,006, that they employ 188 full time, 152 part time and that they have 443 volunteers. As well as their social value the 17 have assets totalling £26,145,132.

Initial steps have been taken to establish the network Rhwyd which would bring together social enterprises operating primarily in Welsh across Wales.

In collaboration with Building Communities Trust, Community Movement Cymru has recently been set up. This network organisation has as one of its main functions facilitating communities to interconnect directly and help one another, aiding the dissemination of the model. The Movement also acts as a collective to influence and cooperate with local and central government.

Adoption of the model by a community benefits that community. Its dissemination, adaption and adoption by other communities leads to links between communities resulting in mutual benefits such as sharing knowledge and resources. Disseminate to further communities and the collective benefits cumulate.

National dissemination could transform Wales. For this to happen the role of Welsh Government is crucial. Dissemination of the model provides a challenge to Welsh Government to develop policies and support to promote the model of community development across Wales.

As a first step it is suggested that the Welsh Government works with community organisations which have experience of employing the model to devise and support a programme to disseminate the model. This could be piloted initially in a number of communities which could then become exemplars for other communities and then, step by step, a national programme could be rolled out. Based on the experience of the programme Government and the community sector in Wales could work together to produce and implement a national strategy for the integrated development of our communities.

3. Community development fostering the long revolution.

Analysis of the income and expenditure of the community enterprises that are members of Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog shows that a high percentage of their income remains in the community as local wages and as expenditures on locally sourced goods. There is also a multiplier effect as a high percentage of

these wages and expenditures circulate locally. In other words, much of the income generated by enterprises such as community tourism enterprises stays in the community. This contrasts with the high level of leakage of money out of the community in the case of externally owned tourism corporations and large companies.

It is reckoned that tourism in Wales brings in £17million a day on average. Currently most of this income goes to externally owned large companies and money leaks out of the communities which operate the tourism facilities, in contrast to community owned enterprises which retain and multiply the income from tourism. Welsh Government tourism subsidies are heavily slanted toward the large externally owned companies. A stark example is Adventure Parc Snowdonia on the site of what used to be the Aluminium works in Dolgarrog in the Conwy Valley. Adventure Parc Snowdonia - initially Surf Snowdonia - opened the UK's first inland surfing lagoon back in 2015. The site later expanded with a £16m investment into an Adrenaline Indoors facility as well as a Hilton Garden Inn Hotel. These investments were supported with multi-million pound grants from Welsh Government (in total estimated as £7.9million plus). Last year the venture made a loss of £1.82 million and urgently wanted an outside investor to help further develop the park after "unexpected costs", calling for further Government support. Recently The Home Office came to the rescue, sending hundreds of refugees to 'stay' in the revamped Hilton Hotel.

There are obviously fundamental environmental, economic, social and cultural questions about the whole venture. Environmentally the vast use of electricity to create waves, the financial losses, the way workers have been treated and the company's reluctance to use the Welsh language. Evidently, this raises questions about the Welsh Government's policy of heavily favouring subsidising private capital at the expense of community enterprises, and for that matter small medium enterprises.

Raymond Williams provides a wider framework to look at the relationship between capital, community and government. Finance capital, as associated with the City in London, continuously seeks investment outlets to obtain a return on capital. Private capital continuously addicted to environmentally

unsustainable growth. For example, private capital increasingly with its tentacles in the National Health System as privatising health care is an attractive way for the rich to enrich themselves further but at a huge cost to the health care of the majority. Large private tourism companies extract surpluses from operations all over the world, including Wales. Surpluses extracted from the labour of those working in the tourism industry. What applies in the case of tourism applies more generally to other industries across the world. This is modern capitalist imperialism. Ex colonies and nations may, nominally, be self-governing but are not free due to the dominance of private, global capital.

Raymond Williams' framework also applies to an understanding of our history. A Welsh people that laboured in coal, slate, iron, steel, tinsplate and agricultural industries produced such real wealth which capital extracted leaving communities in Wales amongst the poorest in Europe. A process facilitated, past and present, by London based capitalist Government primarily serving City finance which in turn finances the Tory party.

Raymond Williams' views on community development in Wales offers a way forward. Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog, in its very minor way, exemplifies an integrated model of community development which interweaves environmental, economic, social and cultural aspects of community together with the adoption of the principles and practice of the foundational and circular economy. We could begin to transform our country if the model was widely adapted and adopted by communities throughout Wales and if central and local government prioritised support to community rather than private capital.

Every community owned asset deprives City and other finance capital institutions of a way to accumulate, that is, to extract profit and add to finance capital. Looked at in this way inverts the conservative perspective on the relationship between the City and Wales; rather than Wales seen as dependent on London it is the metropolis that is dependent on Wales as one area of the world from which to extract returns on private capital. Public and community ownership of capital deprives a dependent City in London. More than this, social and community ownership of the economy and our resources is the basis of Welsh real independence and freedom. Communitisation is

potentially a gradual contribution to revolution from below, socialising ownership of significant elements of the economy over time.

Community and public ownership of the means of production, of capital, is central to the long revolution. It is the basis of socialism. It is more sensible for some elements of the economy to be socially owned at a national level, nationalisation. Some elements internationally socially owned and controlled. Depending on the nature of the activity communitisation may be the preferable form of social ownership, helping to safeguard against the over centralisation of state power. This is a sort of Welsh decentralised socialism, along the lines of the political philosophy developed by Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg (Welsh Language Society) bearing the name 'cymdeithasiaeth' ('society-ism').

Importantly, the community perspective outlined in this paper, based on Raymond Williams' work, combines a socialist and nationalist analysis and brings together two of the main political streams in recent Welsh history. Streams that have been largely kept apart for so long. As a national movement, defined in terms of community, and a labour movement, defined in terms of community socialism coalesce a powerful force for transformation is created. A merging of class and national interests, bridging a nation east and west, north and south. This way there is hope that Raymond Williams's 'long revolution' may not be too long coming.

Paper prepared by Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog, March 2023.

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