



# WELSH LANGUAGE USE IN THE COMMUNITY Research Study

## Executive Summary

### 1. Research Aim and Objectives

- 1.1 In November 2014, Bangor University was commissioned to undertake this research study as part of the evaluation of Welsh Ministers' Strategy for the Welsh Language: *A living language: a language for living*.
- 1.2 Strategic Area 3 of the Strategy specifically addresses 'strengthening the position of the Welsh language in the community'. The aim of this study was to add to the Welsh Government's understanding of how the Welsh language is used in communities, and to assess whether the types of programmes funded by the Welsh Government to promote Welsh language use are meeting the needs of communities.
- 1.3 The research was intended to address the four main research questions below, whilst also considering wider factors:
  - What are the defining features of various typologies of communities in terms of their capacity to exist as sustainable Welsh-speaking language units?
  - What are the defining features of various typologies of communities in terms of their capacity to integrate non-Welsh speakers and Welsh learners?

- What are the 'tipping points' that trigger language change or language shift within different typologies of communities?
- Does the Welsh Government's approach to language planning, as outlined in the Welsh Language Strategy, provide the required impetus for change and sustainable linguistic vitality in communities across Wales?

1.4 In interpreting the research specification, specific attention was given to:

- analysis of factors that influence language use, such as context, language skills and language attitudes;
- gauging public opinion regarding opportunities to use Welsh in the community;
- contributing to the development of a typology framework to map the language profiles of communities, with the aim of assisting language planners to determine suitable interventions;
- offering practical policy recommendations to inform a community language strategy in Wales.

1.5 In order to achieve this aim and these objectives, six communities were selected in discussion with the Welsh Government to be included in the research study. Four communities (Cardigan, Bangor, Llanrwst and Ammanford) were selected on the basis that they had been/were part of purposeful Welsh Government planning to promote the Welsh language in communities. Two communities, Aberystwyth and Porthmadog, were chosen as examples of communities that had not received the same intensity of purposeful planning.

## **2. Methodology**

2.1 In order to reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of community language planning in Wales, a mixed methods approach was used in the study. The following four methodological methods were drawn upon:

- Focus Groups
- Street surveys
- Analysis and interpretation of secondary statistical data
- Monitoring and administrative data from the Welsh Government and their partners

2.2 30 focus groups were held (five in each community) with community groups based on the following categories:

- Parents with young children
- Young people
- Middle aged people
- Older people
- Welsh language learners

2.3 In addition, 638 street surveys were administered on high streets or in central places in the six communities.

2.4 Bangor University worked with Hywel M. Jones, Statiaith and Arad Research during the data collection process.

### **3. Key Findings**

3.1 According to the respondents, there are many opportunities to use the Welsh language within the six communities, although some gaps exist (for example activities for older young people). There was also awareness and use of programmes and activities supported by the Welsh Government to promote the Welsh language in communities.

3.2 Not everyone questioned in the six communities attended community activities. For many respondents, community interaction was based on day-to-day activity such as shopping and accessing services.

3.3 The language habit of using English in formal contexts was highlighted, e.g. when shopping and accessing public services. However, some individuals did look for opportunities to use the Welsh language in these situations.

3.4 According to the respondents, the education system influences the language practices of the communities in question. They referred specifically to how language habits established within schools influenced day-to-day language use patterns in the community.

3.5 There was evidence from all six communities that Welsh learners attempt to use the Welsh language in the community. However, many learners voiced frustration about the lack of informal community opportunities to practise their

Welsh language skills beyond activities specifically for learners.

- 3.6 Various sources were seen to be used to obtain information about Welsh language activities within the six communities. These included traditional methods (e.g. local newspapers (*papurau bro*) and social networks), as well as digital platforms (e.g. websites and social media).
- 3.7 In a number of cases, respondents expressed the view that urban centres have experienced a period of anglicisation whilst nearby villages have remained viable in terms of the Welsh language.

## **4. Conclusions**

- 4.1 The Welsh Government funds a number of programmes and activities to promote the Welsh language in the community. There was evidence in all six communities of awareness and use of these programmes, although there are gaps in individual communities.
- 4.2 The research shows a difference in the language composition of the communities in question, which suggests that a different intensity of planning is required to support the Welsh language at a community level. In this study, it was seen that some communities have day-to-day activities through the medium of Welsh, whilst those activities are rarer in other communities. It therefore appears that the principle of prioritising coverage and intensity of language planning programmes according to local needs is a valid one. However, it also appears that the level of support provided to the more precarious communities needs to be revised to ensure it responds to gaps in the existing provision.
- 4.3 No clear differences were seen between the communities that were part of purposeful planning from the Welsh Government and those that had not received the same level of intensive planning to promote the Welsh language in the community. However, there was evidence that the Welsh language continues to be in a vulnerable position in some communities that are part of purposeful Welsh Government planning.
- 4.4 There is evidence in this study of the need to increase the emphasis on supporting the Welsh language in day-to-day interaction, which happens beyond clubs and formal socialising, in order to normalise Welsh language

use on a community level.

- 4.5 The Welsh Government needs to consider further the indicator used to assess the vitality of the Welsh language on a community level in its Welsh Language Strategy, *A living language: a language for living*. Although the numbers attending Welsh language events is an important indicator, the wider daily use of the Welsh language in communities needs to be emphasised.

## **5. Recommendations**

- 5.1 Welsh Government to ensure that its language planning strategies and policies for the family, for education and for the workplace also give a central place to the use of Welsh as a community language.
- 5.2 Welsh Government to ensure that decisive steps are taken to strengthen the transition between education and the wider community through a range of appealing leisure activities for older young people.
- 5.3 Welsh Government to renew the emphasis on Welsh language use in daily interaction (for example language use in shops and when accessing public services), as well as Welsh language use in organised events in the community.
- 5.4 Welsh Government to take action to ensure a more detailed and comprehensive picture of language use patterns in relation to urban/rural tendencies.
- 5.5 Welsh Government to ensure purposeful and effective methods of sharing current information about Welsh language and bilingual community activities, in order to reach the widest possible audiences.
- 5.6 Welsh Government to take further action to facilitate the participation of Welsh learners in settings other than those designated as opportunities for learners.
- 5.7 Welsh Government to develop a more meaningful indicator than the one that currently exists to measure the effectiveness of its strategy to promote Welsh language use in communities.

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