

Aberystwyth Business School

Symposium 2021

Regenerating rural
communities after COVID-19:
challenges and opportunities

Symposium Proceedings
23rd June



Editorial

The symposium organising team would like to welcome you to the first CLaRE and Regional Centres of Expertise (Cymru) Resilient Communities symposium held at the Aberystwyth Business School. We are delighted to welcome presenters and symposium delegates from across the world.

The symposium has the following objectives:

- To provide opportunities for Aberystwyth Business School (and Aberystwyth University) staff: to share their research with School stakeholders and contribute to the culture of research and enterprise at the School.
- To complement the CLaRE Working Paper Journal' and to generate activity/working papers to be published in the journal.
- To contribute to a REF evidence-based research culture, in particular to use the symposium to develop potential REF case studies
- To provide opportunities for Aberystwyth Business School (and Aberystwyth University) research students to share their research, receive feedback and contribute to the culture of research at the School.
- To create opportunities for the application/implementation of Aberystwyth Business School and wider Aberystwyth University research and enterprise activity in industry

The papers delivered at this year's symposium consider a wide variety of subject matter from literature to online learning, from food fraud to theatre, and from farm tourism in Wales to the impact of Covid-19 on a small high street. We hope you enjoy listening to the presentations, participating in the discussions and reading the abstracts in the symposium proceedings (please note the abstracts are reproduced in symposium programme order). We wish to thank our keynote speaker Paul Byard (FSG Tool & Die Limited) for his valued input to the symposium.

Symposium Organising Team

Sophie Bennett-Gillison, Julio Munoz, Lyndon Murphy

June 2021

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Abstracts

COVID-19 and The Care Society

Guy Hamilton Evans Executive Director of Cymdethas Gofal/The Care Society

The Care Society are a registered charity and company limited by guarantee, providing housing, homelessness and support services across Mid Wales. We are a progressive organisation delivering essential services across rural Wales, helping improve people's quality of life and addressing increasing numbers of social issues. With an experienced Board, Management and Staff, we have the enterprise and desire to carry the organisation forward and develop services to meet the changing needs of vulnerable people in our community. COVID-19 has had a significant impact upon charities such as the Care Society, in the past year, for example we have expanded our temporary accommodation provision by 59%. While the pandemic has created greater recognition of the care sector overall there have been many negative consequences which our Society, team of staff and volunteers have been met with such as low levels of staff morale, antisocial behaviour and a recruitment crisis.

This presentation by Guy Hamilton Evans Executive Director of Cymdethas Gofal/The Care Society details how the rural mid Wales Housing and Support charity has navigated and mitigated the impact of Covid -19. The presentation also provides an overview of the political and socio- economic factors that have influenced the delivery and increased demand for services together with future challenges and opportunities.

Reaching new audiences in lockdown: Literature Wales' Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre

Leusa Llewelyn Head of Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre (Literature Wales)

2020 would have seen year-long celebrations for Tŷ Newydd's 30th birthday, including gatherings in the garden and world-class courses tutored by some of Wales' best writers, including one of the centre's founders, former National Poet of Wales – Gillian Clarke. Instead, the doors were locked on the 20th of March, the programme for the year was postponed, and Literature Wales staff started planning how we could continue to offer writer development opportunities and writing for well-being experiences to audiences remotely.

Some of Tŷ Newydd's main unique selling points are its location looking out over Ceredigion Bay, the atmosphere of sharing meals around the big oak table in the communal dining room, the home-made food prepared by the ever-present resident chef in our warm farmhouse kitchen. What happens then when our residential centre has to close unexpectedly? In this short session we will explore the challenges and opportunities of reaching new audiences for Literature Wales activity in lockdown – and what long-term impact the pandemic will have on audiences and their behaviours post Covid.

A Writer's Lockdown

Matthew Francis, Dept of English and Creative Writing, Aberystwyth University

Ceredigion has traditionally been seen as a remote region of the UK, cut off by the Cambrian Mountains. This remoteness can be frustrating, but it also has its positive side: it has helped, for example, to keep the area one of the safest places to live during the pandemic. For writers, remoteness may make them feel isolated from the mainstream of cultural life (though that has not in the past been particularly evident, with much literary activity centred around the county's two universities), but it is also a stimulus to creativity.

This paper deals with one writer's experience of the creative stimulus provided by lockdown. It is not necessarily typical, since I did not suffer from many of the downsides experienced by others. Nevertheless, being cut off from many normal social and professional interactions can be valuable to artists, and is something they actively seek. In this case, forced to spend more time writing, I became much more productive. Access to libraries was not the problem anticipated, as much material is now available online. In any case, research itself can be time-consuming, and some of it is best postponed till later.

I conclude that we need to learn from experiences like this one. Social contacts are obviously desirable, but those who are able to keep them under control and allow themselves the psychological space to work may find unexpected rewards.

On lives, on learning: Online – A study of the lived experiences of stakeholders in the education sector in mid-Wales during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Key words:

COVID-19, Education, Rural Schools, Connectivity, Resilience, Adaptability, Disadvantage.

The closure of schools to the general population as a result of COVID-19 lockdown measures, from March 2020, resulted in numerous challenges for stakeholders. Pupils experiencing limited contact with teachers, curriculum provision varied from school to school, take-up of 'home learning' was uncertain, and disadvantages as a result of the increased significance, and exacerbation, of existing and historically un-signified disadvantages, all during a time of significant public and personal upheaval for stakeholders meant that the everyday experiences of stakeholders were radically transformed. Drawing on interviews with key stakeholders associated with 5 rural schools across mid Wales - located within the counties of Ceredigion and Powys, and educating c.3,500 pupils from 3 to 19 years old - including senior leadership team members, and parents, focus group interviews with teachers and educational support staff, and survey responses submitted by teaching staff, parents and pupils, the data highlights the lived experiences of these key stakeholders during the pandemic, and their experiences, including the challenges faced by each in the transition to, initially, teaching and learning from afar, and in regard to later blended learning approaches, and the opportunities which stem from their responses. The strong desire to ensure that all students ensured "meaningful progress" (Welsh Government, 2020b: 8) throughout the period, despite the substantial challenges posed to pupils and teachers in rural areas in the pursuit of such aims, highlights and the creative responses adopted by stakeholders in an attempt to surmount them.

Key issues highlighted by stakeholders included the increased significance of socio-economic considerations in regard to the educational well-being of learners, especially when education

was provided from beyond the school walls and the significance of rural infrastructure, especially in terms of connectivity, and the lack thereof, and its effects on pupils' and staff experiences of education. Building on the significance of unequal access to technologies, understanding of tasks, access to additional resources, and differences in the amount of parent time available to support learning, as highlighted by the Royal Society DELVE Initiative, our research highlights the significance of issues surrounding parental employment, increased economic instability, and access to resources – especially technological - and the increased pertinence of many of these issues within rural communities within the context of educating during COVID. These issues were clearly noted as being of significance by educators and parents. Unchecked, they posed an increasingly significant threat to the educational disadvantage of learners during the pandemic. For example, the precarity of numerous stakeholders was highlighted in the data. Significantly, 42% of parental survey respondents noted that they and their children had experienced difficulty with connectivity.

The burdens on stakeholders were significant, and clearly exacerbated by issues associated with rurality, yet numerous responses were developed to respond to the challenges of the pandemic. These responses created opportunities for select stakeholders, yet, as numerous responders highlighted, a 'one size' response to the myriad of challenges faced during the pandemic simply did not exist. As a result, we chart and evaluate both the challenges and responses adopted by stakeholders in the response to COVID-19.

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What are the priorities of consumers and theatre Venue Managers in rural Wales when returning to live events?

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Key words:

Events, Theatre, Covid-19, Consumer Behaviour, Venue Management, Rural, Wales

This paper will discuss some of the priorities of consumers regarding the return to live events in order to compare with that which venue managers intend to deliver in practice. There is a specific focus on theatre venues as there have been research projects focusing on the arts sector such as Indigo (2021). The examples to be discussed will provide the perspective of rural venues in Wales which have not been explicitly differentiated in such studies i.e. there are differentiating factors between city venues and rural venues.

It is important to note that in addition to organisations conducting audience surveys there is a wealth of guidance and information in the public domain such as Creu Cymru (2021) who, since the start of the Covid-19 crisis, have worked to support and provide advice and services to their members. Additionally, there are useful online resources such as the Covid-19 sector benchmark (TRG Arts, 2021).

The research methods adopted are: desk (analysing existing consumer survey data) and primary (conducting qualitative interviews with Venue Managers).

The venue managers and organisers' priorities when surveying attendee satisfaction ranked 'staff helpfulness' highest (Jaimangal-Jones *et al.*, 2018) who may now prioritise adaptations implemented by managers due to Covid-19. The perceived and prior experiences of consumers are important to consider as "being an audience member is an emotional risk, as well as a financial one" (Pitts, 2014 p28). The categorised risks associated with cultural consumption are 'Functional' (being bored and a waste of time and money); 'Social' (being seen in a place that is 'incompatible with our perception of how other view us'); 'Psychological' (being at an event incompatible with our self-image); and 'Economic' (spending money and leisure time on the activity) (Colbert, 2003). It is likely that the return to live events will provide a different dynamic to these previous findings. Indigo (2021) lists the five reassurances for audiences when returning to events as 'health & safety', 'access', 'financial', 'social' and 'brand'. Adopting the 'See It Safely Toolkit' (UK Theatre, 2021) is a method for venues to show audiences that they comply with the latest government guidelines.

This working paper is still undertaking primary data collection. Preliminary findings note that many rural Welsh arts venues have been shielded from economic harm through government funding, but that challenges remain, particularly in relation to the 'lag' between venue readiness and the preparation of artistic work to fill available slots; the changing of venues' duty of care to their audiences; and the regulation of audiences' and visitors' access to and use of venue spaces and facilities.

The larger capacity arts centre seemed to prioritise brand reassurance more than the smaller theatre e.g. communication strategies via venue posters/signage, social media and 'meet and greet' staff at the entrance. The larger venue (arts centre) prioritised operational and scheduling factors due to its diverse range of activities. Both venues emphasised the importance of social factors in relation to group ticketing and associated seating arrangements.

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The impact of Covid19 on the small high street

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Key words: High-street, Local economy, covid19, Regeneration, small business, depedestrianisation.

This study is the first and second part of a greater longitudinal piece of research into the regeneration of a rural town and the affect coronavirus has on that regeneration. Holywell in North Wales is undergoing a regeneration project and pre-coronavirus small businesses were interviewed to understand their views on Brexit and how this will affect ongoing regeneration. The research has now shifted in focus to coronavirus as the main topic with Brexit as a secondary area of impact. Initially interviews were conducted face to face, however during covid they were conducted remotely, either via telephone or Zoom call.

The high street businesses have changed their views overall at this point regarding current impact and for the future. Whereas before coronavirus hit the area, they were upbeat about the regeneration, believing that it would breathe new life into the town and attract tourists, they now believe original plans will not be viable post Covid. Many businesses are struggling, with total or partial closure negatively impacting their revenue streams to the point that they may not recover.

The research continued with interviews of the same businesses after 6- and 9months intervals to assess the short-term impact of lockdown and the subsequent easing of restrictions as life returns towards normality and Brexit is once again higher up on the agenda. During the later stages of the 2021 lockdown, several new businesses have opened, suggesting that regeneration efforts albeit different from initially planned maybe come viable again.

A final set of interviews with the same respondents is planned a further 9 months on to understand medium term effects of both coronavirus and Brexit. An implication of this research is that the situation is quickly evolving, which would open up for future research to assess the longer term impacts on the town.

Influencing community regeneration policy in Wales post-Covid19– a discourse analysis

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Key words:

Local economic development, discourse analysis, post-Covid19, Wales

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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Farm Tourism in Wales: operators, impacts and the potential impact of Covid 19 and Brexit.

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Key words: Farm diversification, farm tourism, rural tourism, impacts / benefits of farm tourism, changing environments, rural resilience

Farm tourism has been promoted as a diversification strategy in aesthetically pleasing yet less favourable areas for agriculture across Europe such as Wales by the EU for the last three decades. During this time it has emerged into a professional sector.

While many studies have identified the motivations for such diversification into tourism few have addressed the impact that farm tourism has had at a farm household level or on the wider rural area. Neither have studies examined who operates farm tourism businesses in the twenty-first century and how diverse groups benefit.

These omissions and questions are addressed using qualitative and quantitative data collected for Dr Mandy Talbot's 2015 PhD: Farm Tourism in Wales: a New Peasantry Perspective.

The paper / presentation will also examine how the changing environment in which farm tourism operates could potentially impact the sector and its contribution to rural resilience with particular reference to Covid 19 and Brexit.

Key findings:

Primary findings from the PhD

There are three distinct groups operating farm tourism businesses. These include: lifestyle movers from the city, and those diversifying into tourism on small farms (<200 acres) and big farms (200 acres plus). Farm tourism benefitted households in these groups in different ways.

Farm tourism businesses have had a positive impact on the rural resilience collectively, with notable benefits including job creation, the development of a professional sector that contributes to the distinctiveness of the region, green tourism products, the creation of social capital, and plans by 54% operators to invest in further growth of their businesses.

Desk base research also examines the changing operating environment of farm tourism throughout the 21st century with particular reference to the recent Covid 19 pandemic and Brexit and how these events might impact the performance and development of the sector.

World Travel and Tourism Council Figures (2021) highlight that domestic tourism is predicted to recover to 2019 levels by 2023 and UK media headlines indicate many tourists are travelling to rural areas suggesting that there is buoyancy in trade in the sector.

At the same time Dr Talbot's PhD research (2015) found that one third of farm tourism business had benefitted for EU support for farm tourism (e.g. through the rural and regional development funding) and others had benefitted from being located near to attractions that had received EU support to develop tourist facilities e.g. Coed y Brenin Forestry Site. The question is raised to what extent will similar support be available going forwards and what the impact of new funding regimes will be on the farm tourism sector and its contribution to rural resilience.

Food fraud in a pandemic

Louise Manning, Professor of Agrifood and Supply Chain Security

Keywords: food, fraud, substitution, hacking, ransomware, crime

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the surface a number of instances of supply chain fraud. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was in short supply at the start of the pandemic and also was being routinely checked for compliance with standards that would ensure safety in the context of a contagious virus for which there was no vaccine. Quality control checks identified multiple batches of PPE that did not comply with specification. This gave rise to the question of whether the PPE had been non-conforming for some time when the supply chains had worked on trust or problems only arose during a pandemic. The National Crime Agency (May 2020) stated: "There continue to be cases of suspected fraud involving the supply of PPE, both in terms of large-scale procurement contracts and in online scams relating to sales direct to the public."

The National Food Crime Unit define food crime (seven types) as serious fraud and related criminality in food supply chains. These types of food crime are theft, illegal processing, waste diversion, adulteration, substitution, misrepresentation and document fraud. This presentation considers data on food fraud incidents in the UK during COVID. The increase in 2020 for unauthorised ingredients found in food products is almost exclusively due to additives (e.g. melamine) used to enhance the apparent protein content of commercially-traded soy protein and pea-protein, all originating from China. The pandemic has also seen a number of ransomware attacks across national infrastructure, and the business sector, but specifically in food businesses impacting on already vulnerable food supply chains. Vulnerability has increased during the pandemic for a number of reasons including: reduction of regulatory oversight, no-visitor policies, financial pressure, supply chain disruption and spot purchasing in supply chains.

The economic impact of COVID-19 on Ceredigion in Wales (working title)

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Key words: COVID-19, economic-impact, pandemic, poverty, vulnerability, supply-chain, unemployment.

The world is going through an unprecedented period in its history with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns. As countries around the globe went into lockdown to contain the spread of the virus, business and economic activities were brought to a standstill. As a result of that, businesses and households in Wales and Ceredigion have been adversely affected in several ways. Many individuals have either temporarily or permanently lost their jobs. One of the most important implications of this is that aggregate consumption is likely to fall as household earnings fall. Consequently, the demand for goods and services are falling, and the trend is expected to continue in the future.

Some lockdown measures put in place to contain the virus have curtailed economic activities, particularly for workers in jobs where it is not feasible to work from home. Business activities in human contact-intensive sectors such as hospitality, high street retail, and tourism came to a halt during the lockdown. The self-employment and gig-economy sectors have their share of economic woes. The above areas are a significant and vital source of private sector employment in Ceredigion. Tourism which is one of the leading business sectors in the region has taken an unprecedented hit during this period. Compared to other counties in Wales, Ceredigion has a high self-employment rate of 14.5% against Wales' 8.8% average. The self-employed (both part- and full-time) often encounter eligibility issues for government financial

support schemes during the lockdown. Also, more deprived areas are at risk of suffering more from health inequalities and the adverse impact of the pandemic. The concern is that non-metropolitan areas like Ceredigion will be weakened economically because of sectoral/occupational composition of the area. The cumulative effects will lead to further divergence in growth trajectories of the region and an increase in spatial inequality.

The context-specific impact of the pandemic resulting from the interplay of local factors such as sectoral composition of the local economy, transmission patterns, age and health characteristics of an area necessitate studying the effects of the pandemic at a local level. UK-wide studies have been designed to be representative at a country level but not at the regional or local levels. These studies are unlikely to reflect details of region-specific effects of the pandemic in diverse areas. We are proposing to investigate how the current pandemic impacted on economic activities of both businesses and households within Ceredigion. Broadly, we intend to have two projects – one focusing on businesses and another on families.

Key research objectives

- To explore the immediate adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses and households within Ceredigion County
- To gather relevant evidence linking vulnerability, poverty, and population dynamics to the pandemic
- To gather relevant evidence that will inform policymaking in short to long term for Ceredigion

Data collection

Our primary source of data for this research is through the survey of businesses and households in Ceredigion county. The questionnaires are designed to address economic challenges on businesses and families in this area due to the pandemic.

Key issues to be addressed include business performance, adaptability, employment, supply chain, within the main business sectors in Ceredigion. Similarly, the household survey questions will look at issues such as the impact of the pandemic on income, work patterns, redundancies, health, self-employment, among others. The survey does not contain questions that are likely to identify the respondents. Also, the data will be anonymised, and the outcome of the analysis will not be traceable to individual businesses and households.

Impact Development

The outcome of this project will be useful to the public policymakers for the county. Ceredigion Council will benefit from the result of the study in a number of ways:

- It is expected that the results of the study will inform the Council's response to the impacts of the pandemic. They will suggest approaches to alleviate the adverse effects of the pandemic.
- More broadly, the results will inform the Council's long-term policy on critical areas such as poverty, sustainability, and resilience.
- We expect that businesses and small and medium enterprises will benefit from the findings of our research project.
- Other players in the third sector, such as Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Charities working in the county will find the outcome helpful. Mainly, those working with families and deprived areas will see the household survey's outcome as a source of vital information for their work.