A yw'n cyfrif? | Does it count?

Weathering The Storms

The Hidden Value of Community Anchor Organisations in Wales

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Cymraeg

Background and rationale
Cefndir a rhesymwaith

- Productive Margins: Regulating for Engagement (ESRC)
- First 'Storm': phasing out of Communities First (2002-18)

- Co-researchers: Eva Elliott and Allan Herbert; Wiserd

Methodology | Methodoleg

- Interviews with leaders/staff in 9 community anchor organisations across Wales
  - rural Anchors
  - some ex-Communities First

- Focus groups (part of Adult Learners Week July 2019)

- Workshop intended in March 2020 but....**second storm** = COVID-19

- Online workshops in September 2020

Timing has worked out well!
        - Renewed focus on communities b/c of COVID?

The literature | Y llenyddiaeth

- 'Third force organisations'; 'neighbourhood regeneration organisations'

- Thake: "a mature operational culture and an extensive body of experience"
  - urban
  - still a broad range of actors (community councils, schools, health centres)
  - "messy, incoherent picture"

- *Firm Foundations* (2004)
  - <u>abstracted</u> concept of community; Raymond Williams: "warmly persuasive"
  - rather than a set of interrelated, contested relations - ''full of awkward elbows' (Yeo)

Findings | Canlyniadau

Central characteristics of Community Anchor Organisations

- Communities they serve are locally meaningful; not necessarily formal administrative boundaries

- Buildings, and how they operate, are important symbols of identity

- Independent of the state, run by and accountable to the community

- Partners with, and challengers of, the State

- Values led; mission shapes everything they do: strategy, income generation, governance, staffing, use of buildings

- They hold contextual knowledge and expertise nurtured over the years; informs the ABCD that's usually a core practice

- Often have a narrow or single focus initially; evolves, broadens and diversifies

- Central to a web of relationships: internally (local people); externally (other third/public sector organisations)

Findings | Canlyniadau

Relationships and networks

- Mixed experiences of working w/ public sector
  - Social prescribing - productive relationships emerging; community education too
  - Despite key individual r/ships….
  - ….overall LAs fail to understand what Anchors do, their values

- Tendency persists to see Anchors as subservient

- Potential for ideas to be 'colonised' an occupational hazard of working w/ public sector. Can co-production mitigate this?

- Any power that Anchors retain: due to their independence, distinctiveness to public sector *practices*

- Key element of Anchors' identities shaped by what/whom they are *not*

- Weak collective identity among Anchors in Wales

Findings | Canlyniadau

How Anchors operate

- Numerous/diverse funding requirements challenges core mission, values

- Various organisational structures, usually flat

- Culture of delegation and dispersed styles of decision-making. Capacity building at all levels, roles

- Leadership = key to success: 'heroic' – dispersed – nurtured throughout the organisation

- Strong commitment to employing local people, flexible working conditions, local foundational economy

- Buildings provide a strong, visual sense of local identity and more; can be draining, energy-consuming

- Recognise their key role in developing confidence in people to participate in society; pathways to participation
    - (sometimes by stealth) leading to people taking on leadership roles, elected representation; or taking on forms of formal education, training and employment

Future Directions? | Tuag at y dyfodol?

- Need for a clearer community policy in Welsh Government and development of the relationship between Community Anchor Organisations and other anchor institutions

- Development and recognition of the collective power, value and voice of Community Anchor Organisations (see BCT manifesto and launch of Community Movement Cymru) with resource to develop *collective* capacity.

- Easing and clarity of powers for community ownership and control of buildings and land (particularly post COVID-19).

- Development of Foundational Economy pilots that explicitly draw on the experience, resources and capacities of Community Anchor Organisations.

- Recognition of the distinct role that Community Anchor Organisations could play in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act