



Ag tacú le ‘nuachainteoirí’: Ag tógáil Líonraí agus Pobal Gaeilge taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht

Supporting ‘new speakers’: Building Irish Language Networks and Communities outside the Gaeltacht

Cruinniú geallsealbhóirí /Stakeholders’ meeting

Dé hAoine 14 Deireadh Fómhair 2016/Friday 14th October 2016

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath/Trinity College, Dublin

Bhí sé mar aidhm ag an gcruinniú seo deis plé a thabhairt do ghrúpaí atá ag cur na Gaeilge chun cinn lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht agus a oibríonn den chuid is mó le ‘nuachainteoirí’ na teanga, daoine a úsáideann an Ghaeilge go rialta ach nár tógadh le Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht. Chuige sin thugamar cuireadh do Líonraí Gaeilge agus do ghrúpaí eile ar spéis leo cur isteach ar stádas mar Bhaile Seirbhíse Gaeltachta teacht le chéile chun na dúshláin agus na deiseanna a bhaineann leis an tionscnamh sin a aithint. Bhí ionadaithe ó Foras na Gaeilge agus Údarás na Gaeltachta i láthair chun cúlra na Líonraí/na mBailte Seirbhíse a phlé agus taithí na pleanála teanga sa Ghaeltacht a roinnt. Labhair ionadaithe ó Ghlor na nGael agus ón Droichead i mBéal Feirste leis an gcruinniú chomh maith agus rinne an tOll. Colin Williams ó Ollscoil Cardiff cur i láthair faoi thaithí na Breataine Bige.

This meeting aimed to provide an opportunity for discussion to groups that are promoting Irish outside the Gaeltacht and that work for the most part with ‘new speakers’ of Irish, people who speak Irish regularly but were not raised with Irish in the Gaeltacht. To that end we invited representative of Irish Language Networks and groups interested in applying for status as Gaeltacht Service Towns to meet and identify and discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with this initiative. Representatives of Foras na Gaeilge and Údarás na Gaeltachta were present to explain the background to the Networks/Gaeltacht Service Towns and to share experience of language planning in the Gaeltacht. Representatives of Glór na nGael and An Droichead in Belfast also addressed the meeting and Prof. Colin Williams of Cardiff University discussed the Welsh experience.



TUARASCÁIL/REPORT

John Walsh & Bernadette O'Rourke

Introduction

John Walsh explained the aims of the meeting and gave an overview of the *Research Report on New Speakers of Irish* (2015). Bernadette O'Rourke explained the COST Action and new speaker network and explained that there is an emphasis on engaging with policymakers and language activists. One of the aims of the network was to assess how its work could help practitioners and see how best practice could be shared in other contexts. A short questionnaire was shared with participants to assess their expectations before the meeting.

For many of the participants a key reason for attending the workshop was that it provided an opportunity to meet with other language planners. Many also pointed out that it gave them an opportunity to meet people who work directly with new speakers in their communities and to share good practice. Many also found it a useful opportunity to meet the representative of Foras na Gaeilge and to engage in discussion. As well as providing a forum for discussion, many also referred explicitly to the expectation that recommendations could be made on how they could put Irish language networks in place. A reason for accepting the invitation to participate in the workshop was that as language officers, they were dealing with these questions in their everyday roles. The participants at the workshop all saw themselves as having central roles in putting in place a strategy on how to set up a network in their local areas.

In the questionnaire participants were asked to identify what challenges they thought were involved in promoting Irish outside the Gaeltacht. Many referred to the lack of confidence among speakers in the community as a major obstacle as well as low levels of competence in Irish. Others referred to the low presence of Irish in many of the communities where they were working. They also alluded to the lack of physical spaces in which learners would feel comfortable and able to express their needs. A key challenge also was getting younger age groups involved and catering specifically for their needs. Despite these challenges, the participants involved in the workshop also saw Irish networks as a positive initiative and as something that would increase the potential for Irish speakers throughout the country. They saw it as a means of bringing the language back to the people and as a means of encouraging its broader use. They referred to opportunities which could be tapped into such as sport, music and cultural activities, all of which could be done through the medium of Irish. They also saw the initiative as a way of providing learning opportunities for children whose parents were supportive of the language and were actively seeking provision for their children. They saw the Irish network initiative as a way of re-thinking what spaces can be identified or created to facilitate those within the communities to hear Irish and to speak it.

Of the fourteen participants at the workshop, twelve said they were familiar with the concept of 'new speaker' and had heard it used before. Some saw it a useful term because it was seen to give recognition to learners and people who had taken up the language. Others said it was useful because for them it was easier to understand and a clearer term than *Gaeilgeoir* (literally 'Irish speaker' but a term that can carry other often conflicting meanings) or L2. They saw it as giving a better status to Irish speakers outside of the Gaeltacht. While some others said it was useful they also expressed some concern that the Irish speaking community might be divided up in this way. They expressed the fear

that it might create a split between Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht speakers. One person considered it relatively useful as long as it was not over-used and not rendered meaningless as has happened to the term 'globalisation'.

Presentations

Representatives of the networks and the representative from Foras na Gaeilge were asked to give short presentations about their work with new speakers, both from a language planning perspective and linked to the activities in their respective communities.

Foras na Gaeilge

Dr Gearóid Trimble of Foras na Gaeilge gave an overview of the language planning process. Under the Gaeltacht Act 2012 and the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language* Foras na Gaeilge was responsible for implementation of a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the number of Irish speakers, in particular the designation of Gaeltacht Service Towns (towns of strategic importance for language planning either near or within the Gaeltacht) the establishment of Irish Language Networks and the roll-out of countywide Language Plans in counties containing a Gaeltacht area. The aims of the initiatives are to develop and support opportunities for language socialisation and to enable communities that have the potential to develop a critical mass of Irish speakers to foster socialisation through Irish. Five Irish Language Networks have been selected under the Gaeltacht Act and 22 Irish Language Community Schemes are already funded by Foras na Gaeilge.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

Máire Ní Mhainín of Údarás na Gaeltachta spoke about her organisation's experience of developing language planning in the Gaeltacht and how that experience can inform language planning elsewhere. The concept of language planning in the Gaeltacht has focused on preserving and supporting those communities that speak Irish as the community language. Less attention has been devoted to significant numbers of people in the Gaeltacht who do not speak Irish or are learning it, potential new speakers. There has been a campaign to create more accessible learning activities to help such people integrate into existing language communities. The language planning process in the Gaeltacht highlights a number of challenges including its high dependency on volunteers and the need to convert sympathetic non-daily users in the Gaeltacht to daily users. There is also the issue of mastering proficiency in Irish; traditionally learners were treated with a degree of impatience and annoyance in the Gaeltacht so it is worthwhile to explore the potential of developing new speakers in these areas.

Irish Language Networks

There followed brief presentations by representatives of the five Irish Language Networks that have been designated under the Gaeltacht Act 2012. Other organisations also contributed their insights.

Gaeilge Locha Riach

Eoghan Mac Cormaic spoke on behalf of Gaeilge Locha Riach (Loughrea, Co. Galway). It was established in 1999 to co-ordinate a campaign for the establishment of a Gaelscoil in the town. The area was Irish-speaking until the early 20th Century and there were relics of Irish in local speech and many older local residents had been educated through Irish. 40 shops took part in a scheme to promote Irish and erected signage if staff were able to speak the language. In 2001 they employed their first Development Officer and achieved funding under the Scéim Pobail Gaeilge (Community Irish

Language Scheme) of Foras na Gaeilge. This funded continued until 2016 but was then discontinued. They have produced bilingual newsletters and other local activities and expanded their space to open a library. Without continued funding these new facilities are at risk.

An Clár as Gaeilge

Donall Ó Loingsigh spoke on behalf of An Clár as Gaeilge (Ennis, Co. Clare). He pointed out that the initiative stemmed from the town's success in the Glór na nGael competition as well as the strong reputation for Gaeilge in the town. The workload was large so it was decided to set up permanent administration centre with a full-time employee. The key tenets linked to the role were to:

1. Enhance the status of Irish in the county and to make sure that local authorities were able to provide services in Irish as well as making the public aware of such services
2. Encourage Irish speakers to use the language more frequently and to increase take-up in the use of Irish for public services.
3. Focus on young people to generate enthusiasm for Irish and take Irish out of the classroom.
4. Increase the visibility of the language, particularly in the town of Ennis through a proper policy of public signage.
5. Use of Irish in the private sector such as the promotion of shopping in Irish in Ennis.

Donall Ó Loingsigh agreed to share the template with other areas where Irish Language Networks were being developed.

Muintir Chrónáin

Brian Ó Gaibhín spoke on behalf of Muintir Chrónáin which is located in Clondalkin in west Dublin. Due to local Gaelscoileanna a new generation of Irish speakers had been created but the challenge was to create opportunities for them to use it on a daily basis. In the 1980s a committee was formed to promote Irish and an Irish language centre, Áras Chrónáin, was set up in the heart of the village. The aim of the local group is to ensure that whatever they do with Irish, it is not only good but better than anything else going on locally in order to attract as many people as possible to take part. Muintir Chrónáin have representation on various organisations and councils such as South Dublin Chamber of Commerce, sporting groups and youth groups. Continuity of efforts is very important but their biggest challenge is funding.

Forbairt Feirste

Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh and Pádraig Ó Tiarnaigh addressed the meeting on behalf of Forbairt Feirste in west Belfast. Forbairt Feirste is based on two of the five poorest wards in the North of Ireland. Irish language initiatives have been active in the area since the 1960s and there has been a lot of grassroots activity within any support from the state until recently. There has been an exponential rise in the social use Irish in social, sporting and youth clubs but less focus on the sociolinguistic dynamics. Various capital projects in Belfast have included the west of the city but there is a need to work out how to maximise the sociolinguistic benefit of such projects as there has been an absence of language planning to date. Forbairt Feirste has prepared a discussion document and has brought

together local stakeholders to identify their priorities and needs. Their aim is to build a language action plan that will be subject to cyclical monitoring. Everyone is now on board but there is no funding available from Foras na Gaeilge to drive it forward.

Carn Tóchair

Liam Ó Flanagan spoke on behalf of the Carn Tóchair project in Co. Derry. Faced with socioeconomic deprivation in the 1990s the community came together and decided to use the Irish language as the main driver of development. They don't use the term 'new speakers' as the break in the chain of transmission is very small. These are not entirely new communities of Irish speakers as the census of 1901 shows that many people's grandparents were themselves native speakers. Therefore this is a former Gaeltacht area that is on its way back. They identified Irish-medium education as the tool to create vibrant populations of new speakers. Former pupils of the school came back to teach there and to work in the community, leading to greater community cohesion. They purchased the local post office business as a community enterprise and opened a bookshop and library service there. They also strongly emphasise sustainability in their community development efforts, have developed an organic farm and promote Irish language cultural tourism in the area.

Glór na nGael

Frainc Mac Cionnaith of Glór na nGael spoke about the language planning issues that have come to the fore as a result of the current process. As a national co-ordinating organisation the details of their role in the language planning process have not been made entirely clear. Glór na nGael's ongoing work with community groups has contributed to development of several projects being carried out today. In relation to the two questions posed by Colin Williams (see below), Mr Mac Cionnaith had the following comments:

- How committed and engaged are the community groups?
 1. Some groups fully understand the integration of community development and business development and language development;
 2. The potential benefits of the projects are often flying under the radar of the business community.
- What would it take to realise these initiatives?
 1. Leadership: the Irish Language Networks need to be developed and led;
 2. Broad support across the community: they need full community buy-in
 3. Investment.

An Droichead

Pól Deeds, director of An Droichead Irish language centre in South Belfast also addressed the meeting. An Droichead is an example of a successful and sustainable local Irish language initiative. Dr Deeds said that their experience is fairly typical: a small group of parents wanted to develop a Gaelscoil and then realised that it would take more to develop Irish speaking community. An Droichead developed significantly with the assistance of multiple funders but there was a danger of mission drift due to the variety of funding sources. By 2013 they were concerned about their strategic goals; many didn't relate strongly enough to the Irish language so they were overhauled to reflect the core aim. An

Droichead engages in community building work and outreach. Their centre is an Irish language development organisation and rings of other activities radiate out from the centre.

Presentation by Colin Williams

Prof Colin Williams then addressed the meeting. Copies of his position paper had already been circulated to participants along with copies of the report on new speakers of Irish (see Appendix). Prof Williams said that good ideas about language planning arise from concerned and convicted people, not just from governments or funders, but he recognised that government support is essential for larger issues such as institution building, legitimisation and training. Ostensibly we are about promoting our language, but neoliberal forces make us consider so many other things and there is a huge temptation to chase funding opportunities, he said, just to keep our language-related organisations going. It serves our interests to take good ideas and good practice on language management and to fashion them in such a way that they can appeal to public servants and decision-makers with power. In this way one of our priorities should be to influence people who can release resources and legitimise projects, which although they include a language-related element, can also be justified as contributing to the mainstream of government thinking and programme development in a wide variety of policy fields. We need the support of civil servants and politicians to turn what is often seen as a private 'minority' interest into a generic public good. Language revitalisation is in the public interest; it is not about excluding a section of the population, but improving the quality of life of many in society based on something that is already there. In the case of the Irish language, it is engrained in this island and nowhere else.

Prof Williams then turned to the case of Wales and discussed the background to the *Mentrau Iaith* local language initiatives. A study in 2013 concluded that most of the *Mentrau* had remained grant-dependent agencies. As long as they met government targets, they were granted more money; they regularly achieved outputs but not necessarily outcomes. Some had been transformed into essentially commercial operations and had lost sight of the language as their cardinal priority and justification. For a long time they had existed as diverse agencies often overlapping with other bodies in some of their work and as a consequence little integrated language planning was coordinated at the national level. However, more recent public investment threats had encouraged all 22 *Mentrau* organisations to co-ordinate and plan more effectively. The lesson of this is that there needs to be a national co-ordinating body for community language development with clout to anticipate changed behaviour or to release energies so that changed behaviour can be tracked.

By 2012 there was a common perception that large numbers of new speakers had reached a high level of proficiency but then did not continue to engage in Welsh-medium activities and networks. This was so because many of the new speakers were not interested in conventional native speaker activities or cultural networks whether music, sport or poetry competitions, they simply wanted to live some of their lives through Welsh. The government backed the idea that safe spaces that were multipurpose could help promote the social use of Welsh. They could provide space for various activities through Welsh and consequently a limited number of new centres for adults with cafés, bars, meeting rooms and conference facilities were established.

With regard to the Welsh government target of creating one million speakers of Welsh in Wales by 2050, Prof Williams said that the figure is an ambitious target if it refers only to residents of Wales and not all Welsh speakers wherever they live. But for the threshold target to apply to Welsh residents something like 1.8 million speakers were needed to be produced so as to compensate for the large number of people who move away or who through marriage patterns do not necessarily reproduce the language within their families. Prof Williams said that language activists had embarrassed the government into setting the target, a reminder of why such organisations are vital. He thought that the target was less important than the actual embodied use of the language, however. Prof Williams said that we need more ideas and convincing arguments that appeal to the majority, who constitute a large part of the electorate and the parents of children who attend Welsh medium education and thus are the lifeblood for supporting and spending money on the language. We have to convince them that what we are about is the public good of society. Public servants are often too busy to be entirely creative; the creative energy is more likely to come from community activists/intellectuals, and it is public servants who fashion some of these ideas into government programmes. Language planning is too often content with changing attitudes, not behaviour. It is not really just attitudes and values, but daily expectations and behaviour that needs to change and these are dependent on infrastructural investment. Where possible we need to wean ourselves away from the initial and overly-dependent support from government to become self-sustaining language revival movements and thereby augment our capacity to be more flexible, purposeful and reactive.

Discussion

In advance of the meeting the following discussion questions were circulated by Prof Williams to participants:

1. How involved and engaged are community groups in the development and implementation of Irish language policy?
2. What would it take to turn the recent initiative on Irish Language Networks and Gaeltacht Service Towns into sustainable projects supporting the language?

The organisers of the workshop asked participants what can be done from their perspectives to make the Irish Language Networks into sustainable projects in the future. They were asked what their plans were and how they envisaged this rolling out.

Some of the participants were concerned that the amount of money being awarded would be insufficient in order to create realistic and viable plans. Another issue seemed to be that there was not a lot of sharing of good practice across different networks. They were also overwhelmed by the fact that what constitutes a community has dramatically changed. This was seen as not something specific to the Irish context but was also the case in Wales and in other minority language communities across Europe. Prof. Williams pointed out that in Wales there no is longer a Welsh speaking community but instead we have Welsh speakers within communities.

Some of the participants discussed ideas for how they can take initiatives forward. These included taking stock of who is in their community, who can speak Irish, what are their needs, what are they doing already etc. Most agreed that the onus was on the community sector to impress upon Foras na Gaeilge what should be delivered on the ground and called for the need to mobilise community groups

to come together and present their needs. It was decided that the Oireachtas provided a good opportunity to share best practice and thoughts on where to go from here and Foras na Gaeilge spoke of organising other information events which would bring Irish Language Networks together to discuss planning and to share good practice.

After the workshop participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire. The majority of participants found the presentations to be of interest and found the discussion arising useful. The majority also reported that they felt relatively more informed after the workshop. In particular, participants commented on the utility of Prof. Colin Williams' paper which they had pre-read and which he discussed during the workshop. The majority of participants had found the recommendations in the *Research Report on New Speakers of Irish* to be useful and could identify with them. In a small number of cases, participants said that their expectations had not been fully met. This was in part due to the fact that because of time constraints, there was not enough time at the end for more in-depth discussion. This is something that would be factored into the planning of any future events. The majority of participants would be interested in a follow-up event.

While there was not a lot of time for participants to write any detailed comments in the feedback form, some did include useful suggestions and ideas. In addition to the recommendations in the *Research Report on New Speakers of Irish*, participants listed a number of other recommendations. These included the following:

- Present the language to people in a way that makes sense to them so that they could see the language as something that is embedded in their own lives and surroundings.
- Advocate for funding and support for the Irish Networks in the North of Ireland.

Participants were asked to suggest an event that might be helpful in terms of promoting Irish outside the Gaeltacht and that could be beneficial to new speakers of Irish. Ideas included the following:

- An event where people could meet and speak to new speakers of Irish and listen to their story and to the challenges they may have.
- An event in which an expert from Wales or from another community could present what is happening in their own language context.
- Another workshop similar to the one organised in Dublin but where there could be more time for discussion and debate.
- An event in which the topic of bilingualism could be explored.
- An event involving high-profile new speakers.
- Setting up of new networks.

The things that informed participants most on the day and which people found inspirational were Prof Colin Williams' presentation as well as other individual presentations of activities going on in the local communities represented. Some pointed to the fact that the discussion increased their awareness of the need to look at language development from a broader perspective, going beyond language itself. They pointed out that more creativity was needed. Participants found it useful to hear about Welsh and the lessons that could be learned from it.

Participants were asked to comment briefly on the kind of actions they planned to undertake after the meeting. These included the following:

- Come up with new ideas.
- Engage in a more strategic approach to language planning.
- Lobby Foras na Gaeilge to fund networks in the North of Ireland.
- Conduct more research.
- Ask people from the networks to speak at events related to community development.

RANPHÁIRTITHE/PARTICIPANTS

1. Dr John Walsh
2. Prof Bernadette O'Rourke
3. Prof Colin Williams
4. Dr Gearóid Trimble, Foras na Gaeilge
5. Máire Ní Mhainnín, Údarás na Gaeltachta
6. Eoghan Mac Cormaic, Gaeilge Locha Riach
7. Domhnall Ó Loingsigh, An Clár as Gaeilge
8. Brian Ó Gaibhín, Muintir Chrónáin
9. Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh, Forbairt Feirste
10. Piarais Mac Alasdair, Forbairt Feirste
11. Pádraig Ó Tiarnaigh, Conradh na Gaeilge
12. Dr Pól Deeds, An Droichead
13. Lorcán Mac Gabhann, Glór na nGael
14. Frainc Mac Cionnaith, Glór na nGael
15. Bríd Ní Chonghóile, Gaillimh le Gaeilge
16. Peadar Mac Fhlannchadha, Conradh na Gaeilge
17. Liam Ó Flanagáin, Carn Tóchair
18. Laura Rawdon, Oireachtas na Gaeilge

The following people also attended the meeting:

1. Seán Ó Coinn, Foras na Gaeilge
2. Prof Wilson McLeod, Edinburgh University
3. Kevin Petit, Université Lumière Lyon 2 & NUI Galway
4. Stephen Joyce, NUI Galway
5. Siobhán Nic Fhlannchadha, University College Dublin

APPENDIX

Recent Language Initiatives

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COST SHAREHOLDERS MEETING, Trinity College, Dublin, October 14 2016

This briefing note focuses on a long-established initiative, namely the Menter Iaith (Language Enterprise Agency), a more recent initiative Canolfannau Cymraeg, and provides an overview of the currently revised Welsh Language Strategy which is designed to produce a million Welsh speakers by 2050. It will conclude with some considerations and suggestions for questions derived from this experience which may have some resonance for the Irish situation discussed in this seminar.

MENTRAU IAITH

In the late nineties the Menter Iaith idea (Language Enterprise Agency) was an innovative and much-needed local instrument for community language planning. There are now 23 Mentrau Iaith in Wales and their cumulative work is integral to the implementation of language policy. They have grown organically, in varying linguistic and geographic contexts, primarily on a county or part-county basis. As a result, they can no longer be referred to as one entity, but as a collection of activities and structures that are *called* Mentrau Iaith. The most prominent strength of this type of organisation is the fact that the Mentrau Iaith are rooted in their communities. However, it is no longer feasible to expect them to perform all the functions they are generally expected to achieve.

In March 2013, Cardiff University was commissioned by the Welsh Government to conduct an independent review of the Mentrau Iaith as part of the [Welsh Language Strategy: a living language: a language for living](#)'s commitment to strengthen the Welsh language in the community. The aim of the independent Review was to report on a number of matters, including:

- the methods used by the organisations to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh
- identifying the whole range of activities conducted by the organisations - and assessing
- to what extent they reflect local needs, and to what extent the organisations
- collect data effectively in order to assess the impact of activities; do the organisations' structures ensure effective working, partnership working and
- sharing of good practice
- the potential to further develop the role of the Mentrau
- are the Mentrau doing work that should be done by others (such as local authorities)
- is the level of funding provided by the Welsh Government appropriate?

The Review and the Government's response may be accessed at: <http://gov.wales/topics/welshlanguage/publications/review-of-mentrau-iaith/?lang=en>

<http://gov.wales/topics/welshlanguage/publications/response-to-the-review-of-mentrau-iaith-and-aman-tawereport/?lang=en>

The general tenor of the Review was that the Mentrau Iaith were effective but faced a number of operational difficulties which had not been overcome during the past seventeen or so years. The organisations studied in the 2014 Review make solid efforts to promote the Welsh language

considering the budgets available to them and the structural barriers they faced. The more successful ones had plans that met local requirements (in terms of language planning and community development) and had administrative and management systems that show a high level of professionalism. Others, meanwhile, operated in an ad hoc, fragmented way. One typical observation is the lack of language planning examples that took public policy into consideration alongside micro level language planning and community development. In other words, holistic planning is rather rare in this area. The number of examples of policy-makers in local authorities discussing and planning collaboratively with the organisations were very low.

The overall conclusion was that too much attention was given to processes and activities, without sufficiently addressing means of providing evidence of the difference made by organisations to the language at grassroots level. There is little evidence of working in an integrated manner to address language planning needs at micro level, i.e. through comprehensive discussion and joint planning with related and relevant organisations in other areas. This may result from the priority given to achieving operational targets. Perhaps inevitably then there was a tendency to be overly focused on administrative tasks and not on outcome-based behavioural change.

The evidence identifies a consensus in favour of establishing a national coordinating body for the Mentrau Iaith. There is also support for the idea of combining administrative and management elements of the organisation where appropriate on a macro level in order to free up time and resources for more action on a micro level. There is no widespread support for merging all Mentrau Iaith constitutionally as one national entity. The Mentrau have difficulty in appointing experienced staff with significant expertise in language planning. Despite the fact that Welsh language policy has created many opportunities to work in the field of language promotion, language planning has not necessarily developed into a specialised profession. The evidence suggested that the organisations have very motivated and committed staff. One aspect with much potential is strategic leadership on an all-Wales level. The evidence received showed that more consistency was needed in terms of management and operational methods as well as significant investment in staff training and development. The most frequent response was the need to strengthen and restructure Mentrau Iaith Cymru (MIC) since it cannot address these matters sufficiently at present.

A real difficulty is that the short term expenditure cycles for the Welsh Government's Grants to Promote the Welsh Language (from year to year) prevents organisations from recruiting sufficiently and from planning on a medium to long term basis. The respondents argued that the level of funding allocated to the organisations was inconsistent; this is the cause of great frustration at grassroots level. As a result, some organisations have felt the need—understandably—to find funding through alternative means, and this could constitute a risk of compromising their original language mission.

The Review identified the need to strengthen a number of elements, such as better training and systematic methods to identify needs and language priorities (based on research, data analysis, focus group views etc.), turning need into action plans, implementing more effective monitoring processes and appropriate methods of measuring outcomes and impact since this does not generally happen at the moment.

The nature of the Government's leadership was a concern for a number of the organisations. Specifically, they explained that they are driven by targets set by Welsh Government officials which do not necessarily arise from analyses of local needs. The Mentrau's targets are set independently of the targets of other language organisations and are not agreed collaboratively in a specific area. This can lead to duplication of work and encroaching on the remits of other organisations.

In general, the Government agreed with the results of the Review and their response may be seen at <http://gov.wales/topics/welshlanguage/publications/response-to-the-review-of-mentrau-iaith-and-aman-tawereport/?lang=en>

The role of government in all language policy is vital; as is the political and economic framework within which public policy decisions are taken. An analysis of the relationship between language promotion and regulation which looks at several jurisdictions may be found in Williams (2013).

LOCAL ACTION PLANS

While the Mentrau Iaith have become an established element of community language planning, two further initiatives have been developed to supplement their work. The first was the development of a Local Action Plan which were established by the Welsh Language Board to operate in more localised bilingual areas where there has been a recent sharp decline in the proportion of people who speak Welsh. These are aimed at drawing together local people and several of the WLB's partners to facilitate the use of Welsh locally. By 2006 10 such LAPs had been established. The first Language Action Plan was developed in the Fishguard area during 2001-02 in partnership with Menter Iaith Sir Benfro, WDA, Department of Education Pembrokeshire County Council, Pembrokeshire College and Menter & Busnes, Young Farmers, the Urdd and Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin. In its initial evaluation, the WLB, as facilitator to the project, argued that a number of tasks had been accomplished through this project as follows:

- Establishment of a Language Centre in Fishguard Secondary School;
- Development of Welsh-medium education in the area;
- Increase in Welsh-medium nursery education in the area;
- Increase in opportunities for young people to use their Welsh through establishment of Aelwyd [the Urdd] and 2 leisure clubs in the school;
- Increase in local opportunities for adults to learn Welsh;
- Help in development of language element in community and economic development work in the area.

Consequently the WLB established additional LAPs which operated in Amlwch, Ammanford, Bangor, Cardigan, Corwen, Gwauncaegurwen, Llanrwst, Machynlleth, and Ruthin. In most LAPs the WLB employed a Development Officer to facilitate the operation of a local Steering Committee. This is because an important by-product of these LAPs was to strengthen the practical co-operation at the local level between the Welsh Language Board and its main partners, especially the Mentrau Iaith together with the Urdd, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin and the Young Farmers. However, the 2014 Review (Cardiff University (2014)) suggested that in terms of collaboration between language organisations, the relationship between the Language Action Plans and the Mentrau Iaith is not as good or as productive as it could be. There is tension and an element of competition between them that hinders the wider aim of promoting the Welsh language. Having said that, the Review authors argued that there is value in focusing intensively on areas of special linguistic significance, and they advocated the co-operative philosophy and principles between relevant agencies that the experimental Aman Tawe Scheme could offer in this regard.

By definition a Language Action Plan / Area Development Plan must reflect local concerns, needs and priorities if strategic investments in the Welsh language are to realise local dividends. But they cannot do that effectively without the political support of the Welsh government, local government and, in

the past prior to its abolition in 2012, the experience provided by senior management of the WLB. The question then is to what extent the balance between local initiative, co-ordination and national level commitment can be sustained without periodic injections of additional resources, capacity-building efforts and new partnerships.

Just as with the Mentrau Iaith, which were intended to be long-term self-sustaining organisations, the Local Action Plans can become too dependent on special funding expenditure and once this is reduced or threatened, there is a danger that the local partnerships atrophy as the constituent members focus on their own core interests.

Thus a critical question for all community language initiatives is how to turn the original good idea into a long-term self-sustaining pattern of activity which boosts local language vitality almost regardless of which party is in power or how resource allocation decisions are changed.

CANOLFANNAU CYMRAEG¹

While the Local Action Plans and the Mentrau Iaith have been integral to increasing the visibility of Welsh language provision, space and vitality they did not cater sufficiently for adult learners. Thus it has been argued for a generation that there was little within the formal language planning system to cater for the needs of New Speakers. Several studies had demonstrated that while the Welsh for Adults sector had been successful in imparting Welsh language skills many of the former adult students were frustrated at their lack of integration into Welsh language networks. Part of this is the attitude of native Welsh speakers, part the nature of the conventional networks and part the lack of targeted spaces within which New Speakers would feel comfortable. In consequence several of those working in the field of Welsh for Adults have lobbied for the development of Canolfannau Cymraeg (Centres for Welsh).

The main justification for, and outline framework of how such centres should operate is contained in the commissioned report prepared by Gruffudd, H. and Morris, S. (2012). Although the concept of setting up Canolfannau Cymraeg in Wales can be traced back to the 1960s (e.g. Clwb y Bont in Pontypridd was first discussed in the late sixties²), the variety of those that now exist is testimony to the various models which have evolved in different parts of the country to respond to local needs and aspirations. The overriding motivation is a desire to promote the teaching of Welsh (often but not uniquely in the context of communities which are not majority Welsh-speaking communities) and aligning this with developing the potential to use the language in a social context.

The prime justification for creating many of the Canolfannau Cymraeg³ has been to enhance the experience and networks of learners of Welsh – although it can be seen more recently that their remit

¹ I am grateful to Dr S. Morris, Swansea University for sharing his expertise with me on the Canolfannau Cymraeg. Although these are occasionally referred to by their literal English translation 'Welsh (language) Centres' the general tendency is to use *Canolfan Gymraeg* (plural: *Canolfannau Cymraeg*) in both languages to denote a centre where classes for learners are combined with activities for Welsh speakers in the community as well as other facilities such as Welsh language bookshops, cafés and/or bars.

² <http://www.81170.mrsite.com/page5.htm>

³ Here is a list of early examples:

Clwb y Bont – Pontypridd. Established in late 1960s and in present building since 1983.

Nant Gwrtheyrn – Llŷn Peninsula. Opened in 1978 as a centre offering residential courses as well as other activities through the medium of Welsh.

has expanded to offer opportunities for new Welsh-speaking domains and networks in areas which might be considered to have more vibrant Welsh-speaking communities (e.g. Carmarthen and Bangor). Initially, nearly all of the Canolfannau Cymraeg could be described as community enterprises which were forged by local efforts and fund-raising with little governmental financial support. In that respect they were a classic example of bottom up language initiatives, which has been so characteristic of Welsh language revitalisation, as was seen in relation to the development of Welsh-medium education (Thomas and Williams, 2013) or community language planning (Williams, 2000).

From the point of view of Welsh Government policy, no mention was made of the Canolfannau Cymraeg in the last annual review of the now defunct Welsh Language Board⁴ and similarly, there is no reference to them in the Welsh Assembly Government's language strategy from 2003 on, *Iaith Pawb*. More recently, however, the Welsh Government has come to view the establishment Canolfannau Cymraeg as a way to further its aim of creating more *users* of Welsh articulated in their policy document '*Moving Forward*'.

In 2010, the Welsh Government commissioned research to consider the model of the Canolfannau Cymraeg and social networks of adult learners of Welsh and one of its main recommendations was for the establishment of more of them.⁵ The First Minister, Carwyn Jones, announced at the Carmarthenshire Eisteddfod (August 2014) that an initial four Canolfannau Cymraeg would be funded and set up in 2015 through the strategic capital investment fund. This amounted to £1.25 million for 2014-15 as well as £1 million for 2015-16. Local authorities, colleges and universities were invited to bid to the fund to develop Canolfannau Cymraeg to facilitate the process of learning or using Welsh in centres which would act as focal points for the Welsh language within their communities.

Many of the Canolfannau Cymraeg combine their role as centres for learning the language with other Welsh language promotional work. Several of them now incorporate their local *Menter Iaith*, Welsh language bookshops, performance spaces where gigs or live events can be held and social spaces such as cafés, bars or coffee mornings. In many of the more non-Welsh-speaking parts of Wales, apart from educational domains and given the demise of other more traditional Welsh language domains, the Canolfannau Cymraeg provide one of the few community foci for speakers of Welsh to use their language. Their co-location with many of the *Mentrau Iaith* means that they are able to offer a unique

Clwb Ifor Bach – Cardiff, 1983 with its original aim to promote the Welsh language in the city. It still offers socialising opportunities for young people however in 2016, the First Minister opened another Canolfan Gymraeg in the city 'Yr Hen Lyfrgell'. This is a splendid resource in a prime city centre location which combines meeting and exhibition spaces, a café, bookshop, craft work and an information contact point for matters and events relating to the Welsh language. A similar concept was proposed for selected Irish cities in the draft Twenty Year Strategy for Irish prepared by Fiontar but was not retained in full in the Final Version of the Twenty Year Strategy.

Clwb Brynmenyn – opened in the Bridgend area in 1987 but disbanded in 2003.

Canolfan Merthyr (Soar) – opened following the 1987 Urdd Eisteddfod in Merthyr Tydfil. (For an example of the relationship between the Canolfan and the local Menter Iaith please visit

<http://www.mentrauiath.cymru/newyddion/possib-project-integrating-the-use-of-the-welsh-language-into-every-day-activities-in-merthyr/?lang=en>)

Popeth Cymraeg (Canolfan Iaith Clwyd) – launched in 1988 in the north east of Wales.

Tŷ Tawe – Swansea 1987. Like Merthyr, work on setting up this Canolfan Gymraeg began in 1982 after the visit of the National Eisteddfod to the city.

⁴ Welsh Language Board (2010) Annual Review 2009 – 2010.

⁵ Gruffudd, H. and Morris, S. (2012) *Canolfannau Cymraeg and social networks of adult learners of Welsh: efforts to reverse language shift in comparatively non-Welsh-speaking communities*. Swansea: Academi Hywel Teifi (or) <https://www.swan.ac.uk/media/Full%20Report.pdf> [Accessed 4 August 2016]

space for learners of Welsh as well as the many young people who have received all their education through the medium of Welsh (but face a challenge on where to use the language outside the school) together with the minority who have always spoken the language.

The Welsh Government recently launched a consultation on a proposed strategy to create a million Welsh speakers by the year 2050.⁶ Proposed development area 4 in the consultation includes the objective to “...Ensure that more places exist where it is completely obvious that Welsh is the natural language, so that it feels completely normal and safe to use Welsh as the default language.” The existence of Canolfannau Cymraeg – and their location in visible, multi-purpose buildings at the heart of their communities – is likely to continue to be an important policy arm in the realisation of this goal.

THE REVISION OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY

Section 78(1) of the Government of Wales Act 2006 requires Welsh Ministers to adopt a strategy stating how they propose to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language. Section 78(4) requires the Welsh Ministers to keep the strategy under review and enables them from time to time to adopt a new strategy.

The Executive Summary is reproduced below: -

“Section 1 – Executive summary

The year 2050

The Welsh language is thriving, and the number of speakers has risen to a million. It is natural to use it in every aspect of life, and among those who do not speak it there is goodwill towards it and an appreciation of its contribution to the culture and economy of Wales.

2016 – now and next

Our vision is clear – to have a million Welsh speakers by 2050. For us to achieve that, we believe that several things need to happen: more children in Welsh-medium education, better planning in relation to how people learn the language, more easy-to-access opportunities for people to use the language, a stronger infrastructure and a revolution to improve digital provision in Welsh, and a sea change in the way we speak about it.

This document sets out our strategic priorities on how to reach a million speakers, and describes the key things that need to happen if we are to achieve the necessary changes.

Our priorities

The Welsh language is one of Wales’ treasures. It is part of that which defines us as a people, and an integral part of our everyday lives. According to the most recent Census in 2011 there were 562,000 Welsh speakers in Wales. On that basis, the aim of this strategy will be to almost double the number of Welsh speakers by the middle of the century. In order for that to happen, we believe we need to prioritise 6 key areas for action.

1 – Planning and Language Policy: For all the other elements of this strategy to be effective, we need to plan sensibly and deliberately to put the appropriate programmes in place at the appropriate time.

⁶ <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/consultation/160729-consultation-doc-en.pdf> [Accessed 4 August 2016]

For instance, if we are to increase the number of Welsh speakers on the scale needed, the first step in any strategy must be to create enough teachers to teach children through the medium of Welsh.

2 – Normalisation: By fostering a willingness to use Welsh among people who speak it, and goodwill towards it among those who don't, we want the language to be a normal part of everyday life. This means that people feel comfortable beginning a conversation in Welsh, that they can expect to receive services in Welsh, and that people are used to hearing it and seeing it.

3 – Education: We need to see a significant increase in the number of people receiving Welsh-medium education and who have Welsh language skills, as it is only through enabling more people to learn Welsh that we will reach a million speakers. Early years provision is also essential, as the earlier a child comes into contact with the language, the more opportunity he or she has to become fluent.

4 – People: As well as education, it will be essential to increase the number of people who transmit the language to their children. We also need more opportunities for people to use it in a variety of settings, and encourage more of them to take up those opportunities. These include opportunities as individuals, for the family, by taking part in local activities, or as members of networks or wider communities of interest that may be scattered throughout the world.

5 – Support: It is essential to develop a robust and modern infrastructure to support the language in order to increase the number of speakers, improve their confidence, and make it easier to use in a wide variety of settings. Digital resources, a healthy and diverse media, a responsive and modern translation profession, and a corpus which reflects and maintains the status of Welsh as a living language, are essential for Welsh speakers whatever their ability.

6 – Rights: Legislation provides an unequivocal basis for organisations to act in support of the language and for Welsh speakers to use it. We need to encourage individuals to take up the opportunities that come with these rights. The long term aim is to move to a situation where these rights are embedded as a natural part of services.

We propose these six development areas as a basis for deliberate action over the long term to realise the ambition of a million speakers.”

Clearly the scope of any official language strategy is influenced by the parameters of the political context. One challenge for formulators of language strategy is how to balance the need to be faithful to the remit given by political or legislative enactment while also striving to be creative, to be responsive to a professional vision of how language strategy can be an enabling policy document and set of related programmes and actions.

Considerations

1. Following the demise of the Welsh Language Board the Government of Wales now takes full responsibility for language policy and planning.
2. How feasible is the target of achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050?
3. Will the speakers be those who reside in Wales or those who reside anywhere and have been produced by the system so as to constitute a virtual network of speakers/users, for who knows how people will be able to communicate in effective ways by 2050?
4. Where did the figure originate, is it based on solid evidence or on political propaganda and wish fulfilment by both government and language activists?

5. If the target is not met, does it really matter? For what really matters is the actual usage of Welsh in a wide range of domains in daily life, not a putative set of skills.
6. How will progress towards the implementation of the Strategy be evaluated?
7. There is a change of emphasis in this iteration of the Strategy as opposed to the two previous versions, less detail, less instrumental outputs to be measured and more discourse, clearer relationships between elements of the Strategy.
8. But the Strategy, although belonging to the Government and devised by its Welsh Language Unit, is heavily dependent on all Government departments contributing - and the largest of such contributors, namely the Welsh education system from the cradle to the grave, is key; but not necessarily a co-sponsor of the Strategy, how does this impact on the effectiveness of the implementation?
9. Consultation is currently under way on the Strategy and will close by 31 October 2016 with an aim to launch the revised Strategy by the spring of 2017.
10. Concern with rights, regulation of Welsh medium services and language standards now rests with the Welsh Language Commissioner. How will this agenda serve the interests of the Strategy as it plays out and as the Commissioner's Office develops?

Suggested Questions for Ireland Stemming from the Briefing Notes

1. Is there a sufficiently proven 'community involvement and engagement' element in the formulation and implementation of Irish language policy?
2. What would it take to turn the recent initiative on Irish language networks into self-sustaining nodes of Irish language vitality?
3. How does one maximise the opportunities for, and involvement of New Speakers in a wide variety of sociolinguistic networks?
4. What types of locations in practical terms would constitute the 'safe spaces' for New Speakers of Irish as recommended in Walsh et al (2015)?
5. How is it possible to guarantee more attention to outcome-based behavioural change when the structural tendency for organisations is to focus on administrative and institutional processes?

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