

# Community Radio in Wales: New Voices with a Welsh accent.

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## *Abstract*

*This study provides a snapshot of the community radio sector in Wales, just over ten years since its inception. It does so at a time of economic instability and focuses on issues pertaining to social gain and sustainability. The McLeish (1986) definition of a radio interview as a 'conversation with an aim' (McLeish, 1986) is borrowed here, as an analogy with which to explore the 'conversations' between the community radio stations of Wales and others. The discursive exchange is found to be multi-tiered; affecting the ways in which the stations articulate with their partner agencies (Howley, 2010) their local communities (Day 2009) and facilitate democratic participation (Hochheimer, 1993; Barlow, 2002).*

*The non-static nature of societal pressures, re-shaped by changes in government policy, legislative developments and economic circumstances, is noted. It is argued here that such fluidity requires the community radio sector (in this case, in Wales) to react to the influence of society on the 'conversations' between the stations and their local communities. It is further suggested that stations need to constantly re-evaluate and re-articulate (Howley, 2010) their connections with others (including each other) in order to sustain the delivery of social gain outputs within their local communities, modifying their strategies for the delivery of sustainable social gain outcomes accordingly.*

## **Introduction**

At the initiation of this study, in 2011, very little had been written about the community radio sector in Wales. Nearly ten years after the introduction of community radio (formerly access radio) in the UK, this felt like an appropriate time to capture a snapshot of the sector in Wales. However, the intention was not to simply provide an insight into the workings of Welsh community radio at a given point in time. An awareness of the prevailing economic climate had also prompted this investigation. In the midst of financial pressures, the intention was to assess how the community radio stations of Wales balanced their need for ongoing sustainability against their obligation to deliver social gain outcomes. At the outset, there was a hope that the study might generate useful strategies for the stations to employ and as it transpired, this was possible.

It is clear that the stations engage in multi-flows of communication with their communities (Day, 2009) and facilitate democratic participation, in varying capacities (Hocheimer, 1993; Barlow, 2002). However, and somewhat surprisingly, the ways in which the stations articulate (Howley, 2010) with their listeners, partner agencies and each other was found to be the most crucial aspect of developing strategies for economic viability in the sector.

The original intention had been to consider issues pertaining to social gain and sustainability and more specifically, investigate how social gain delivery, a key requirement for community radio licence holders (Everitt, 2003:13) might be sustained within the community radio sector in Wales. McLeish (1986) described a radio interview as a 'conversation with an aim' (McLeish, 1986: 68). That definition was used here as an analogy for an investigation of Welsh community radio, predominantly using semi-

structured interviews with key figures in the community radio sector as a means of identifying strategies for survival.

In 2011, the Welsh economic situation was bleak and the significant challenges facing community radio were apparent. UK interest rates had been held at a record low of 0.5 percent since March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 (Bank of England, 2009). Finances were clearly tight and consequently, sources of public funding were less widely available. Cutbacks were rife at the BBC (BBC, 2011) and changes of group ownership were also widespread in the field of commercial radio in Wales (Johnson and Mitchell 2012). There were over 200 licensed community radio stations on-air in the UK, ten in Wales (see Figure 1) but eighteen stations, nearly 10 percent of the UK licence holders, had discontinued broadcasting (Radio Today, 2012) mostly as a result of financial difficulties.



**Figure 1. Map of Welsh community radio stations (adapted from Johnson and Mitchell 2012: 19).** NOTE: Radio Beca was not broadcasting at the time of writing, for reasons explained below, but is included here to illustrate its proposed geographical location as the only community radio station covering west Wales.

Day (2007 and 2009) had analysed the Irish community radio sector, but very little research material had been written or published about the sector in Wales. The intention here was to increase awareness of difficulties facing the Welsh community radio sector and to use the research outcomes to investigate how the community radio stations of Wales balanced the need for sustainability with their commitment to deliver social gain.

### **Social gain and sustainability in UK community radio**

Social gain can be a somewhat nebulous and difficult term to define but the Community Radio Order (2004) outlines various manners in which it might be engendered by UK community radio stations, including the provision of training, opportunities for discussion and expression and sources of broadcasting for underserved individuals (Community Radio Order, 2004). Barlow (2002) and Day (2009) particularly valued the provision of participatory opportunities as a means of assessing how community radio operations provide social gain to their communities. That point of view accords with Girard (1992) and his argument that community radio should, wherever possible, allow for the community to actively participate in the life of their community radio stations. Crucially, in whatever form that social gain delivery is manifested, the non-profit making, usually charitable, community radio stations are all tasked with the delivery of social gain outcomes to their local communities. The question here was how the community radio stations of Wales might best sustain such community participation in such austere times.

It is clear that support from government sources, local authorities and funding agencies, especially the Community Radio Fund, administered by Ofcom, for the DCMS (Department of Media, Culture and Sport) hold considerable significance for the community radio sector. The Community Radio Fund Panel was established in 2005 and provides up to £500,000 per year to 'help fund the core costs of running a community radio station' (Ofcom, 2014:2).

Community radio stations in the UK may also generate up to 50 percent of their revenues via commercial sources such as sales of on air advertising and sponsorship. However, until recently (as explained later) stations whose coverage area over-lapped with nearby small-scale commercial radio stations were not allowed to raise any commercial income at all. Encouragingly, the average percentage of on-air advertising and sponsorship as a share of income rose from 21 percent to 26 percent between 2010 and 2011 (Ofcom 2012: 196-198). It should however be noted, rather worryingly for the sector, that average (mean) income for the community radio sector fell to just £60,250 in 2011, a drop of over 8 percent from the previous year. Average (mean) expenditure was also £4,000 higher than the average income. It should also be taken into account that the headline figure may be misleading. Whilst the top 17 banked £150,000 – £250,000, 116 stations had an income of less than £60,000 (Ibid).

### **Community radio in Wales**

A number of localised factors have been identified that specifically affect the Welsh community radio sector (Johnson and Mitchell, 2012). These include the lack of space on the FM spectrum, a very low number of stations servicing mid-Wales (an area of few major conurbations), transmission difficulties caused by the mountainous terrain of Wales and the absence of devolved legislative powers for broadcasting (Ibid). The comparative weakness of indigenous media provision in Wales has been cited on numerous occasions, Williams (2008) Mitchell et al (2005) and Talfan - Davies and Morris (2008). From 2008 to 2013, the Welsh stations were given access to localised monies, via a community radio fund provided by the Welsh Government but this very welcome, additional funding stream has now ceased and there are no indications of the funding stream being continued or renewed.

As stated, the decision to undertake a study that focused on sustainability was reinforced by the particular difficulties facing Welsh community radio at the time. Radio Cardiff (the only community radio station serving the capital city) had encountered significant funding problems in 2010, and has since been run on a purely voluntary basis. XS (formerly Afan

FM) had been forced to return its licence in 2011 due to a financial crisis. Voice FM (a community orientated online station, based in the Caerphilly County Borough) had folded in 2010.

During this investigation, an ambitious, Welsh language community radio project had been preparing to go live, adding another dimension to the sector in Wales. It had been agreed by Ofcom that Radio Beca would be given a much wider broadcast range than the standard five-kilometre radius, in order for it to serve pockets of the Welsh-speaking community across a range of small towns, villages and hamlets in Carmarthenshire, north Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion, west Wales. As explained later, the Radio Beca plans were ultimately shelved and the station never got on air. The demise of Radio Beca, epitomises the battle to attain sustainable social gain delivery in the Welsh community radio sector. It illuminates the need for a variety of approaches and rationales regarding strategies for survival and sheds light on variations of circumstances and community radio management philosophies.

The challenges facing community radio license holders are indicative of the straitened economic climate at the time of writing. Economic difficulties have been experienced globally but the UK government described the fiscal position in the UK as ‘one of the most challenging... in the world’ (HM Treasury Spending Review 2010: 5). The impact of financial austerity has certainly affected Wales as much as other parts of the UK. Indeed, Wales was identified as having ‘the lowest employment rate of countries in Britain for all age groups, both sexes, and disabled and non-disabled people’ (Equality and Human Rights Commission. *How fair is Wales?* 2011).

Barlow et al (2005) allude to an ‘Anglo-centric perspective of the overall controllers and policy makers’ in Wales (Barlow, et al, 2005:98). A disparity is identified between experiences of media activists in Wales and their counterparts in England, where many of the media conglomerates are based (Ibid). Talfan - Davies and Morris (2008) agree that circumstances in Wales are different to other parts of the United Kingdom. They bemoan the lack of substantial Wales - wide newspaper publications, arguing that this highlights the need for a strong and independent Welsh media sector. Ofcom informally recognised the difficulty of serving disparate rural communities by allowing Radio Beca to potentially broadcast across a substantially larger area (100 miles) compared to the normally permitted 5 KM radius for community radio stations. However, it is argued here, that this would not have been enough to keep Radio Beca on-air, as existing restrictions on commercial income generation have a disproportionate impact on community radio stations based, like Radio Beca, in the more rural parts of Wales.

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) publication *Creative Futures* (2002) provides further detail of how Wales has fallen behind England in terms of its indigenous media output. The document includes references to the inadequate number of radio stations in the country, with radio provision in mid Wales (a hilly, mostly agricultural area with few large towns) noted as being particularly weak. The publication questions whether Wales is ‘low on the priority list of entrepreneurs and regulators in the broadcasting industry’ (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002:50). It also features an impassioned plea for the Radio Authority (since replaced by Ofcom) to look for ways of championing the Welsh audio-visual sector to make it a ‘leader in the field, not an afterthought’ (Ibid).

Unlike other parts of the UK, such as England, there are no BBC local radio stations in Wales. BBC Radio Wales (English medium) and BBC Radio Cymru (Welsh medium)

broadcast to the whole nation. The commercial radio sector in Wales has also gone through a recent period of uncertainty. London-based, Global Radio was required to relinquish several licences in Wales as a part of its merger with the Guardian Media Group, eventually deciding that *Real Radio North Wales* and *Capital South Wales* were to be sold on to the Irish media group, *Communicorp* (Independent, 2014). The transfer of Wales-based stations from English to Irish ownership provides a perfect example of the deficit of indigenous ownership and control of media in Wales. Johnson and Mitchell (2012) add weight to this point of view, citing Radio Hafren (until its closure in February, 2015) as the only commercial station that was ‘owned exclusively within its own catchment area’ (Johnson and Mitchell 2012: 16).

The paucity of Welsh media ownership is perhaps reflected by the absence of devolved rights for broadcasting legislation in Wales. The outcome of the March 2011 referendum resulted in an increase in autonomous powers for Wales (BBC, 2011). However, broadcasting legislation remains in the hands of the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) with the media in Wales remaining dependent on support from Westminster based MP’s for any proposed changes. Williams (2008) puts forward a strong argument to devolve such powers to Wales. His argument is that such a move would generate more accountability for broadcasters to the Welsh public, help build a sense of national community, provide more balance between English and Welsh medium content and create a stronger position for Wales in the future digital media market place (Williams, 2008: 110). His argument makes a lot of sense, for without such devolution of legislative powers, it is difficult to envisage the Welsh media industry making significant progress.

It is argued here that the community radio stations of Wales might be able to help in redressing the imbalance in the Welsh media market place, by establishing themselves as independent broadcasters within their specific communities. Johnson and Mitchell (2012) argue that the limitations within the Welsh commercial and BBC radio sectors, cited above, provide a unique opportunity for community radio in Wales. They identify potential for community radio to facilitate an alternative voice for the communities of Wales, particularly encouraging citizen participation in the field of localised media. They also argue fervently that the survival and growth of Welsh community radio is crucially important and that its sustainability should be made ‘a specified political, regulatory and cultural priority’ (Johnson and Mitchell 2012:24).

The Centre for Community Journalism at Cardiff University has worked with a number of hyper-local websites (websites generating and focusing on very local news stories) in Wales, nurturing coverage of community-based content that may not otherwise be covered by the mainstream media. Hargreaves (2013) sees this new form of online community journalism, as being particularly useful in Wales, as, depending on adequate mobile network coverage and broadband availability it can take place anywhere, even in some of the more sparsely populated and mountainous regions of the nation. Stewart (2012) feels that citizen journalism is ideally suited to community radio, identifying it as a unique opportunity for the sector to be seen to act as a facilitator of ‘democratic participation, to that extent filling a democratic deficit’ (Stewart, 2012). Stewart argues that it is essential that community radio overtly makes the point about the unique role it can play within the UK broadcasting marketplace, with such overt identification helping the sector to justify requests for the continuance of subsidies, used to help the community radio sector to sustain social gain delivery (Ibid).

### **Articulations and the community of community radio stations in Wales**

Alluding to Anderson (1991) and Cohen (1985) and their theories pertaining to imagined communities, Howley (2010) applies the theory of 'articulation' to the analysis of community radio, describing how articulations meld partnerships between previously unconnected groups, celebrating communities of 'commonality as well as difference' (Ibid). Howley explains how such articulations enable the stations to construct and modify links with key agencies, such as funders, volunteer groups and local councils, creating 'shared identity and collective solidarity between disparate groups and individuals' (Howley, 2010: 64). In that manner, feelings of communal belonging are, 'in large measure, articulated through communication' (Ibid). It is argued here that a similar philosophical shift might be encouraged in Wales, increasing collaboration between the nation's varying community radio stations.

The stations in Wales are varied in their geographical locations, target audience demographics, limitations on their ability to advertise, philosophies towards social gain, perceptions of themselves as community radio stations and even the language in which they broadcast. However, the evidence suggests that they have more in common than they do not. They certainly share similar constraints in their role as community radio broadcasters, in their battles for sustainability and to deliver social gain to their communities. The eclectic nature of the Welsh community radio sector is healthy and welcome. However, it is argued here that, especially in times of austerity, the stations of Wales might enhance their chances of attaining individual security by working together for the common good. The Welsh community radio sector should perhaps welcome the fact that 'community life is far more diverse' than might commonly be imagined (Howley, 2010: 64). It is also suggested that the stations in Wales should recognise the value of constructing communities that serve 'not only to create a common identity among different people but also to differentiate one community from another' (Ibid).

It is felt appropriate to visualise the stations of Wales, themselves, as occupants of a shared community and to assess how those stations communicate with each other. It is argued here that individual stations enhance their chances of attaining sustainability through collaboration and collusion with others. Early on in the research process, the Wales Community Radio Network (WCRN) website, the first digital cluster of its type in Wales, was set up, initially operating as an online platform for collaboration (University of South Wales, 2011). The website emerged from a partnership between the researcher, and the Digital Network Business (DNB) arm of the Welsh Government, in partnership with Hywel Wiliam, from Advisors in Media (AiM). Subsequently, on behalf of the Welsh Government, Wiliam compiled a report on how the community radio sector might wish to collaborate, and how such a network hub might be maintained. In general, the report indicated 'significant goodwill' towards collaboration and the instigation of a network (Wiliam, 2011). The WCRN was seen as a good way to facilitate conversational dialogue, being seen by the stations as a 'one stop shop' that could 'only make things better' and enable Welsh community radio stations to 'share intelligence' (Ibid).

The initial WCRN website is not currently active but social networking activity pertaining to Welsh community radio networking continues on the Facebook website. Digital networking potentially allows for the stations to exchange ideas and to use the shared platform as a virtual meeting place, enabling discussion regarding a variety of matters, including social gain and sustainability in the sector. This is seen as a step in the right direction and a starting point for what is identified here as a 're-articulation' (Howley,

2010) of the relationships between the community radio stations in Wales, in a manner that creates, by default, a new ‘community’ all of its own.

### **The DCMS Consultation and the Future of Welsh community radio**

The articulation of links (Howley, 2010) between community radio and other agencies have been noted and applied here, to the sector in Wales. A topical example of ‘articulation’ was provided, in 2013, during the course of this research, as the relationship between community radio and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) continued to evolve. The DCMS announced plans that had the potential to investigate ways of removing some of the ‘complex and restrictive financing regulations currently in place’ (Vaisey, 2013). This culminated in the DCMS issuing a *Community Radio Consultation Document* on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014. It sought responses from the UK community radio sector on the relaxing of restrictions of commercial income, where stations’ broadcast areas overlapped with local commercial stations with less than 150,000 listeners, the 50 percent commercial income limit, further licence extensions (linked to digital switch-over) and an enhanced Community Radio Fund (DCMS, 2014: 3). The DCMS consultation criteria was of great interest to the community radio sector in Wales. In addition to the topography of the country and the shortage of heavily populated towns and cities, the existing legislation increased pressures on the stations, especially those serving north and west Wales, who were, under the terms of the Order, prevented from raising any commercial income. As previously stated, it is likely that these limitations on the sale of advertising had a particular impact on Radio Beca, affecting the viability of the proposed station by lessening its attraction to potential investors and reducing its opportunities to raise share capital from the local community.

The background information provided within the DCMS consultation appraised difficulties facing community radio stations in the UK. It indicated that demand for community radio licences remained high, with, up to that point, 270 having been licensed (DCMS, 2014: 5). Community radio was seen as playing an ‘important and integral part of a modern radio landscape’ however the average income of community radio stations had decreased since 2007, partially as a result of reduced public funding support (Ibid). Worryingly, 33 of the stations licensed by Ofcom had returned their licences, or had them revoked, with 14 of those never actually launching on-air (Ibid).

Representatives of the Welsh community radio stations were invited, initially via the WCRN, to attend a seminar at the University of South Wales in February 2014. As opposed to issuing individual responses, Welsh community radio station representatives were encouraged to consider reacting as a sector to the consultation process, with the Welsh sector speaking with one voice. The event concluded with the compilation of a unified response to the DCMS consultation document, the first time that community radio in Wales had spoken as a unified sector (apart from Radio Cardiff, who were not represented). Effectively, the Welsh community radio stations had again re-articulated their working relationships with each other and, on this occasion, a third party, by communicating with the DCMS as a single entity (Howley, 2010).

Ofcom/CMA workshops, facilitated by the DCMS, in 2012 indicated a ‘clear consensus for change’ (DCMS, 2012: 1) with a majority claiming that it was no longer necessary to prohibit community radio stations overlapping with commercial stations, with Measured Coverage Area (MCA) of less than 150,000 from generating commercial income (Ibid). This limitation was particularly restrictive in Wales, especially in less highly populated areas, such as mid, west and north Wales (see Figure 2). Just one of the five commercial

stations covering those regions, Radio Carmarthenshire, had a MCA above 150,000 (see Figure 2). This negated the right of Môn FM, Tudno FM, Point FM, Glan Clwyd AM and (notably) Radio Beca to sell advertising. It is difficult to envisage how the stations affected by the 150,000 MCA rule were expected to survive and flourish without the ability to generate commercial support.

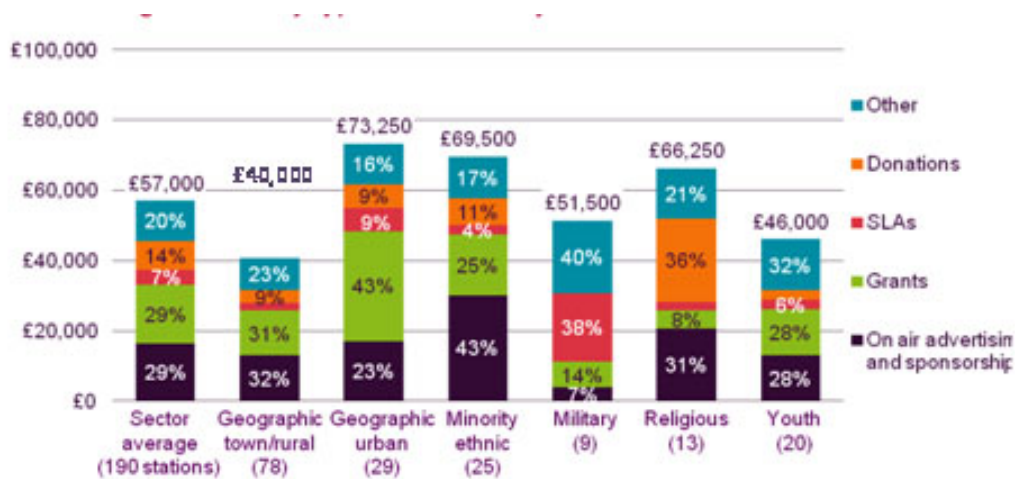
Station	MCA	Community Station
Heart Caernarfon	94,873	Môn FM
Heart North Wales Coast	138,711	Tudno FM, Point FM Glan Clwyd AM
Radio Carmarthenshire	178,318	Radio Beca
Radio Ceredigion	72,088	Radio Beca
Radio Pembrokeshire	89,127	Radio Beca

**Figure 2. Commercial radio station Measured Coverage Areas (MCAs) in west and north Wales and community radio stations with overlapping coverage.** Source: Wales Community Radio Network *WCRN Response to the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) Community Radio Consultation* (2014) unpublished.

Radio Beca, serving pockets of Welsh-speaking communities across a larger area than normal would have been subject to increased transmission costs and it is likely that the station would have found the restrictions particularly challenging. Their intended broadcast territories included areas served by two commercial radio competitors with less than 150,000 listeners (see Figure 2). Thus, under the existing legislation, they would have been restricted from selling advertising. The DCMS consultation document indicated that stations serving predominantly rural communities, such as the less densely populated, agricultural parts of mid, west and north Wales received the lowest average income per community served (see Figure 3). Radio Beca would not only have been unable to sell advertising, but would also have faced higher than average transmission costs and done so in an area whose population had a lower than average disposable income. Facing such insurmountable obstacles, it is difficult to perceive how Radio Beca could have built a sustainable future for itself without significant changes to existing legislature. Ultimately, the station never went on-air.

The DCMS Consultation document details how the Ofcom Communications Report (2013) had provided further justification for changes in legislation and increased support for community radio, throughout the UK, in order to aid its future levels of sustainability (DCMS, 2014: 12). Grant income was shown to have dipped from 45 percent in 2008 to 29 percent by 2012, with the fall seen to be ‘the effect of the recession on the providers of grants’ (Ibid). Conversely, over the same time frame, the percentage of monies raised through advertising and sponsorship had risen from 20 percent in 2008 to 29 percent in 2012 (Ibid). ‘Other’ sources, including education/training grants and local fundraising had similarly increased from 12 percent in 2008 to 20 percent in 2012 (Ibid). The figures indicate a lessening availability of grant funding and an increasing reliance on commercial sources of revenue. However, despite an increase in the proportion of funds generated from advertising and sponsorship, just one station in ten ‘generated 50 percent or more of their income through commercial activity’ (DCMS, 2014: 13).





**Figure 3. Average income by type of community served.**

Source: Ofcom, *Communication Markets Report* (2013).

Government legislation directs Ofcom to consider the terms on which it grants licences, potentially allowing for Ofcom to lower the 50 percent limit on annual income from commercial sources (DCMS, 2014: 14). Significantly, the DCMS felt that there was a compelling argument for the removal of this rule, stating that such changes had ‘little impact on small-scale local commercial radio stations’ (DCMS, 2014: 14). The DCMS recognised the need to find a balance for the commercialisation of community radio against the restriction of revenues needed by the sector to sustain itself (DCMS, 2014: 15). The DCMS were also aware that the level of the Community Radio Fund (protected, in comparison to other areas of public funding, until 2015) has not increased in accordance with rising number of community radio stations (Ibid). The DCMS supported the principle that community radio stations should not become too commercialised but wanted to develop a sustainable community radio sector that had ‘the ability to grow and succeed in its delivery of social gain and the production of compelling radio content’ (DCMS, 2014: 15).

The eventual DCMS response included some relaxation of the limitations on community radio selling commercial airspace, allowing for all community radio stations to be able to raise annual income to a maximum level of £15,000 from advertising and/or sponsorship before application of any other current rule. This was a significant development for community radio in Wales. Above and beyond the £15,000 cap, stations could continue to raise additional commercial revenues so long as the total raised did not exceed 50 percent of their total income. They could do this, for example, by counting volunteer time, income from training contracts and localized Service Level Agreements to count against commercial income.

The freeing up of limitations, as a result of the DCMS community radio consultation process, on the community radio sector’s ability to generate commercial support was gratefully received within the sector in Wales. It is seen as a positive move but, capped at such a low level, is not one that has made a definitive difference. For example, it is unlikely that this modification would have been enough to sustain Radio Beca, if it had managed to get on-air. However, the relaxation of limitations on the sale of advertising is certainly beneficial. Without on-going sustainability, the stations cannot continue to benefit their communities through the delivery of social gain outcomes.

### **A community of ‘articulations’ - community radio stations in Wales**

A decrease in restrictions on the ability of community radio stations to access commercial revenues is vital, if the sector is to survive independently. There is a need for decreased reliance on other funding agencies for financial support, enabling the community radio stations of Wales to use their financial independence to help them to develop robust models for economic stability. Relaxation of financial restrictions and subsequent enhancement of financial independence provide the community radio stations with a great opportunity to develop robust financial strategies. Such autonomy encourages community radio stations to react to future economic developments, helping them to continue delivery of social gain outcomes in their target communities throughout Wales. Increasing independence, less reliance on limited pots of funding and deregulation of the financial limitations on the sector, certainly enhance the chances of a healthier long-term future for the sector in Wales.

Social gain is at the very heart of community radio but in order for that social gain delivery to be sustained, it is clear that local people need to be able to hear it, see it and, ideally, feel that it is possible for them to be a part of the process. It is not enough for community radio stations to deliver social gain to their communities, in isolation. It is critically important, for the future financial well-being of the sector, that the benefits of community radio stations to their local communities are widely communicated. Flows of communication between the Welsh community radio sector and the communities of Wales need to be abundant and overt, in keeping with the views of Day (2009).

The Welsh community radio stations, distributed throughout the country, naturally adopt a localised view of themselves and their local communities. The stations are irrevocably linked by their very nature as community broadcasters for their locales, with the geographical and socio-economic constraints and boundaries that shape and define them. By their nature, the community radio stations of Wales share similar day to day issues, regarding the acquisition of funding, resource management and meeting the needs of volunteers, staff, partner agencies and listeners. They all, to varying extents deal with the daily pressures, outlined by Barlow (2002) of building audience numbers, maximising income streams and producing listenable (often, professional sounding) radio output for their communities. However, above and beyond that, it is concluded here that the stations need to recognise their need for each other, as a gateway to collaborative information exchange, utilising increased collaboration and co-operation as a potential means of developing strategies for economic survival.

Collaboration and connections are ‘neither natural nor inevitable’ (Howley, 2010: 65). The linkages need to be established by the community radio stations, if they are to occur. The collaborative activity offered by the WCRN has the potential to help to create ‘shared identity and collective solidarity’ (Howley, 2010: 64) within the Welsh community radio sector. That shared identity and collective solidarity is identified here as a very powerful weapon for community radio in Wales in its battle to attain sustainability but can only come into being if the stations actively engage in the process. The manner in which sets of interests between groups are articulated is just one of many possibilities, with many other articulations also being possible. The non-fixed nature of the articulations exemplifies the personal influence on how these linkages take shape, illustrating ‘the ability of human action to alter, remake, or re-create any social formation’ (Ibid).

The value of Howley's articulation theory and the ways in which its application potentially impact on the on-going viability of the community radio stations of Wales is acknowledged here. Each individual station is tasked with 'articulating a vision of community' (Ibid) that encourages a broad range of participation in their daily operations. The argument here is that the Welsh community radio stations need to develop an awareness of how the 'particular and distinctive assets and attributes' of their localities can be articulated in a manner that respects and reflects 'the lives and experiences of local communities' (Ibid).

It is clear, at this time, that Welsh stations are struggling financially. Additional funding streams, albeit from grants, donations, government or commercial sources are clearly welcome. It is argued here that, in accordance with Howley (2010) the stations need to build links with a wide range of revenue-generators. There is a requirement to retain a focus on meeting social gain objectives whilst also establishing effective lines of communication with key local groups, organisations and associations. Identifying links with funding partners has multiple benefits; enhancing the legitimacy of community radio station identities, and providing the requisite funding that enables social gain delivery to be sustained.

If members of the local community can see, or hear that social gain is being instigated by their community radio station it is more likely that they will become involved as volunteers. In that fashion, overt connection with community members and potential funders facilitates a funnel for volunteer engagement and financial input. It is more than possible that, over time, some of these partnerships might prove to be problematic, with clashes of interest and variations in philosophical objectives perhaps inevitable. However, the generation and modification of links with government, local councils, grant funders and business partners, as detailed by Howley (2010) is certainly identified here as a key factor in the enablement of sustained social gain delivery by community radio in Wales.

### **Conclusions – community radio, Wales and a consensus for change**

Day (2009) notes the potential of community radio to use multi-flows of communication to build communication links for their communities through the facilitation of democratic participation opportunities (Day, 2009: 85). Several Welsh community radio stations, notably Bro Radio and Point FM, use social media extensively, especially Facebook to promote themselves. The evidence here suggests that a dedicated networking website, such as the WCRN, has the potential to benefit the stations in their communication flows with their audiences, other stations and external partners (Day, 2009).

Whilst it is acknowledged that articulation is 'not exclusive to the community radio sector' (Howley, 2010: 69) community radio is the only form of broadcasting that is obliged, through legislation, to meet designated social gain objectives whilst simultaneously delivering economic stability. In addition, community radio does this in a non-profit making, often charitable, capacity, and, as detailed in this study, often faces limitations on its ability to generate commercial revenues and access sources of public funding. The links formulated by community radio are unique in the way that they are strategically 're-articulated to suit the particular and distinctive needs of local communities' (Ibid). In this case, a disparate range of Welsh community radio stations, developed a new way of collaborating with each other, using that as a means of strategically and effectively lobbying a government agency for deregulation. It is hoped

and envisaged that further imaginative coupling of hitherto un-connected agencies will ensue, allowing a way for community radio for Wales to survive and flourish.

### **What does the future hold for community radio in Wales?**

To close, it is worth considering the impact of digital switchover in the UK. There is a risk that community radio stations may become isolated on FM, with the bulk of listening taking place on DAB and other digital platforms. Ofcom is currently trialling low power/low cost DAB transmission options for community radio. In order to retain listener awareness of community radio, it is vital that the stations also migrate to DAB when the UK switchover occurs. It is concerning that commercial stations will be able to drop their localness requirements on migration to DAB. This could be highly problematic in Wales, with stations owned by major conglomerates (EG Global, Bauer etc) becoming effectively London-based networks featuring no news, weather or traffic information for Wales. In such a situation, the community radio stations in Wales would have a vital role. Digital broadcasting could also provide the option for greater capacity. It might allow for additional community radio stations, possibly serving communities of interest as well as geographic communities to be able to launch, enhancing levels of plurality for radio listeners.

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