



# **Weathering The Storms**

## **The Hidden Value of Community Anchor Organisations in Wales**

by

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

This report has been funded as an output from a research programme, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, entitled *Productive Margins: Regulating for Engagement*.<sup>1</sup> Led by the University of Bristol in partnership with Cardiff University seven research projects were co-produced by academic researchers and community organisations. All the community organisations at the time were examples of thoughtful, resourceful community rooted organisations and most had a long history.

*Weathering the Storms: the hidden value of community anchor organisations* was a research project which explored the ways in which place based community organisations attempt to hold onto their values, purpose and identity through time and particularly through times of crisis. It emerged as a response to the announcement in October 2016 by the then Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, Carl Sargeant, that he was minded to phase out the Welsh Government's flagship regeneration/anti-poverty programme, Communities First, which had been running since 2001. The two Welsh community organisations, South Riverside Community Development Centre, in Cardiff, and the 3Gs Community Development Trust, in Merthyr Tydfil, had both been central to the delivery of the programme locally with staff directly employed by the organisation rather than the Local Authority. They had been in existence prior to Communities First, established by local people in response to issues that were important, at that time, to them. At the beginning the ambitions of the programme resonated with values and ethos of such anchors, but that changed over time. The Productive Margins programme enabled the community and academic participants to bear witness to processes of destabilisation and renewal as the programme withdrawal became a reality.

Underpinning the research was an exploration of what these community organisations do, what they are and how they manage a role which sometimes, and in this case, requires them to mediate community needs and aspirations, on the one hand and the delivery of large state funded programmes at the local level on the other. In relation to this we examined the extent to which the regulatory requirements of State programmes may be at odds with their local practices and values. What also emerged was a perception that community organisations have a 'hidden value' (Elliott et al, 2020). They provide ways of working with communities that are different to public services, as well as offering a vehicle to alter the ways in which matters of local concern are addressed. The term 'community anchor organisation' emerged as an idea that encapsulated the rooted nature of the organisations within the place-based communities from which they emerged, using distinct community asset-based practices that enabled them to connect individuals and groups to each other and to a web of third and public sector organisations. As the research came to an end it raised further questions about the usefulness of the term, the nature of similar community rooted organisations across Wales, and whether they needed to have a distinct collective identity and role.

### 1.2 Scoping Objectives and Methods

This follow-up project is a collaboration between Allan Herbert from South Riverside Community Development Centre, Russell Todd, a freelance community development specialist, and Eva Elliott

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<sup>1</sup> <https://productivemargins.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/> The term productive margins embodies an understanding that "people and communities excluded from participation in the regulatory regimes that impact upon their daily lives have expertise, experience and creativity that can be politically productive".

from Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD) based at Cardiff University School of Social Sciences.

In brief the objectives were to:

- Provide a clearer description of what community anchor organisations are;
- Develop a possible framework through which community anchor organisations could collectivise, collaborate and share learning, and become a more visible entity to government, other public bodies and civil society;
- Make recommendations for the community 'sector', for policy actors, and for academic researchers.

There were two initial phases of work:

- Review of recent relevant reports and reviews on the nature and role of community anchor organisations.
- Interviews with key leaders/staff in community anchor organisations across Wales

The research also includes data from three focus groups undertaken in July 2019 and funded by the Learning and Work Institute as part of Adult Learning Week. These were undertaken alongside an immersive arts installation, created by Artstation<sup>2</sup> as part of the initial *Weathering the Storms* project, that brought the original research data to life and was used to contextualise the discussions that followed.

The third and final stage was an online event<sup>3</sup> that brought representatives together to share ideas and suggest future directions. We have done what we can to ensure that any conclusions, recommendations and ways forward are shaped by people with experience and expertise of working in community anchor organisations. Since the first draft was written the COVID-19 pandemic, and Lockdown means that these discussions have become particularly important, as community anchor organisations play their distinct role in keeping communities safe, well and connected. The pandemic has put these organisations under pressure, and so far as it is possible, we have tried to understand what difference they have made. However, we feel that some of the issues they raised initially may be particularly apposite as we both move into recovery and assess the regulatory requirements for a post-Brexit economy. We are also mindful of the shift in focus to inequalities related to race and ethnicity since the police murder of a black man, George Floyd, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Again, from the ways in which respondents talked about their responsibilities regarding inclusion and diversity, they have an important role in representing and speaking alongside people of colour in many of our communities.

In total semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve representatives from nine community organisations. They were structured in that the interview schedule covered several themes including: the history of their organisations; how and why they emerged; the structures they put in place; the values that inform their work; how local engagement informs their work and with whom they work, collaborate and, if relevant, trade. However, the interviews were also open in that respondents were free to contribute any comments that they felt were important and/or relevant. The organisations

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<sup>2</sup> *Anchor Peoples* was initially launched in November 2018 at the Senedd the home of the Welsh Parliament, Senedd Cymru: <http://www.artstation.org.uk/anchor-peoples/>

<sup>3</sup> Initially this was intended to be a workshop involving the interviewees and others from their organisations (e.g., staff, volunteers, trustees) but due to the Covid-19 pandemic it was postponed and was moved online in September 2020. See below

were selected from the interviewer's own knowledge of the people and organisations and to ensure diversity in terms of geographical location in Wales and type (urban, post-industrial, rural). Though most had been in Communities First areas this was not always the case. Focus groups included a few of the organisations already interviewed plus representatives from other community groups plus members from other community focused organisations including a Housing Association and a County Voluntary Council. Focus groups also included representatives from local authorities. FG1 and FG2 focused on the relationship between community organisations and the state, whereas FG3 directly focused on the role of community organisations in providing informal opportunities for learning. A recording for a fourth focus group on the latter topic is unfortunately not available.

### 1.3 Ethics

In terms of ethics all participants were provided with information about the study and signed a consent form. It was made clear that quotes would not be attributable to individuals and that they could withdraw any comments with which they felt uncomfortable. It was made clear that they could withdraw from the interview process at any time. Interviews were recorded and the audio files and transcripts are stored in pass protected files and will be destroyed after five years. This research was approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University. The focus groups were funded, alongside the arts installation, as part of the Learning and Work Institute's Adult Learning week. The host organisation was the 3GS Community Development Trust in partnership with South Riverside Community Development Centre. Information and consent forms were provided and signed to ensure ethical processes were respected.

All personal and local place names have been taken out of this report to protect the anonymity of the participants. Regarding quotes community organisations are numbered 1 – 9, and focus groups are marked as FG followed by the type of respondent they were: CO = community organisation, LA = Local Authority, HA = Housing Association and CVC = County Voluntary Council.

### 1.4 Online Workshop

It was always the intention that co-production would be at the heart of the process of producing this report. This extends the legacy of the Productive Margins programme where projects were identified, designed and conducted through a collaborative process, facilitated by a research forum and fuelled by multidisciplinary academic and grassroots community expertise. However true co-production in the process of analysis and writing was impractical and unrealistic given the pressures that participants were facing. However, we tried to honour and value the input of the participants as far as it was possible. The original funded project felt 'unfinished' hence the partnership between the academic lead on Weathering the Storms and one of the community leads (from the South Riverside Community Development Centre) continued. The plan was to have a day-long face to face workshop in the Spring of 2020 to ensure the themes resonated with participants' collective understanding and experience as well as to agree what should happen to the report itself. However, COVID-19 lockdown halted these plans, changed the working patterns and priorities of the community organisations themselves, and made face to face contact impossible. It was not until Autumn 2020 that we decided to hold an online workshop, with all its limitations in terms of collective and creative interaction, through Zoom.

During September and October 2020, we invited participants to review the anonymised report to: assess its veracity in terms of whether they felt it reflected the characteristics of their organisations; discuss whether there were points that needed to be amplified; consider whether there were particular ‘asks’ they wished to direct at the sector as a whole, the field of policy and of academic research organisations; and decide how they wished the research to be used. Although COVID-19 had been easing over the summer, cases had been rising and this inevitably impacted on the number of people attending from the organisations (three in the first, and one in the follow-up). Although the discussions were rich and wide-ranging, we decided to complete the discussions through the asynchronous mechanism of email correspondence.

Whilst the participants strongly welcomed the report for ‘hitting the nail on the head’ there were a few points they wanted us to emphasize more and some restructuring was suggested. It has also made sense to link the report to what has been termed a ‘manifesto for communities in Wales’ (Building Communities Trust, 2021). The manifesto is the result of a consultation consisting of 20 workshops and involving over 250 people from community organisations in Wales. Our report gives substance to many of its recommendations concerning the need to give communities more prominence and influence at all levels of policy and economic development, and the right to own and control buildings and land as community assets. Our report focuses on community organisations and how they may be considered as anchors that connect communities to wider regulatory infrastructures and institutions.

As social and economic conditions, and people’s living and working arrangements, are changing rapidly we see this as a living document. We therefore present no ‘asks’, but a set of proposals as to how community anchor organisations might contribute to an alternative regulatory infrastructure reflective of emerging discussions on the Foundational Economy (Barbera and Jones, 2020) and social and solidarity economy (SSE) (Serrano et al 2019; McDermont et al, forthcoming).

## 2. Review of Literature

The term 'community anchor' has a relatively short history dating back to the early 2000s a period when the then UK Labour Government was articulating its 'third way' dialogical role between citizen and state that did not rely on the traditional binary of the free market or the state (see Civil Renewal Unit, 2004) and which valued voluntary, associational, participative activity and recognised the limitations of an unabstracted concept of the state (at all levels) rather than see it as a set of ever-changing relations (Yeo, 2001). Not only was a *statist* socialism rejected, but also a collectivism that ennobled a professional, technocratic and managerial class. Participation by communities was espoused not on the basis of qualification or certification, but rather on the expertise possessed through simply being part of, and connected to, a strong civic culture (ibid.; Amin et al, 2002). Though, as Gilchrist (2004) notes, there are some who interpret this emphasis on the benefits of civic participation as a means of distracting from a more fundamental societal redistribution of resource and opportunity.

This was not a uniquely British phenomenon with parallels in other European and North American industrialised countries whose local and *localising* conceptions of the social economy and its actors in broader economic policy were also an influence on UK thinking (Amin et al, 2002). Stoker and Young (1993) were among the first to analyse "third force organisations" (TFOs) in the British urban realm that they identified increasing rapidly during the late 1970s and 1980s. They typify TFOs as organisations running projects and providing services of their own devising; lying outside government structures; operating on a not-for-profit basis; and striving to raise funds from a range of sources. Theirs was a wide and somewhat scattergun analysis – fundamentally grounded in a deficit model approach that defined areas by their 'problems' – encompassing a broad range of agencies and cross sector partnerships undertaking, in the very broadest sense, 'community work' or neighbourhood regeneration, they were nevertheless able to discern key characteristics of community anchor organisations: their origins through spontaneous community initiatives; rooted in a 'local' that is self-defined; governance drawn from a local population; and, a fragility of existence due to uncertain income levels and sources. They considered these 'third forces' to still, in the main, be a nascent movement, with little join-up between them.

Notwithstanding the ability and desire to provide services of their own devising, Wolch (1990 in Jones and Evans, 2008) talks of the 'shadow state' and how TFOs risk, as a part of a broader 'hollowing out' of the state (see Jessop, 1994), being brought 'to the table' in the regeneration arena tokenistically in order to provide a veneer of inclusivity; or, they are diverted from their core mission as the state manoeuvres TFOs - still technically independent of the state - to provide government agenda at the local level.

Particularly in urban settings, these risks emerged as part of a complex and locally-shaped – but centrally-proscribed – mosaic of institutional arrangements to stimulate urban renewal by emasculating, disciplining and regulating the traditionally managerial role of the municipal and local state (Harvey, 1987, in Imrie and Thomas, 1999; Painter, 1995; Goodwin, 1993; Goodwin and Painter, 1996). Though some municipal interests became protectionist, many acquiesced or openly embraced their role in helping to create the right climate for private business or increasing local competitiveness, rather than meeting the needs of citizens, residents, or community interests which have become increasingly powerless to shape policy nor influence developments; precious few have gained much from the changes (Goodwin, 1993; Colenutt, 1999).

Stoker and Young (1993) argue that *within* these new entrepreneurial and corporatist arrangements a vacuum was created, prompting 'third forces' to organise, lobby and amplify their voice around communities of interests within traditionally conceived spatial communities, such as around gender



issues, black and ethnic minority issues, housing and tenancy issues, or the green movement. More lately there is a growing understanding of the intersectionality of these issues and interests.

The later work of the likes of John Pearce and Stephen Thake has been influential in carving out a role for so-called 'local' and later 'community' anchors (Henderson, 2015). Thake's (2001) more nuanced and informed analysis referred to 'neighbourhood regeneration organisations' (NROs) and began to home in on a discrete type of organisational arrangement within this broader 'third force' that was part, albeit a small one, of the entrepreneurial, 'post-municipal' urban governance arrangements in the UK that characterised urban policy from the mid-1980s onwards (see Oatley and May, 1999). Thake identified "a mature operational culture and an extensive body of experience" (2001, p35) among the diverse range of NROs that his inquiry covered. Alongside development trusts and faith organisations, Thake cited the likes of rural community councils, schools and health centres as comprising NROs.

Importantly, Thake also identified local anchors that strived for the benefit of communities of interest, such as black and ethnic minorities. Largely located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, many of Thake's sample of NROs had formed out of a desire to tackle local social exclusion, which at the time was still in its infancy as a tenet of national social policy (ibid.). Thake revealed the contribution of local anchors to be a messy, incoherent picture and his study remains a key milestone in the recognition and understanding of local anchors' contributions, value and challenges. It directly influenced New Labour's 2004 *Firm Foundations* policy document, the first such strategy to refer specifically to the term and considered them to be valuable agents in providing:

"A crucial focus and support for community development and change in their neighbourhood or community. We are calling them 'community anchor organisations' because of the solid foundation they give to a wide variety of *self-help* [emphasis added] and capacity building activities in local communities, and because of their roots within their communities". (2004, p.19)

The emphasis on self-help is indicative of the continued prominence of personal responsibility within New Labour's Third Way conception of a reciprocal relationship between the state and the individual (Amin et al, 2002). Its struggle to get away from an abstracted concept of community rather than one that sees community as a set of inter-related, sometimes contested, relations - 'full of awkward elbows' (Yeo, 2001) – prompted an irritation at the lack of *en masse* participation and in part precipitated a raft of reviews and inquiries into public service design and delivery across the UK (e.g., WAG, 2004; Beecham, 2006; Christie, 2011) all of which not only prioritized citizen engagement in service delivery, but began to prescribe mechanisms for bringing it about.

In Wales, devolved government was partly heralded as an opportunity to do away with the democratic deficit of the sort that the quintessentially post-municipal and entrepreneurial Urban Development Corporations (one of which was bestowed on Cardiff) typified, in a so-called 'bonfire of the quangos'. But across the UK Colenutt (1999) observed a renewal and reconfiguration of the corporatist arrangements in – albeit urban – regeneration policy. Reflecting the 'third way' emphasis on participation and citizen involvement, communities were beginning to be encouraged into the partnership arrangements. However, though the market-led zeal was less pronounced, some of the strategic public and private partnership arrangements that had developed became cosy and settled, with additional community involvement not universally welcomed (ibid.); or was 'managed' or 'sanctioned' so to occur on terms not dictatable by communities in what amounted to a rehash of former policy, with little radical or fundamental re-conception of community empowerment (Hoban, 2002).

More lately, however, anchors – sometimes referred to as ‘hubs’ – are seen variously across the home nations as potential brokers of such input, particularly in disadvantaged communities (WCVA, 2011; WCVA et al 2011); the potential leads on highly localised service design and delivery, as well as related local economic, social and democratic developments (Christie Commission, 2011); or the recipients of public assets via asset transfer to then entrepreneurialise them to meet social needs and aspirations (Quirk Review, 2007). Whereas some see this enhanced role for, and status of, anchors in the arena of local services as core element of a re-strengthening of ‘social infrastructure’ (Gregory, 2018; Slocock, 2018; McDermont et al., forthcoming) and a means of capitalising an under-resourced community sector (Wyler, 2009) following a lengthy process in some communities of a hollowing-out of social networks by deindustrialization (Earle et al, 2017), others are more sceptical and caution that such activity can serve as a cover for the state abandoning its responsibilities to communities and a retraction of the welfare state (e.g., Coote 2010)<sup>4</sup>. Community anchors – as part of a contemporary alliance of ‘third forces’ – appear therefore to be well-placed, at least theoretically, to mobilise to bring about the shift of local people from the periphery to the centre of decision-making processes and changing the nature of relationships between participants that, for Hoban (2002), is fundamental should empowerment of communities happen (see also Scottish Community Alliance, 2018; CLES, 2009). It is perhaps worth noting too Hughes et al (2009) who note the connotation that the term ‘anchor’ may have to some (cumbersome, static, heavy), but nevertheless they feel the concept is significant, strong and suggests a rootedness in the local.

Recent research by Locality (2017) into economic resilience in England highlights how anchors can be powerful economic agents: acting as economic multipliers, redistributing wealth locally, employing local people in quality jobs, using local supply chains and investing in people to themselves become economically active. At the confluence of where this local social enterprise and entrepreneurship meets the trajectory of policy, dating back to the mid-2000s, of effecting greater citizen influence over service design, lies the transformative potential of community anchors. Much like the earlier analyses of NROs or TFOs, there has been recent consideration of anchors’ distinct characteristics, needs, potential, and challenges (see Community Alliance, 2009; WCVA, 2011; WCVA, CREW and CDC, 2011; Henderson, 2014, 2015; Todd and Nicholl, 2018), indeed, such has been the recognition of anchors’ distinctiveness that in Wales an Assembly committee (2017) encouraged the Welsh Government to consider core funding of anchors as part of the legacy funding made available because of the winding-up of Communities in 2018. The irony being that Welsh Government was asked to consider providing unrestricted core funding to anchors *beyond* the end of a programme during which it had conspicuously declined to do so.

By the advent of the first devolved administration an array of ‘third force’ activism can already be seen across Wales: ethnic minority networks and organisations (e.g., Bawso); organisations formed by women to address gender aspects of poverty and disadvantage (e.g., Dove Workshop in Dulais valley, or Gellideg Foundation Group in Merthyr Tydfil); development trusts (DTs) that diversified beyond their initial particular focuses such as housing (e.g., the 3G’s DT in Merthyr Tydfil; South Riverside Community Development Centre in Cardiff) or community cohesion and racial tension (e.g., Caia Park Partnership in Wrexham); social infrastructure that European structural funding had stimulated (e.g., The Hill DT in Swansea). In addition, development trusts were operating in Sandfields near Port Talbot; both Ebbw valleys; Penywaun and Penrhys in RCT; Gorseinon and Clydach Vale in Swansea’s hinterland; Pillgwenlly in Newport; and the Amman valley.

This is not intended to be a definitive list, but merely reflects a rich mosaic of organisations in the valley’s coalfields, urban areas and north east Wales. But what of rural Wales? In the mid-1990s the

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<sup>4</sup> This fear was borne out in recent engagement work carried out by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) with Welsh third and community sector organisations (see Todd and Nicholl, 2018).

Welsh Office was resistant to publishing a damning report into the extent of poverty in rural Wales and its 1996 White Paper setting out the then Conservative Government's vision for rural Wales whitewashed rural poverty and the rural poor from its imagery and discourse (Cloke et al, 1997). In their review of community regeneration best practice Adamson et al (2001) recognised that "conventional approaches to community development...have tended to emerge from urban locations" (p.25) and would need to be tailored to reflect diversity of communities in Wales, many of which are rural in nature; and which are often overlaid with the issue of the Welsh language as well (ibid.).

Applying Thake's broad TFO conception, rural communities are home to a slightly different range of non-state actors – e.g., young farmers' clubs, farming unions, farming co-operatives – but rural-based enterprises such as Menter Môn or PLANED, that emerged from the European LEADER programme, recognised early on that integrating social and economic initiatives was key to strengthening rural communities (Clarke et al, 2002). LEADER had many similarities with the CF partnership approaches; like CF, too, LEADER came to be tamed, risk-averse, overly prescriptive programme, in which local and community influence was greatly diluted (Midmore, 2018).

One attempt to push back against this creeping conservatism in a CF context was WCVA et al's 2011 paper espousing a greater attention to the needs of, and seed funding for, community anchors in communities that wish to have one. Rather than 'anchor', the paper used the term 'hubs' to describe independent, multi-functional, cross-thematic community organisations. This term has subsequently been adopted by the public sector. For instance, in Cardiff a number of the city's libraries have been re-designed into multi-use facilities where services that usually centre on employability, skills and welfare are co-located. The Valleys Taskforce has a dedicated workstream that includes reference to existing and new 'community hubs' in which:

"the NHS, social services, schools and job centres work together with the third sector to provide services for local communities. We will work with local communities and local councils to develop these and decide where these will be based."

(Valleys Taskforce, 2017, 12)

The Valleys Taskforce locates the development of community hubs under the strategic heading of 'Better Public Services' and, short-sightedly, as an outcome in themselves rather than the means to bringing about more aspirational outcomes. Furthermore, it is hard to look past the current fashion for hubs as a locus for the co-location of facilities and services as a response to the imperative of austerity belt-tightening.

There are real conceptual shortcomings in this thinking. Even within the narrow confines of public service reform, the development of hubs as publicly owned and managed physical spaces where services are co-located is different to multi-purpose community-led anchors who can mediate the voice of citizens by acting as a bridge between communities and the state. That the Scottish Community Alliance (2018) can find "no examples of sustained community empowerment without some such locally embedded [anchor] organisation" is testament to what broader potential and value to communities that anchors can have beyond service design, delivery and, ideally, co-production. The public sector has, arguably, colonised the term 'hub' and it is with regret that Empowerment strand of Welsh Government's once-mooted post-CF Three E's agenda was fleshed-out so little; it may have offered robust conceptual challenge to sub-national state thinking in Wales about social infrastructure and anchors' role within it.

This Weathering The Storms inquiry to anchors in Wales shares a curiosity with Henderson et al's (2014, 2015, 2018, 2020) work on anchors in Scotland and might be seen as the latest in the line of analyses on this particular 'third force' dating back to Thake, Peace, and Stoker and Young. However, there is merit in considering their role in Wales at a time when increasing inequality is likely to be

exacerbated by ramifications of COVID-19 and Brexit. There is a space to consider what the infrastructural and regulatory structures might look like if community anchor organisations were recognised and enabled. In doing this there is merit in going beyond identifying the services they offer, how they are set-up, or where they are located, to describing and elaborating their role in an array of networks, the material and social assets they command, and the influence, impact and achievements they have had. It is this 'relational' engagement that the Weathering The Storms interviews interrogated, among other aspects of anchors' work, and which emerged as a key theme. To which this paper now turns.

### 3. Emerging Themes

#### 3.1 Community Anchor Organisations as historically rooted

The idea that the terms 'community', 'anchor' and 'organisation' can come together perhaps seems contradictory, with 'community' difficult to associate with something tangible and permanent. However, as Cohen (1985) argues, the point of community is its symbolic boundaries in distinguishing, demarcating and signifying the 'us'. Furthermore, Neuwirth (1969) argued that Weber's notion of *Gemeinschaftsbildung* (community formation) is essentially a claim for power and resources for an identifiable group of people. The notion of a community anchor could be seen as an assertion of its significance, value and staying power in the face of more institutionalised anchors in the public sector. Grassroots community organisations should be viewed in this sense and as emerging from particular, historically rooted sets of circumstances, which challenge, but do not necessarily negate, the formal administrative and institutional requirements of space and regulation.

All the community organisations involved in this project are well established, having emerged in different ways: as a legacy from previous European or national programmes with Communities First being the most recent; a response to events (e.g., 1984-5 Miners' Strike), opportunistic (a building becomes available), or focused on a specific issue (such as learning, childcare or community transport). All evolved organically to respond to different matters of local concern. All are in communities whose basic needs have been ignored in some way - by the market; by public bodies whose capacity has been eroded by austerity; or because they have 'fallen through the cracks'. Most have been impacted in some way (positive and negative) by the recent withdrawal of funding from the Communities First programme. Most were set up in the early 2000's though some go back to the 1980's. All have some history before they were formally constituted in their current form which may be an obvious thing to say, as constituted community organisations do not appear out of thin air, but is important to emphasize as these organisations embody the history of particular places and the individuals who organise together to drive change. Understanding the origins of community organisations is important. Whilst it is the case that some could have been said to have been created through major funding opportunities, it is the local circumstances that have galvanised local people into action in the first place and ensured that they continued. In addition, they have all been dependent on particular people who have had the leadership qualities and skills to make things happen

Although most focused on particular small areas (not necessarily formal boundaries but ones that are locally meaningful), others also serve wider areas (in some cases because of the services that they have developed). Branding/naming can be important in terms of having a recognised and visible identity that reflects something tangible and recognisable that is also locality owned.

All felt that they were organisations that were run for the community, by the community and (ideally) accountable to the community. However, there was a general sense of frustration expressed by most respondents that there are gaps in understanding by public services, local councillors, and local and national government as to what they are, how they operate and what they do and could contribute to the economy and/or community wellbeing. Where they exist, it was felt that they were different to local authority hubs which have different accountabilities, capabilities, values and relationships with both local people and other local organisations.

Notwithstanding the disruption and uncertainty caused, for some anchors, by the demise of Communities First who were reliant on it, not just financially, but in terms of in-kind support and access and facilitation to networks, some anchors looked forward to the ending of CF so they could

focus on “what needs to be done” rather than a localisation of, or co-option by, a government agenda<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, one community anchor in mid Wales that has developed since that community exited CF in 2013 after the shift to its Cluster phase, described its growth in the five years hence as “like casting off the shackles” (Todd, 2019).

### 3.2 Mission and Values as drivers

This heading is at the forefront as the reason why these community organisations arose and became established was based on a strong sense of values and a conviction that these organisations mattered to local people in some way. There was also a strong appreciation that everything else (strategy, funding, income generation, governance, board development, staffing, use of buildings, working practices), should be driven from an explicit value base.

Most organisations tried to ensure that their practices and projects were driven by their values (with some explicitly developing and using tools to test future strategy, activities and funding) though this had been challenging in an environment where funding is scarce and comes with conditions, or (at the opposite extreme) the organisation is in danger of overload and unable to deliver within the constraints of existing infrastructure and staff and volunteer capacity. Opportunities for project funding, the offer of contracts and service agreements or the temptation of large funded programmes can draw them away from their core purpose, their area of expertise, or take them beyond their traditional catchment area and thus losing their community focus.

Having a strong set of values can be a motivator for involvement as it attracts people to get involved and stay involved as well as generating creative ideas as to how best to use resources. Community-making, seen as a value driven practice in itself, is seen as both necessary (in times of austerity where there has been a withdrawal of state resources and in response to particular issues) and aspirational (in transforming local economies).

The following sections illuminate the key values (practices and conditions) that appeared most prominent in the narratives emerging from the interviews. As subsequent workshops suggested, these go somewhere to describe what community anchors are and what they do, as opposed to other public sector and voluntary sector organisations, on the one hand, and small community groups on the other.

#### 3.2.1 Community Anchor Organisations as independent entities

There was a strong belief that community organisations needed to be independent from the state as that is what makes innovation possible and allows for advocacy and challenge where necessary. Although not all the organisations interviewed were in Communities First areas or a part of the programme’s delivery mechanism there was, apart from one case where the organisation has been the beneficiary of legacy funding, a feeling that the programme never appreciated the role of Community Anchor Organisations as separate to, and distinct from, Communities First Partnerships, the loosely constituted fora that Communities First required to be established in its early-to-mid phase (2002-11) based on a three-thirds principle where membership was drawn, broadly equally, from the community, public and voluntary/private sectors<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Unpublished conversations between the author and a Valleys community anchor not part of this research.

<sup>6</sup> In 2012 Communities First abandoned its configuration based mainly on numerous smaller spatial units (plus a handful of ‘imaginative’ proposals and communities of interest) and moved into its ‘Cluster’ phase of fewer,

Whilst the three thirds principle in the early stages may not have given 'community' the influence that was intended by the programme designers, the downloading of responsibility to Local Authorities in the latter stages meant that communities (whether they had anchor organisations or not) in most cases never had the sanction to innovate or provide in the ways in which they believed to be fit (Pill and Guarneros-Meza, 2017). Many had experienced conflicts of interest and barriers to their own ability to be agile where they were expected to meet their expectations or pre-set outcomes.

However, whether organisations were part of Communities First or not, most of the organisations at some time come across situations where they have to challenge a local authority (or other public body such as the Police or health board). When this happens it is difficult to hold a community advocate line, to lobby or more actively campaign against a local authority if, at the same time, they are employed by them. Independence was key to the ability of community anchors to take action on behalf of the people they represent and underpins their credibility with the community to take action where needed.

*Also I think there was a desire to be a bit independent from the state. I always think of a situation very early on where I started as a community worker here when the council proposed 270 houses on one of north X's last bit of green spaces and there was a massive local outcry and petition and posters around north X in opposition to this but we were employed by the proposed developer and were sort of caught in the middle...[when employed by the local authority through Communities First.] We were accused by the community of not being able to support them in their campaign, even though we tried. And we were getting sort of threatened by the employer at the time as well. So for me it was about having independence and having something in X that could speak on behalf of local people and have some credibility and power with decision makers.*

#### Community Organisation 1

Furthermore, state funding tends to be risk averse, whereas some of the community organisations were trying to be innovative and creative in terms of their response to problems or opportunities. There was a feeling from some that although the state or public bodies want innovative solutions to social problems (for instance rough sleeping or youth crime), the processes put in place create straitjackets that do not allow organisations to work in ways they feel are appropriate or effective in the communities in which they work. The conditions of funding work against them. In some cases community organisations also feel that the larger third sector organisations have a competitive advantage over small community organisations that may have built trust and capacity locally. There was a feeling that they tend to 'hoover up' the available funding. They become invisible.

However, the withdrawal of state funding can also have effects. With regard to Communities First funding the phasing out of funding impacted in terms of loss of staff, services, and a network of people and organisations that often worked well together. One organisation talked about having to pull the support that was provided for people on Universal Credit. What they offered in terms of a safe space to seek help and supportive face to face support was suddenly unavailable.

*There was a huge amount of confusion around what it was going to look like. We're the face that faces the consequences of that. If you pull out a service, like CAB which was funded through CF, or the Universal Credit support, or the youth work, we're the frontline that people see even though those services have gone. We have to learn to counter some of the negativity from local communities who say, "You don't do anything anymore." At one point we had a*

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larger units the prescription of a Partnership board was dispensed with, and more freedom was given in programme guidance for different models of representation, if any at all, at Cluster level.

*heavily used Universal Credit support group and now we don't have anybody coming in. Those people haven't miraculously found out how to use Universal Credit.*

*Community Organisation 9*

However, freedom from CF has created new opportunities, collaborations and alliances and a new-found independence which, for some, has left them with a sense of possibility but with a need to find ways of being sustainable in a manner that allows them to stay true to their values.

However, three of the organisations have had significant core funding from their LA, (two still do) one of which is legacy funding from CF, which has helped these organisations find their direction, purpose and focus and to develop a workable governance structure and organisational infrastructure. For one of the other organisations this has now gone but in the past helped them to develop and build. However, this was because of local circumstances and local understanding of the value of what they were attempting to do. This, the respondent argued, ensured that they were steady once CF money was withdrawn.

*You're very aware of the issues CF created in the partnership. It could have been the end of [the organisation] and now CF has gone there would be nothing there. It really did feel like "Can we survive CF?" at times. [The organisation] is still there in spite of CF rather than because of CF and hasn't developed in any way as a result of CF... The fact [the organisation] was core funded for about 15, 16, 17 years by the local authority, we wouldn't be here without that. That was individuals within Economic Regeneration who saw the value of community anchors way before that term was created. They gave us unrestricted funding to do our stuff which enabled us to take on those buildings, provide employment for hundreds of staff, hundreds of volunteering opportunities, loads of services, generating God knows how much money for the local economy, because a few individuals in Economic Regeneration made sure we had our core funding year in year out. As a bigger thing it's more often a breaker rather than an enabler.*

*Community Organisation 2*

However, local authority funding, however welcome, is never guaranteed and the above organisation is aiming to be completely self-funding in the future.

An alternative perspective was provided by a Local Authority representative at one of the workshops where a 'hub' was funded by the local authority where a community development organisation had existed. They felt that they were trapped in the middle with Welsh Government, on the one hand, expecting them to administer funds and by the community on the other. They argued that they were trying to work in different ways in order to support and respond to the community as an anchor organisation.

*As it is, the local authority is the anchor organization. In [neighbouring authority] the pilot is run by X. Either way, somebody has got to lead the conversation and the development. I just think it's a positive that we are sitting around the table, that those awkward questions are being asked. FG2 LA*

However, given the make-up of the focus group it was not surprising that other participants felt that the Local Authority having the lead voice at the table was not enough – though all spoke of the need for good partnership working. Furthermore, the issue was raised again about the co-option of the term hub, which largely describes what local authorities are trying to develop, and community led hub, whose virtue is in being at arm's length.

*For me, the conversation we had with Valleys Taskforce is you need to understand that these are very different things. If the building's run by the council, you shouldn't be calling it a*



*community hub. Call them a one-stop shop, call them a one-for-all centre, and we're not saying they're not good things, they're very different from a community hub, and therefore to try and treat them the same is the most ridiculous thing. They're obviously different, and they provide very different types of support. In theory, a community hub run by the council shouldn't require external funding to do some basic stuff. It's this independent thing, isn't it? Councils find it very difficult to fund something and not retain control, and when they describe this early work it's that freedom and time to develop relationships in your community, and no community hub can be valued, unless it's got relationships with its community. FG2 CVC*

### 3.2.2 Improving the lives and living conditions for local people

A key motivation was, not surprisingly, improving lives for people in their community – usually the immediate locality which may, but usually did not, map onto formal administrative boundaries. This involved an understanding of who the community is and in respecting those who belongs (see section on diversity and inclusion). Community identity was important in making visible who the community is internally, to people living in the community, and externally, to other organisations and public officials. Many felt that the state had let their communities down and was incapable of building community infrastructure in ways that were meaningful to local people.

*The key purpose of X is to regenerate, we're not talking about economic regeneration, (although increasingly we're thinking more about that, how we play as more of a player in this community in terms of trying to create employment and enterprise), but it's the social networks, the fabric of this community that has been eroded and broken down by, for example the local authority feeling it has to do everything for everyone and doesn't have any money to do anything for anyone, or does it in one hub which everyone has to conform to. I guess for me the purpose of the organisation is about bringing people together and finding out again how there can be community.*

*Community Organisation 1*

In a rural context this could require the recreation of collective resources, spaces and mechanisms for connectedness that had been eroded over the years:

*Fundamentally we're a community organisation. We're trying to make our community a better place to live and make the community. Lots of people have lived here many years. Going back 50, 70, 100 years, rural life was very different. Going back to the C19th there were about 20 shops in the community, those have gone. We had a chapel, a pub, all the shops and the Post Office closed. The garage closed, that was part of the business we took over. The school has since closed; the church has closed. We got to the point where there were virtually no community facilities. The villages were turning into places where people slept, particularly if they work in Aberystwyth or Machynlleth. There was no opportunity to meet your neighbours. You wouldn't bump into them walking down the street because there was no cause to walk down the street.*

*Community Organisation 3*

Nearly all felt that the context in which they were working was poverty, and the austerity processes which have deepened poverty locally and increased inequalities. Since these interviews both COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter (and before that the Me Too movement from a gendered perspective), have further illuminated, and deepened these inequalities from, not purely an income and class

perspective, but an intersectional standpoint. *Community making* was therefore seen as necessary at a time when the *resources for community* may have been eroded through population change, austerity or by other political decisions and events that impact on the social and physical resources that are seen to comprise community life. There was often a keen sense of how history shapes the need for social action. As with the quote above it is not just a rose-tinted nostalgia for how things used to be. Memory can also be a resource for understanding what is missing, what is possible and how things ought to change (Tannock, 1995). Community anchor organisations, with the contextual expertise that they have nurtured over the years, are well placed to be responsive to what might be needed locally. Rather than abstracted, singular, static conceptions of community, anchors are attuned to the relations that exist in, and are shaped by, perceptions of neighbourhood among local people that are influenced as much by physical boundaries (e.g., road or railways) as social and familial networks, or shopping and park amenities (Taylor and Wilson, 2006).

Anchors also provide the early warning systems for the problems that are experienced as intolerable, and impact negatively on people's bodies and emotions. A parallel could be made with work on popular epidemiology when it is the people (or the workers) impacted by environmental shocks that first experience, identify and then make sense of the patterns of ill health that emerge (Brown & Gibbs 2007). In this case we are talking about economic shocks and their long-term impact and legacy for the people who experience them. The development of support services for mental health was one example mentioned. Local people feel alert to increased problems in the area (in one case to the increase in local suicides) and then the community organisations are agile in seeking solutions and partnerships in, as they see it, providing appropriate and effective services. The point was also made in one of the focus groups that the problems people face should not be individualised and pathologised, but recognised as stemming from the pressures created by the economic and resultant social pressures that grind people down. Local understandings of mental ill-health factor in 'the social' as a link in the chain of causal processes.

*We talk a lot about the economic situation we're living in, the extra pressures on families and support they need. People with mental ill health are us, they have anxiety, depression, fear of paying bills. That's the level of anxiety I'm talking about. People are terrified in our communities of how they're going to survive next week and pay bills. FG3 CO*

Some organisations therefore feel that their role goes beyond making lives manageable. Community development is not just about repairing or making things good again (more recently in relation to the perceived damage that austerity has had), important as this is, but it is about building and transforming. A radical approach to it since the 1970s has promoted the merits of organising to challenge inequalities of power, raise class consciousness outside the workplace, and transform grassroots democracy as a crucible for genuine local influence and autonomy on local decision-making (Gilchrist, 2004). Whether one prefers this approach or a more liberal, 'centrist' approach that seeks to achieve small gains (see Twelvetrees, 1991), the neighbourhood remains the best level at which to understand community development (Twelvetrees, 2017); each of the organisations appreciates this to a large extent and operating at and within the neighbourhood level is a key feature of their work, irrespective of the broader canvas across which they have a constitutional or operational remit.

On occasions, they are motivated by perceived deficiencies or absences in the provision by other public sector organisations. This is particularly the case with youth provision and education (both seen as key to individual and collective thriving in the present and the future); and childcare (also seen as a condition for parents to learn or work; and as a means of employment in itself), where public provision was often felt to be inadequate.

*We know for a fact that young parents who live locally wouldn't be able to work if we didn't have a nursery. We know for a fact that people have come through from our communities, if*

*there hadn't been a day nursery they couldn't have joined the courses. And we know for some people the only place they can go to have access to the internet and do their claims online or get advice and support on welfare and signposting is in our centre because there are no other services anywhere. So it does make a difference to them.*

*Community Organisation 4*

However, there was often a sense of ambivalence in this role of service provision. While the provision of services by established and rooted community organisations was often perceived as better tailored, sensitive and effective in making lives manageable or easier in hard times, there is perhaps a danger of substituting what should be provided as a right by public services (and which has disappeared, been downgraded or diluted in quality due to austerity). A recurrent theme among several organisations was the lack of services for young people (or a dissatisfaction with them) and that they had stepped in to retain these.

*There have been other things like cuts to youth services, they're not running here anymore. We have a Welsh medium youth club that runs out of here in response to some of the local young people that are going to Welsh medium school in the city*

*Community Organisation 9*

*The youth came out and said that they weren't happy with the youth services. They've got a full youth club now which runs five days a week, it's got two youth workers and they have their own building and it's amazing, it does it all on its own...The youth came out and spoke and we worked with them and developed that project and that's running itself now.*

*Community Organisation 7*

*We're making sure there's provision of services for young people. We're working with other partners, other associations locally, to support them to engage more with young people and provide alternative opportunities and boost their provision so more children and young people can have the support they need. They haven't had youth services up here for a long time so that's a real positive.*

*Community Organisation 5*

However, community provision cannot just be seen as a substitute for services that are otherwise unaffordable, particularly if they continue to be dependent on the passions and commitments of local leaders without any security of support, long-term funding or access to professional learning and development for employees. One organisation, on the subject of youth provision, was alert to the gap in provision, but also sufficiently self-aware and honest to recognise that it was not the appropriate organisation to 'plug the gap':

*The youth service was virtually decimated in [our county]. Unless young people are into sports activities there's a gap of support for them. We might not be the right organisation to do that because we don't have trained youth workers but it would be nice to offer a way in to other organisations or look at how we could support that*

*Community Organisation 8*

This was echoed by another organisation for whom the notion of 'chasing' the money or the grant to deliver something because the money was available for it went against their values.

*[We're] delivering the same services and staying true to the core aims that we've got. We're not chasing the money for the sake of having the money. We're chasing the money because it suits what we need to deliver. That's where we're at.*

*Community Organisation 7*

However, follow-up discussions suggested whilst it was undoubtedly true that they were in danger of substituting state responsibilities, it was argued that Community Anchor Organisations could be seen as spaces of challenge to what defines a service. In many cases they did not see themselves as 'delivering services' in the sense in which public services operate but use their understanding of the community context in which they work to repair, restore and build the communities as required. Echoing Richard Sennett (2013) community (development) work could be seen as a craft utilising community knowledge and variety of devices, practices and tools to rectify the damage and neglect inflicted by the economy and the state.

However, respondents also felt that Community Anchor Organisations provide a resource for thinking about the ways in which public services could be more embedded in communities in ways that acknowledge and respect the context in which local people live and work. A Community Interest Company (CIC) was established that at the time of the interview was in the middle of re-designing and re-conceptualising the primary health care available to vulnerable people experiencing homelessness (and invariably other challenges, such as addiction). Interestingly, the experience of managing a community anchor organisation has been bought in to inform the business and enterprise side of the mission, that had a visionary local GP as its driving force.

*My role is to provide the business expertise that I gained from the last 25 years of being a chief executive [of an anchor] to help [the GP] realise that dream. In the last 12 months we set up a community interest company, we've secured funding for this homeless community care hub, we have successfully tendered to deliver services at three GPs. We're on the brink of being able to put some of these community based, coproduction and cooperative solutions in action...It's about how do we reshape primary care so it does serve those that are most vulnerable and gives them the services they need and require because that reduces demand and has a big impact on the survival of the health service.*

*Community Organisation 2*

The interviewee referred to the new CIC as facing significant opposition to the model from within the health sector. Another organisation also referred to friction in its relationship with the public sector.

*The local FE colleges see us as a threat. We are absolutely small fry to them. What we can't get across to them is the people that we deal with would never walk through a college door. Not yet, but maybe when we've finished with them... The people we deal with wouldn't go through [their] doors, and yet they see us as a threat.*

*Community Organisation 7*

For some community organisations, focusing on assets has led to thinking about the local economy itself in different ways and rather than supplementing what the state no longer does, rethinking the whole way 'the economy' is understood and grounded locally. Rather than being a localist 'trap' this way of thinking about the economy is to recognise that 'social' infrastructure, when woven into the fabric of wider state governance infrastructures can provide essential goods and services that are fundamental to a good life for all (McDermont et al, forthcoming). This way of thinking resonates with some of the discussions in Wales (and some other cities and countries) on the Foundational Economy:

*This idea [is] that if you invest in this infrastructure you attract all these businesses and then they create employment. But our experience is most of those opportunities for employment are actually crap, they're not things we really want to embrace...That's one reason why we're interested in the foundational economy stuff, because it's recognising the traditional global economy is creaking at the seams and has not necessarily got long left and the tide is turning.*

*The solution to that as we see it is local responses, provide services locally that create better employment for people that provide things for people they need, not just endless trash.*

*Community Organisation 1*

*If we want to have a country we want to be happy to live in, this is the sort of thing we need. Where communities go back to being communities, not dormitories, where people know and trust their neighbours and work together with their neighbours to make life better. We've realised for so many years there has been an assumption that 'the government' does things, whether that's local or national government. The political landscape in recent years and likely in the short to medium term is going to be very different. We can't rely on some person in London or Cardiff to do things with. Communities are going to have to more and more make their own communities worth living in and not depend on outsiders.*

*Community Organisation 3*

Although the two quotes above appear to retreat into the local there were also strong calls to recognise such organisations as a sector, that could have stronger network power that could contribute to thinking nationally about the economy that drew upon local social infrastructure assets. Insofar as Community Anchor Organisations are focused on improving the lives and living conditions of local people, they could be seen as both reaching down and out to people living lives that are too complex for the bluntness of traditional public services, as well as giving energy to considerations of 'wealth' as something that has social, rather than merely monetary, value. As McDermont et al (forthcoming) argue "community wealth building pushes back on narrow investor-owned conceptions of wealth and innovation."

### 3.2.3 Inclusion and diversity as value and a craft

An inherent problem with the concept of community is that it is 'double-edged'. In its very assertion of belonging it assumes the symbolic boundaries of insiders and outsiders. As Gilchrist (2004) points out the dominant norms associated with a particular community may not be ones that some people wish to follow or embrace to harmful effect should they be ostracised or oppressed for these preferences. However, whilst not a critique that should be ignored or understated, the community anchor organisation respondents that we spoke to implied a creative vision of belonging, where community is made in the face of the structural impulses of division and exclusion. Returning again to Sennett (2013) this aspect of community making requires the crafting skills of community workers to repair and restore internal divisions, as well as opening safe spaces for those who have felt disempowered or invisible.

All places could be seen as diverse in some ways and all organisations saw the need to respond to different groups of people living within the community. The complexity of community was, in different ways, recognised by all community organisations, and the commitment to inclusion and diversity is also driven by a sense of fairness and justice. Albeit writing from the perspective of the individual community worker, there is a parallel with what Banks (2013, in Twelvetrees, 2017) identifies as the ethical dilemmas for community workers, principally that they must always strive to work with integrity. But where a worker's motive might be, say, faith based or political there remains the prospect of one's ethics running counter to those of some in a community. Likewise, in delivering a specific contract on behalf of the state, an anchor may unwittingly or unintentionally marginalise or exclude a specific element within the community; or at the very least be *perceived* as doing so. In areas where many local people do not have English or Welsh as their first language or whose cultural

preferences or requirements may not be met in other settings the effort to include was explicit. In these cases, the emphasis was on creating a safe place in which people could both be themselves and develop their skills and reimagine their horizons.

*We try to focus on having a safe, inclusive environment...We have three women's hostels within walking distance of us, we have two homeless hostels. We're trying to engage and communicate with those organisations as well to make sure they get involved. We're very aware it's a transient community so we have to keep that message going. People coming for ESOL will move on when their language skills improve. For us it's about how we constantly keep the door open to our local community. It's about being inclusive in a transient community. It's how we offer that welcome and make sure how local community still feels important and involved.*

Community Organisation 9

However, the need to be able to speak in people's own language was extended in other organisations in terms of respecting, advocating on behalf of, and giving space to particular groups in the community who historically have not had a platform to voice their desires and aspirations. As well as time and patience it requires experience and skill to be aware of, and respond to, other peoples' ways of speaking and understanding. It can mean doing things differently to ensure that those who do not connect have an opportunity to do so.

*That was the idea: low level, grassroots communication, speaking the same language as people. That sounds basic. I did children's rights training for Y Council in the mid-1990s and one of the issues I had was if a Somali family was moving into Y we'd spend a lot of talking about language, dress, food, religion etc. When we got a child from [ ] or [], X's two most deprived communities, to move into leafy [ ] where the children's home was, no one spent any time talking to him about any of those cultural issues and that shift he was going to experience. Nobody had ever thought about it. That was an issue. Speak the same language as people. Build the bridges. Earn your spurs with them.*

Community Organisation 6

As Darren McGarvey (2017) notes in his autobiographical account about growing up in a disadvantaged community on the outskirts of Glasgow, the alienation felt through having a different *unspoken* language – of the body, fashion, diet – can also influence people's feeling of belonging. It is worth noting that a couple of organisations were located in communities where Welsh is either the majority first language of the community or is spoken by a significant proportion of the community as its first language. For these an element of their mission was to ensure continued vibrancy and longevity of Welsh.

### 3.2.4 Asset Development, participation, and involvement

Whilst all organisations were concerned with unmet needs and matters of local 'concern' all had developed with an explicit acknowledgement of the assets potentially and actually embodied by local people and places. The recognition and development of human assets (and the physical assets which support individual growth, social connections, and symbolic power) was a core practice in community anchor organisations. Most explicitly talked about asset based community development as a core (professional) practice though others later said that it was something they stumbled on – a way of community building that had a name and application to what they were trying to achieve anyway. Two of the more rural organisations interviewed (organisations 3 and 8) referred less often and less

overtly to community development approaches; number 8 has received funding from a trust to encourage greater 'active' participation and so spoke about participation in project specific terms. This is based not simply on a desire to respect the value of people and to avoid the stigmatising narratives often associated with the language of 'poor' people and 'deprived' places. Although important, it was also more about giving the multiplicity of groups in the community hope that things could be better. It was seen as a tangible and effective practice to make change by utilising the individual, collective and environmental assets that already exist locally. They are, in effect, forms of capital to build both local wellbeing and local economies.

Sometimes this means taking risks and giving people, who may have been overlooked in the past, a chance to be productive in different ways.

*I employed a few people and had a row by other people for employing them. One of them I had a knock on my door, a prominent local man came in and said, 'Is it true you've employed this person?' I said yes and he said, "Are you f\*\*\*ing mental? Do you know the family? F\*\*\*ing hell. You can't employ people like that." I said, "Listen now, shut up. He applied for the job, he went through the process, he was selected. He'll have three months and if he's rubbish he'll be gone. If he cuts the mustard he'll have a full time job." That guy is now the best community worker I've ever seen. He knows that community inside out. So trust people to run with their own issues.*

*Community Organisation 6*

An asset based approach involved connecting, including and building locally with what is already there, to create something that has value; less as a means of achieving an externally-imposed or prescribed outcome, but to celebrate the merit in and of itself of coming together. The organisations acknowledged the productive value when groups of local people with shared interests are brought together informally. This is often the way in which ideas are born and things happen. It will be interesting to see post-pandemic how quickly these opportunities can be re-established, particularly should people continue to shield and social distance.

*There's a Knit and Natter group, the ladies come along and knit, there's about 40 of them that come every week but they have issues, and they might say, "Oh, such and such is not happy because that one down the road is causing a nuisance." They start to talk and they come out with these things and then they go lobbying which is brilliant because that's what it used to be. They deal with those issues and some of those issues become bigger issues and they create a little group to deal with it. That's how we do our community development, I would say.*

*Community Organisation 7*

In addition, there was a consensus in the online workshop about how anchors tend to invite people to express themselves in how they wish to participate, whilst not prescribing participation. While the provision of services was an element in many of the organisations, most saw future development as stemming from the capacities of local people. Capacity building in this sense inherently depends on people taking ownership of the things that they want to change. There was a difference in emphasis in the interviews with some emphasising the need to develop the capacity to take responsibility and others in developing the capacity to take power. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive though they may reveal subtle differences in ideas about the relationship between citizens and the state.

This ambivalence is perhaps best reflected in this quote:

*I've been working in community development for 25 years and I still don't know what that means. From our point of view, it is about enabling: 'Doing to, doing for, doing with and then*

*helping them do it themselves'. We're very much trying to get people to do it for themselves, taking control. For me it all goes back to power and how do we get power to those people that have none. That can be power over what they eat, what they put in their veins, what services they get, where they live. It's about readdressing the fact there's whole groups of people who have no power at all and that's just not right. If that's community development I'd say it's at the root of everything we do which is about changing the power and dynamics within our communities, whether that's communities of need or communities like [ ] where it's people that are done to, done for all their lives.*

### *Community Organisation 3*

Community anchor organisations are not about top-down provision of services or goods. They are not food banks (even if they may host one). Community-making implies the need for action that is about challenging the conditions in which people live. Although talk about campaigning and lobbying were not as evident as might be expected, it is clearly the case the organisations have the knowledge, and perhaps the authority, to be able to stand up and lobby when the community has been affected. Community building and protection implies advocacy.

*I don't think you could try and deliver a service and feel there were gaps without having to campaign and lobby. I think it's an integral part of the job. I feel our jobs are to be a voice for the community where the community has no voice. I'm not saying everybody in the community has no voice, and sometimes they don't know what it is they want to voice, the issues. But someone's got to stand up and say the truth and say what's happening in their communities. There are loads of us, it's not just me and [ ]. But if you don't advocate and challenge and speak out people aren't aware. I suppose this is how you do it. It's bringing people with you.*

### *Community Organisation 4*

In practice what is done on a day-to-day basis was very similar, with volunteering acting as a foundational basis for the development of skills to 'move on', or for growing up through the organisation and keeping that organisation informed, active and sustainable. This emphasis on people development also informs the decisions that organisations make about the use of their buildings. Where there is an emphasis on building skills, capacity and, indeed, power there was likely to be a reluctance to offer their buildings out to other organisations to provide services – a key difference to how local authority hubs operate.

*Taking aside some of the pressures community development can bring, it would be easy for us to just rent our rooms and not do any of the community development. With a small number of staff, it could maybe sustain itself. But we made a decision that's not what we're about. Our priority has been doing the community development.*

### *Community Organisation 9*

In line with the asset based community development approach, Community Anchor Organisations claim that they aim to put local people in the 'driving seat' as much as possible, rooting strategic development in the local. This means going further than engaging or involving local people in responding or developing ideas. It means developing people so that they become, in time, part of the governance structure as managers or board members as well as being the outward face of the organisation as staff members or volunteers.

*It's governed and managed through a board of trustees. They've employed me as a manager but there are still decisions that have to be approved by the trustees. We've recently had a new intake of trustees but we've still got well-established, extremely knowledgeable trustees*



*... The trustees wanted to build a trustee board for the future. The new trustees are local people. Having that knowledge and being a local resident is valuable.*

*Community Organisation 9*

*The majority of the people who worked there - we had over 100 employees - I would say 98% of them were local people, probably 70% off X and the rest from other places in [the local authority]. At times I was the only person who lived out of [the local area]. ...So a real impact on those individuals who often came as service users and ended up as staff members. I had four senior managers, all of whom had come as service users at some point. So a real change on a personal level but also the organisation itself.*

*Community Organisation 2*

However, as the two quotes suggest, this takes a significant investment of time in ongoing relationships with the community, in training where that might be necessary and in supporting staff roles. Not only can that investment in relationships, confidence, and skills development challenge the ability of the organisation to, at the same time, deliver but it is not always appreciated by partners or by the funders of programmes who are largely focused on programme or project based results within narrow time frames.

In addition, a key challenge can be in keeping local people interested and involved. This may be due to other life pressures or a feeling that 'nothing is likely to change.'

*There is an element of personal attitudes. We've noticed there will always be some people in the community with a negative approach. When someone says, 'Why don't we try doing X?' They'll say, 'Oh no, we tried that back in 1961 and it didn't work.' There are people in the community who I don't think we've ever seen in the shop or café, even though they're able to get out and about. There are some people who don't want to get involved and that's their right. ...In some cases the barrier is people not being willing to come forward. I'm sure there's lots of good ideas out there but perhaps people are a bit shy about raising it. It could be lack of confidence amongst members of the community and our volunteers... We do what we can to tackle that barrier of people who are a bit shy. But if the community isn't willing to get involved it isn't going to happen. That's probably the barrier.*

*Community Organisation 3*

As well as developing the capacities of individuals, and building connections between individuals and groups, most community organisations, particularly those who had been central in local delivery of the Communities First programme, have built strong connections to public sector organisations and these can also act as a mechanism to respond to issues that arise locally. Whilst this may seem like a needs-based idea of community development it is important to acknowledge the assets inherent in links to organisations that themselves hold resources that benefit communities they represent. The community-making role enables them to be alert to issues that arise whilst partnerships enable them to be able to respond as best they can.

*We've always been keen to work with people across those identity groups and bring people together. We have an awful lot of people we engage with in all levels of the organisation who have varying degrees of mental health problems. That's a key theme we confront every day, not because we've gone looking for it or advertise our services as for people [with mental health needs], although some of our services are specifically about mental health. It's just because that seems to be both a national crisis, or feature at the moment, but also inevitably it's even more pronounced where people are dealing with poverty.*

Community-making is about building connections that will provide the foundations for improved conditions for people locally. It is an 'in-between' organisation that holds and facilitates a web of connections:

*The key purpose from my perspective is they're that connector of people locally, they support and facilitate that local infrastructure. They don't compete with it, they complement it. Then regeneration, if you go back to its articles of association, it's about regeneration and all the charity's aims and objectives. Fundamental to that is engaging those people and recognising what you've got now. We're about facilitating, enabling, involving, connecting. It's about working with. Those are the foundations and ethos of the organisation: to regenerate and connect it by working more connectedly and stronger collaboration is having better results. It's the process at the moment, rather than the results. The results will come as a matter of strong collaboration.*

Furthermore, it is the practices of 'street welfare' (Blakely, 2010), of speaking to people (outside and inside buildings) and acknowledging the central importance of dialogue and conversation that make what they do very different to other kinds of public or even voluntary service. One focus group participant recounted how new local authority-employed Communities First staff approached the organisation to enquire how they might engage with the community.

*They approached us and said, 'We're coming to work in this area. Can you help us?' We said, 'Yes, great.' I took them down there, walked round the streets, introduced them to people. That was the only time they ever walked round the streets. They used to come to me and say, 'We're not getting many people in.' I'd say, 'Go and walk round the streets.' FG1 CO*

Though not common to all, or even a majority, of the interviewees, there was a strong recognition that they are part of a broader effort across communities in Wales, and beyond, in tackling inequalities and so needed to be more cognisant to the opportunity of forging alliances and networks across territories and across issues. So not just facilitating participation locally, but participating themselves at a greater scale be that national or international.

*I think we're quite ruthless about what we get involved in. They might end up thinking we can probably manage three different networks at any one time and I want them to be fruitful and useful and have some, not necessarily hard outcome but at least some relational value, you're not just sitting there having conversations that don't go anywhere. Within that I see networks are about learning and they don't necessarily have an immediate practical output, they're of value for other reasons...[ ] has been really useful. We got some concrete things that came out of it: we peer review each other's applications and we support each other. They're people that get where we're coming from. [ ] isn't really a network, it's more of an alliance. That's particularly around campaigning on structural issues.*

For those that had been part of the Communities First programme its demise had seen them lose opportunities for intra-programme collaboration and interaction that had not been adequately replaced; although there was a varying degree of desire over whether these *needed* to be replaced or not, given their perceived effectiveness. Nevertheless, the apparatus was there should they have wanted to utilise it.

It will be interesting to see whether this appetite for alliance-building has increased given the huge impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the global prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement since the interviews were first conducted.

A final point to make here, and one that arose frequently throughout interviews and in the online workshop, is the shared commitment to further education and learning as a means of transforming not only the individual but the wider community; as a way of continuing to develop and invest in your assets. Learning, for example via formal training (the availability of which, remarked several interviewees, had become conditional to being engaged with employability programmes), was recognised for its value in developing skills and knowledge and acquiring qualifications. But almost all interviewees referred to less tangible benefits of learning such as increased confidence and self-esteem. Moreover, learning was not simply a service that many of these organisations either delivered or hosted, but something which they strived to embed across their operations and is a process in which their own teams were engaged.

*I think my principles are guided by my learning from my work with CF. I've got my own values and learning, they all blend together. But my learning has also informed my principles.*

*Community organisation 5*

*We quite consciously put learning as an organisation at the heart of that. Yes, we need to collect information and data and monitor for funders and stakeholders, but at the heart of it we wanted to be a learning culture as an organisation.*

*Community organisation 1*

There was also a strong consensus in and across all the different methodological activities about the need for learning to sometimes have to happen in subtle ways, 'beyond the classroom' or, in the words of a focus group member, by embedding it 'by stealth into the things I do' (FG 3).

### 3.3 Funding and income generation

Currently most are funded from multiple sources, and many have started with small pots of money or, on the other extreme, were kick-started from significant European<sup>7</sup> or national programme level funding. However, many are now wary of funding opportunities that divert from their core mission and values and there are examples of organisations systematically prior testing potential funding opportunities against organisational values.

*If we were looking at funding for a particular project [a senior manager] will come and test it with some of the staff and see what they think. Maybe we'll speak to some volunteers about it. I guess that 'working with' culture is really, really important. Say there's a contract that comes up, we use a yes/no bid flow diagram. It's a simple set of 10 questions that challenge us, do we wish to progress with that or not. That's been quite useful. It helps discussion. We've done that with the board.*

*Community Organisation 1*

Two of the organisations currently receive core funding from the LA (one with legacy funding from Communities First equalling 10% of their total funding).

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Brexit seldom cropped up in the interviews as a challenge for anchors be that financial, practical or existential in nature.

*We decided that the legacy funding would be spent on the core infrastructure of [the organisation]. It pays for my role, the finance manager's role, an office coordinator and some running costs. Without those three roles, nothing else comes. It's my job to get the money. Without my job, whether it's me sitting here or anybody, part of that role is to bring all the other contracts in. None of that money would come in.*

#### *Community Organisation 7*

For the other organisation, they described themselves as one of a number of Community Anchor Organisations across the borough that receive a small amount of money which they felt, though small, helps to stabilise the organisation whilst fundraising. It is quite possible that initial core funding provides the impetus for future sustainability, as well as achieving recognition, but it could also be argued that it creates a form of dependency which could work against what the organisations are trying to achieve locally. However, there is also an awareness that no single source of funding is likely to be permanent and in general there has been some ambivalence toward LA funding and even more reluctance to accept Government funding, particularly as they are unlikely to be in control over when and how funding is phased out

Many had, or had benefited from, large non-government grants which were more plentiful in the past. As highlighted above, the pressure to find the money can easily divert from the core mission and strategic direction of the organisation, but some pointed to funding bodies and programmes, such as the Big Lottery's Helping Working People Programme, that were felt to be doing things differently and in line with the ethos of asset based community development and co-production.

However, Community Anchor Organisations are increasingly in competition with larger third-sector organisations and infrastructure bodies. There is a need for them to be seen as distinct with an explicit commitment to place, and/or communities of interest *within* a particular geography. In addition, community organisations still face the ongoing pressure from funders to be seen as doing something different or developing some innovation on previous delivery, despite it working well. The fight to win small to medium grants can also create logistical pressures on staffing and in keeping the organisations running evenly throughout the year and managing multiple small grants can be time-consuming. Furthermore, some funders do not pay organisations in advance and put extra pressure on precarious organisational structures.

*There are quite a few that won't [pay in advance]. They expect you to have the reserves to be able to cover paying the salaries or paying out on projects, and claim the money back. If you report something slightly wrong, there's a delay in getting the money. It's a barrier to people applying, especially small organisations. FG1 CO*

However, there were other examples of income growth that did not depend on programme and project grants. These have included opportunistic funding (for instance through the production of renewable energy, local giving, donations and legacies). Others have been looking to self-funding through income generation/trade and service level agreements. This has been particularly evident in more recent interest in social prescribing, particularly with regard to mental health. One organisation that previously relied on grant funding (the person has recently left for another community oriented organisation) worked hard over the years to move away from grants to be more or less self-sustaining.

*When I arrived it was probably 90% dependent on grants. When I left it was self-sustaining and had 10% to 15% grants and the rest contracts or earnings. In the following year they were in a position to finish with the last of the core funding from the local authority which led us to the independence I'd been striving for. We were in no way a vehicle for the local authority, other than as a paid deliverer of contracts.*

One organisation was initially set up with the support of small grants, but now operates as a community café and a shop, purely through trade. However, it is still firmly rooted in the community and in developing opportunities for community members. In a rural context the development of community run venues was highlighted as a productive way of maximising value from community assets which then benefit the community.

Community Anchor Organisations could have the infrastructure, local knowledge and connections to respond creatively to opportunities that generate income and opportunities.

*We saw a gap in the market. When the cruise ships come into [], there's around 30 a year, they needed stevedores tying up that ship, down on that jetty and doing everything. So we put a training package together, got in touch with [a training provider] and we came up with a deal and it's our second year running it now. Our trainees get paid for the summer months to go and be stevedores on the jetty, pulling the boat in and getting experience and all the training. Most of them move on very quickly, once they've got their qualifications because they're really good quality qualifications. So we use it as a training package but it generates quite a substantial income for us and it's unrestricted.*

However, there was still a strong feeling that Community Anchor Organisations need core funding in order to sustain the work they do.

*Most of the funding is for projects. You've got to think of a project. Core funding is what the small organisations need. As we keep telling the funders, if you haven't got the core team there, there won't be a project of any kind. Those venues won't be around to run those projects for you. FG1 CO*

The core funding is what keeps the partnership relationships alive, ensures the work they do is coherent with their aims, has an eye on, and capacity to pursue, future opportunities and manages to keep the vision alive.

### 3.4 Governance, management and workforce development

The organisations differed in terms of structure and mix, partly because of the way in which they were set up in the first place, partly because of scale (geographical reach and ambition), partly because of maturity but also because of values. Most aimed at a flat structure and even when there were tiers of governance there was usually a blending of roles with managers also taking on frontline activities. There is a strong culture of delegation and dispersed styles of decision-making.

*When we pick our staff we look for something a little bit different, we don't just go for the qualifications and the CV, we look at the person, their personality, the passion and why they want the job. I've got more staff delivering front line than management. I don't believe in big management, even our middle managers deliver frontline services.*

On the whole there was an effort to employ local people. This is worth emphasising because employment with Community Anchor Organisations also tends to mean that: commutes are shorter and greener; people's caring responsibilities are accommodated better; and people buy and shop local promoting more resilient supply chains, again resonating with some aspects of Foundational Economy thinking.

However just employing local people is not enough. Community organisations, in different ways, talked about the importance of nurturing people (users, volunteers, staff) through the organisation to become members of staff (if they wished) or to progress through the organisation. That way the organisation is both strengthened (through the place-based expertise that is key to these organisations), keeps it young and relevant, and it becomes seen as a valuable means of career progression and skills development in itself.

*We used to have an administrator last year, but she wanted to retire, so instead of employing someone on a full-time post, we applied for an apprentice and last August a young 16-year-old woman came, who said she didn't want to go to college, she wanted to learn on the job. We interviewed her, and she was a breath of fresh air for someone so young. She's completed her apprenticeship and from 1st July she's been employed by us. Me and x are getting older, and we can't afford to bring someone in to work alongside us, so we're trying to bring younger people in. You could probably bring in a manager, but would they have the same values as us, that we've worked so hard to keep? Anybody can manage. They can come in and manage the organisation, but would they have the same values that we've had during our time. FG2 CO*

However, there can also be an inherent limitation for community managers and leaders who, at times of stress, will take on additional workload, with no extra pay, in order to keep the organisation running. Nonetheless, where the infrastructure is working well (and this can be due to good leadership and management as well as good fortune in terms of income) the burden on everyone (including managers) can be minimised. A healthy management infrastructure should mean that the running of the organisation is not dependent on one or two people.

*The other kind of barrier I'd say is there's an economy of scale in terms of running an organisation. You need a certain level of infrastructure for an organisation to function in a healthy and progressive way, in terms of HR, finance, governance, and that can be quite a challenge. Otherwise it tends to fall onto one person, or two people. One of the lovely things for me is when I went away on holiday for three weeks in Scotland I came back and it was running itself. The things I'd been worrying about I didn't need to worry about because people had taken it up and that's not always been the case.*

*Community Organisation 1*

In terms of strategic development, boards have a key role in thinking about future direction. As has been emphasized throughout, Community Anchor Organisations try to involve local people as much as possible on the boards but also need expertise that might not be available locally.

*We currently have nine trustees; we usually have ten. It's a mixture of people who represent the community and roles which are useful to the organisation. They're very supportive.*

*Community Organisation 8*

In fact, some organisations actually prided themselves on bringing in, particularly rare financial, HR or data protection, expertise into the organisation.

*In 2003 [x] joined us as the chair. He was a regional director with [] Bank. [He] had that step-ladder in the maze when it came to running a business. He saw the world through different eyes from mine... [He] audited the state of the company when he came in. [He] still volunteers in X now. He's not the chair but he's still a director of the company.*

*Community Organisation 6*

In one of the workshops a participant talked about the quality of humility that 'professional' volunteers bring to Boards. On the one hand they are 'wanting to give back' utilising their expertise to strengthen the competence and capacity of the organisation through advice and scrutiny, but on the other, they learn to honour the very particular expertise and principles of community work. There is a sense in which the context in which community anchor organisations operate raises the question of what a 'professional' is. The 'street level' professional activity of community work (Vanleene et al, 2020) encompasses skills, knowledge and roles that other accredited experts did not have. Boards that were considered as working well were when the 'professionalism' of *different* kinds of work and knowledge cohered, rather than a board that was top-heavy with a particular aptitude or background; or defined as 'professional' in a particular way. Indeed, this is another form of liminal space balancing that community anchor organisations have to manage in the social structures in which they find themselves.

Most had involved councillors (and sometimes politicians) at one point or other, or still do. There was a recognition that they can be powerful allies but can also be antagonistic or fail to understand the very different structures, interests and values of Community Anchor Organisations as opposed to local council structures. However, it was generally agreed that a good relationship was key to having both credibility and influence at a local level.

*At X we had a very good relationship with our local councillors. Sometimes that was hard won. We had new councillors who had pre-conceptions and we worked hard because we thought it was important our councillors bought into what we were doing. They're elected, it was important to us to work with them as well as we could. We had a fairly good bunch. At a greater level some of the councillor leads we have good relationships with but there was a whole group of councillors who worked on the basis that [the organisation] got everything and there was nothing you could do to bring those round.*

#### *Community Organisation 2*

One organisation stressed the importance of having a theory of change and in testing practice alongside direction of travel. This also links to ensuring that there is a concerted effort to ensure that strategic development runs alongside core values, to avoid mission drift. However, this is a constant balancing act in ensuring that volunteers and staff are protected, that the organisation has funding to continue and that there is the basic infrastructure to support new projects. In other words, that the organisation is sustainable.

In practice sustainability is often a constant concern (not always for the new few years but the next few months). Some respondents talked about the lack of lack of time to just manage the day-to-day work let alone building for the future. At times the operational can drown out the strategic in business of everyday necessities (training, networking, attending to buildings, staff, form-filling etc.). Nonetheless the importance of developing a plan (as difficult as that may be in times of uncertainty) was stressed, particularly if the running of the organisation appears to be dependent on a small number of people. An awareness of who may be developing in the organisation, or from the community, who may undertake key roles is essential. This forward planning is perhaps even more important when times appear to be good. There is a need to build leadership skills, qualities and opportunities locally through the organisation. Succession planning in advance. Sustainability needs to be planned early (particularly in preparation for loss of major funding)

*You need to be able to actually carry out what you say you're going to do. Also you need to be realistic. We're not always going to be the size we are now, but you need to be realistic about what the community needs from the organisation. So if it needs an organisation that can continue to run some buildings, deliver some projects, but we've got thriving volunteers and*

*groups, that's fine, if we need to be delivering bigger. It's having some realism that we don't have to be what we are now in ten years' time. But we could be a smaller organisation with an element of enterprise supporting some of our other work.*

*Community Organisation 1*

Capacity building is seen as critical at all levels (board, staff and volunteers), though again time consuming. One organisation, in particular, factored in mentoring (of staff by board members) and a number of organisations prided themselves on training service users, and volunteers to future management, board or staff levels. In some cases, trustees had continued their role as volunteers within the organisation so movement through the organisation can be in different directions.

The importance of creating a culture of learning internally was also highlighted. Some organisations talked about finding opportunities to do collective internal learning in ways that feel comfortable to the people involved.

*As a board we've had two evenings where we've got the board together. The second one we got a facilitator who we know to help lead the session. We ordered in pizza and had flipcharts, Post-it notes and pens. We wrote down ideas, where we've come from, where we're going to, what the priorities are. That was the information gathering phase. We need to have the second phase which is drawing it all together into 'Where do we go?'*

*Community Organisation 3*

*...one of the things we want to do downstairs is put a wood burner in the fire place and have more seats around the fire so people can come in and sit in the winter and have a cup of tea and it's absolutely a point where people can gather and chat.*

*Community organisation 1*

It was also emphasised that learning can be an embedded practice in staff meetings, supervision within board meetings and in the process of engaging with local people themselves. However, there was a recognition that people can be trapped in a 'bubble' and that there was a need for outside perspectives (visits to and from organisations / shared meetings / forums / as a sector) but, again, it is sometimes difficult to find the time.

### 3.5 Buildings

Buildings were often mentioned as key on a number of levels: giving the organisation a visual sense of local identity, creating safe places to be and meet, to create a sense of local ownership and to consolidate a sense of independence ('this is our building where we do what we feel to be important'). One of the organisations is almost universally known by the name of the building in which it is located rather than by its official name. While for a different pair the name of the primary buildings from which they operate are regularly used as a colloquial 'short hand' for their names. Buildings are not just bricks and mortar but a living entity which provides spaces for reciprocity.

*The building has been a game changer, which I don't think we were necessarily expecting. I think we thought practically we needed space, and a home for community action and activity, but it's really just become a place where people come in and out. We haven't designed it, it's a mess that we've inherited, but the way that we've used it is to keep the area as you come in*



*as a community living room. People can just chat and sit, and tea and coffee is on demand. You create this culture of talking and listening. FG2 CO*

Buildings also provided a sense of security that they are there for the long-term - an asset that they could use when times were tough.

*For us [acquiring buildings] has been important for sustainability and for sending the message out that we're here to stay. We've also rented some of the properties out to get income generation to pump back into the services we deliver.*

*Community organisation 7*

Not all organisations actually owned their own buildings but the importance of having a sense of community ownership (even if actual ownership was not possible in particular places) was important for all these reasons. In this respect 'autonomy of use' could be seen as a proxy for outright ownership.

*I don't think it's that important. Someone asked me this when the new building was about to open. At the time Brexit was coming up. They said, 'What would you have done if you hadn't had the European funding?' We'd still be here. The money and the ownership isn't the critical thing. Everyone involved thinks what we're doing is worthwhile so we'd try to do it with whatever resources we have.*

*Community organisation 3*

There is the capacity to biographically inscribe buildings with features that make a symbol of local ownership. For example, Newport's Lysaght Institute displays quotes from local people about their connections to the building; Llanhilleth Institute in the Ebbw valley has similar displays. But it can also be in a more mundane everyday way: how the rooms are used, both in the layout and décor as well as in the availability of time for groups to use the buildings in ways that suit them; whether music is played. It is important how a building 'feels'. The extent to which people can move around the building, and inhabit its different spaces affects this; so too, the extent to which they must ask permission to do certain things: access the kitchen, make refreshments, use the WC, login to the wi-fi. Community organisation 1 expressed a degree of frustration at the "bizarre" layout of their building (due to ad hoc extensions over the years) but they recognised that it had the ulterior advantage of encouraging negotiation and compromise over usage of individual spaces.

American sociologists such as Eric Klinenberg, Ray Oldenburg and Jane Jacobs have eulogised about the socio-cultural value of social infrastructure and what Oldenburg calls 'third places': those spaces where different people come together to socialise, debate, dine, play, worship, organise, and so on. They are distinct from one's home and hearth (first places) and the workplace (second places). A broad range of spaces come under the heading of third places. Community and communal spaces such as chapels, institutes, and community centres. But it is important to note that third places are not solely public, community or not-for-profit owned. Consider the cultural importance of *private* enterprises such as salons and barbers to Afro-Caribbean communities; the prominence of *die Kaffeehäuser* in early C20th Viennese culture; the British pub; or the Italian café in the Welsh valleys such as Faracci's in Gwyn Thomas's *The Dark Philosophers* where the owner Idomeneo's policy is to welcome people into the café irrespective of whether they purchase anything, reasoning that 'it was a very poor voter who went through life without ever buying anything'.

Oldenburg talks about how third places tend to dismantle and flatten social hierarchies; do not require people to spend money; are inherently democratic; and involve debate, discussion and philosophising. Whether it is a café, garden, youth club, or Men's Shed space - or CO2's 'pop-up' primary healthcare hub that sets up twice a week in a Salvation Army church to serve rough sleepers - each organisation talked about the way in which spaces can also be used to ensure that people feel 'safe', welcome, and

unjudged; whether it is in terms of particular cultural practices or to express insecurities about matters such as income, job insecurity, racism, or mental health.

*I think it's one of the strengths of the organisation where it's trying to create, we call our reception a 'Community Living Room'. It's trying to create a space where anyone can feel welcome and can be themselves, they don't have to conform too much. We have a code of conduct, people have to be respectful but if someone wants to shout and scream and make a noise they can. It's people feeling welcome to do that. It's trying to help people feel welcome and at home.*

*Community Organisation 1*

However, that a building is a place where groups feel safe to meet is not just dependent on owning a physical building, it is also dependent on how the building is managed and structured. How access is organised and creating a sense of informality as people walk through the door are also important.

On the occasion that one of the research team attended CO2's hub to interview a representative, he was presented with an initially disorientating lack of order. For a primary healthcare setting there were none of the physical barriers often used to corral service users; to keep them separate from professional staff (e.g., reception desks, glass panels, dividers); and to re-enforce hierarchies of power, expertise and professional status. Indeed, it was difficult to distinguish at first glance who were the service users and who were the professional health and ancillary advice staff who also attend the hub present to provide guidance on non-health related matters such as housing, welfare rights and benefits.

Many talked about the fact that they were open every day and evenings (sometimes quite) late. This requires management, staffing and access decisions that go beyond the physical ownership of a building as such.

*We've been open seven days a week from the beginning. In the early years we shut two or three afternoons a week. We were probably open around 55 hours a week. We're now open 70 hours a week in the shop, the café is a bit less. When we opened with the pilot we had three-part time managers who tried to make sure there was a manager in most of the hours the shop was open. We now have 28 paid staff, four of whom are full time, another two or three are close to full time, 25 hours a week or more. Some of them are young people who do two or three hours one day a week after school doing cleaning. We also use young people at weekends and need to balance the opportunities for the use of buildings (e.g. rental) and the need to stay true to values and the identity of the building and locally owned/controlled.*

*Community Organisation 3*

All these factors make a community owned facility very different to one run by a local authority which may run services for the community and may even open their premises up to local groups, but are not ultimately created and controlled by the community.

*The whole idea for us is that social space that is also a safe space. People feel safe there. That comes across in all your spaces. Some of the places we're working with hubs that haven't got that safe space. To survive, they need to charge space to make the building work financially, and it ruins the whole point of it. You get less people coming in, and they have to charge more to survive. You start to lose the value of what you're building. It's quite challenging on that level to make it work financially. FG2 CO*

However, owning a building can be a liability as well as an asset, particularly in terms of maintenance costs and time. One organisation expressed the competing advantages and disadvantages of owning buildings.

*In terms of X, having the buildings was both the best and worst thing. We had them on 100 year leases, so they were more or less ours. It gave us power, a face, security, presence. It was a fantastic resource. X had a nursery, an old community centre which was the old people's centre, three purpose-built buildings on our main site. We also delivered in other people's premises. We also had full repairing responsibility and the cost. A lot of my time was spent on governance of buildings. We got to do fixed wire testing which costs £7,000. We had to check the water, so we're not giving everyone Legionella. They were also hard work.*

*Community Organisation 2*

CO4 mentioned its experience of the local authority insisting on it agreeing to full external maintenance leasehold but which they refused to sign. There was resentment too toward local authorities who tried to pass on buildings to communities which were more likely to become a liability and a burden. The presence of a power dynamic in these sort of negotiations was not lost on the interviewees who had been involved in them. It was also remarked how the potential technical and legal complexity of managing buildings can be a barrier to sustainable and longer-term succession planning around involving younger people in local community work.

During the online workshops the differences were brought up between legislation in Wales, England and Scotland in relation to community asset ownership and development. Most participants were quick to acknowledge that they were not expert in the English right to bid legislation nor the Scottish equivalent under its broader land reform agenda; but there was a feeling that the community asset transfer policies in Wales require review. In simple terms, Welsh communities lack the legal mechanism available to their Scottish and English counterparts that puts a temporary brake on the acquisition by private interests of publicly owned buildings or land, thus providing a window for communities to organise themselves to prepare a collective proposal. The existing Welsh asset transfer policy provides instead for a process that facilitates and sponsors a brokered negotiation between communities and asset-holders. Though it is cognisant of and sympathetic to the potentially lengthy time required to organise and prepare community proposals, it does nothing to actively obstruct the appetite of non-community interests; the playing field is not levelled to anywhere near the same extent as in Scotland in England.

It is perhaps easy to paint a picture of victimhood; of Welsh communities at a relative disadvantage to their Scottish and English counterparts as well as constantly swimming out of their depth in the choppy waters of contemporary commercial property speculation. However, one organisation was quick to stress that in the face of local authority inertia and lethargy in completing an initial leasehold arrangement, and then the subsequent asset transfer process, it was assertive and, in its own words, 'militant':

*"we were virtually squatting...because we refused to sign the licence because we weren't happy with the terms and they never got back to us. So we've been pretty militant. For us it had to be free to develop in the way we wanted to as an organisation.*

*Community Organisation 1*

What was important was the terms under which they controlled and owned - not necessarily in the strict legal sense - the building.

Given interviews took place before the global Covid-19 pandemic there could not possibly be any reference to it; the online workshops however took place in its grip and had an inevitable influence on the discussion. At the time of writing much of the UK has re-entered a lockdown aimed at suppressing virus transmission and these have had an impact on anchors' spaces (as well as on staffing levels through illness, caring, homeschooling, furlough etc.). The organisation with the 'community living room' (CO 1) expressed difficulty in interpreting covid-19 public health guidance because theirs is not a place of work *per se*; neither is it a private home, nor is it a public building from which 'transactional' services are delivered. It is a place where people are free to gather, associate and 'hang out'. The guidance, in the view of the representative of CO 1 "is written without understanding what our community spaces are".

### 3.6 Leadership

Despite a commitment to broad community ownership what was evident was that good leadership lies behind the setting up of the organisations as independent entities in the first place and in driving them forward. That was usually often in the hands of one or two individuals. Without a robust infrastructure and management plan, this could lead to questions as to how the organisation would manage should a particular individual move away, become ill or retire. That reliance was seen as problematic.

*There were stories, 'If you want funding, see Bob', 'if you want something fixed, see Bob.' He seemed to be that person. That was a danger. FG1 CO*

However, though some hierarchy was usually apparent, leadership was often seen as shared or distributed rather than 'heroic'; although there was an acknowledgement that community organisations need someone who can pull things together and there was a general feeling that command and control does not work. At a basic level there was the recognition that people throughout the organisation will have different skills and qualities and that these need to be structured into how the organisations work and are managed. It also borne out of the pragmatism required of managing diverse operations that have followed different evolutionary paths and take different forms

*I think it's shared. Whilst I'm a director of the organisation, I consider X and X work in hand with me to take things forward. It's recognising X is better at writing than I am and I might be better at managing people than he is. I think it's working around strengths of the organisation. I think it's been a bit of a journey, that's fair to say.*

*Community Organisation 1*

Good leadership also requires the recognition of skills in everyone and to ensure that the diversity of these are recognised and put to good use. This can be done informally, simply by talking to staff and volunteers day-to-day but also through existing operational structures. The value of supervision, audits and reviews, and away/team days – often including trustees, and occasionally volunteers - were mentioned as a means of maximising the value of each individual (board member, staff and volunteers) to the running and direction of the organisation.

*I think being open to other people's ideas, you really need to be able to play to other people's strengths and use other people's passions and skills. Find that shared agenda and work together and not be threatened by that. That open mindedness, that genuine willingness to work in an open and trustful way.*

## Community Organisation 2

In the context of a Community Anchor Organisation using a community development approach, leadership is also a question of releasing and building capacity so that the organisation continues to develop on the basis of the potential and actual capabilities of community members themselves. This can have, as articulated by one of the anchors, the opportunity for a 'pollination effect' whereby people are attracted to the organisation because of its outwardly visible values, culture and leadership approach.

*There are two things for me. The biggest and most important is everyone understands what we're trying to achieve and their part in it and we've all got a really important part to play. Sometimes their part is more important than mine because they're got the expertise. The other part is I've been looking for the next manager of X for the last 12, 15 years. I think we're good at spotting talent and trying to encourage people. ... I'm coming to a deadline where I want somebody to come in with the same values of the organisation as myself, the same values about social justice, having empathy and care about their communities and all the things that go with that. ... I want it in safe hands. You can get a manager but can you get a manager with the right attitude for that organisation?*

## Community Organisation 4

However, many people felt that leadership is not just about having these skills to bring people on but also about certain qualities and values. Leadership in a community context can be tiring, frustrating and isolating, so the passion to do the job was often mentioned as key.

*Determination, you've got to be driven to be anywhere near anybody leading anything anywhere, you've got to be passionate and you've got to believe in what it is that you're trying to lead. You've got to be bloody minded as well when you come up against people who are not understanding what you're trying to do and things...[to] push through [that]; can't take anything personally or you would cry every night. I think you've got to have the proper value of believing in the people out there, that's what it takes to lead X, you've got to believe in what you're doing and why you're doing it.*

## Community Organisation 7

*For me leadership is about recognising something, whatever it is, and having the ability and responsibility to act on it, without fear. It's about having the courage to take things and do something with it. But bring people with you. Understand that you can't do anything on your own. You've got to work with as many people as you can.*

## Community Organisation 4

*Compassion and deeply held beliefs about why you're doing the stuff is really important. Sometimes that's the only thing that keeps you going. A lack of ego is important. Tenaciousness, patience, mental toughness and the ability to compartmentalise and pace yourself. I think being open to other people's ideas, you really need to be able to play to other people's strengths and use other people's passions and skills. Find that shared agenda and work together and not be threatened by that. That open mindedness, that genuine willingness to work in an open and trustful way. That's relevant everywhere.*

## Community Organisation 3

However, there is a danger of burn-out and responsibility at 'the top', so leadership is also about being able to take annual leave or step down without feeling that the organisation will otherwise collapse;

a number of the interviewees spoke of the value in drawing on the counsel of board members at times of emotional or physical fatigue. Notably, between the interview and the online workshop the GP who had been the driving force behind the primary health hub had moved on from the project. It is also interesting to contrast CO 7 pride itself on having little management, while CO 1 emphasise the value of its senior management team in a more collaborative approach to leadership.

The final three sections focus on the ways in which Community Anchor Organisations interrelate with the organisations and structures around them. Whilst some organisations may be keen just to use the social capital generated from their external connections, to improve the lives of, and prospects for, local people, others are keen to have wider influence on the ways in which services and the economy itself operate.

### 3.7 Partnerships and networks

Community making is about creating and strengthening connections internally - individuals and groups creating what Cattell (2001) called 'networks of solidarity' - and externally to people and organisations with resources and the power to make things happen. Whereas internal connectedness enables the organisation to see what is necessary or desirable, links with other partners often help to make action (e.g. developing appropriate services/support/training opportunities) possible. One organisation has had a long term and established relationship with a university which has enabled them to bring in significant funding for resources and develop productive relationships for joint work which involves community members. Again these partnerships and networks take time to develop but as they mature and become bonds of trust these can help organisations to be both responsive to local issues that arise and to innovate.

*In terms of partnerships we have some really strong ones. The partnership with the university and (large project) has brought in £1.6 million in resources, it's been a massive partnership and a really big commitment from them into the community. That's taken years really to develop but it's really benefited from two people particularly in the university who are absolutely beyond committed to the work and [the project] and have got it from the beginning and fought really hard within the university to get it recognised. We do have a lot of partnerships.*

*Community Organisation 1*

When these partnerships are with public services there was a perception that the local Community Anchor Organisations have brought the community element into their work and transformed the way in which services are delivered. This was thought to have been particularly in relation to health services and there is a particular opportunity emerging with regard to social prescribing and mental health that some organisations have taken on. One respondent described their role as 'boundary-spanners' between the community and public service organisations to do the things that need to be done differently. As mentioned previously, partnerships with local authorities can be productive but that depends on the nature of the relationship and the extent to which Community Anchor Organisations are free to work in the ways in which they believe to be appropriate and effective. Relationships with elected members, as highlighted earlier, can again be a useful source of support and can help to make things happen but many had had experiences of members being antagonistic or seemingly lacking any understanding of how Community Anchor Organisations operate. Henderson et al's (2020) recent reflections on the role of Community Anchor Organisations sees them as at "the frontier of public value governance and social commons" which "can now be imagined as a space for

dialogue in which collaborative and agonistic dynamics between state and non-state institutions are engaged constructively for local development and wider social and systems change” p 8). The consequence for good leadership is both collaborative (in forging productive partnerships and relationships), and antagonistic in challenging existing structures that require change. Whilst one online workshop participant suggested that Community Anchor Organisations needed to be seen as “apostles not terrorists”, they clearly saw their role as challenging where required.

In the online workshop one respondent spoke about how a new state-of-the-art primary healthcare facility lying outside but serving the anchor’s community resembles very much the one that he and his chair had first discussed over a decade earlier with the health trust. There has been no credit given to the anchor about the early deliberations, and whether it is down to a turnover of trust personnel in the intervening period or for more mendacious reasons is largely academic; a ‘cuckoo effect’ of sorts can ‘colonise’ community input into more strategic, long-term developments, or whitewash it from history. Perhaps in the longer run community organisation number 2 will experience the same with its radical primary care community hub. But for the moment it demonstrates a departure from the prevailing experience of anchors being brought into, or gradually squeezing their way into public service delivery: it appears to be carving out a new ‘space’ altogether to transform primary health care.

However, in a climate of austerity (and even more so since the outbreak of COVID-19) community organisations feel that local authorities were too busy surviving to look at innovative and holistic ways of addressing poverty related issues such as mental health and drug abuse. They have the advantage of having the local expertise and partnerships on the ground to work innovatively and with agility, with a fraction of the funding already being spent.

Finally, some community anchor organisations highlighted the value of networking within the community sector itself, though some also thought carefully about becoming involved with too many networks which may facilitate good relationships and new ideas, but take up time. The awareness of broader alliances also risks this absorption of time and energy. However strong (city or borough) networks of community organisations could create a vehicle for change and accessing collective resources which one organisation could not do alone.

*I don't know if it's relevant really, one of the things that's happening X is lots of social enterprises like ourselves are coming together to create one big umbrella body<sup>8</sup> to force issues within the council about what's going on. That will be a good one if that works.*

*Community Organisation 7*

While sector networking can be a good way of developing ideas and knowledge there is a fine balance between cooperation and competition, particularly now that austerity has resulted in a smaller funding pool. Whilst the ethos was largely about sharing, respondents were aware of the risk. However, fears of competition were largely directed at the large third sector partners though there are also opportunities for collaborative bids.

*Personally, I share. I've offered to share how we did our consultation with other community centres. I think we're going to have to do more sharing. We can't afford to buy-in things. I think*

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<sup>8</sup> The authors note that the structure of an overarching body that intra-connects local activity and enterprise as well as externally and/or at other scales is what exists in Blaenau Ffestiniog and its environs via Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog, which has been cited by other case studies as a model of good practice.

*we need to look at more joint bids. In X I don't think we are there with collaborative bids. I think there's huge scope for that. We're as secure as we can be because I'm trying to write bids, but you can't be dependent on personalities. It should be sustainable without an individual. That's where the third sector needs to come together. It's very difficult. It's a combination of huge organisations and very small organisations. I think there's scope in there to have a different tier, have the smaller organisations coming together more so they don't get dominated by the big beasts.*

*Community Organisation 9*

It is worth noting that in the main the interviewees did not know each other, as individuals or as organisations. There was little expression in interviews to self-recognition as being part of a bigger cohort of similar organisations or of sharing a common identity as anchors. Although several interviewees emphasised their independence as a defining feature, the recognition that this autonomy from the state is shared by other organisations does not appear strong. The independence has been 'carved out' on the basis of who and what the anchors *are not* rather than based on an acknowledgement of shared interests, values, experiences and origin stories.

### 3.8 Influence

The extent to which Community Anchor Organisations felt that they had power to influence the ways in which services are directed, organised or delivered, or how policy is developed and executed differed. Some feel that they are not taken seriously but most have had 'moments' of small influence where, for instance, they have had to back the community on some issue. However, they often have had to position themselves carefully. Being too close to the Local Authority, in particular, can lead to lack of trust from the community but, as highlighted earlier, they need the independence to advocate for the community when necessary. With regard to politicians it was felt that MSs<sup>9</sup> were often willing to praise but tangible support was rare.

Some talked about influencing through being part of a network, others that they are more influential through the work that they deliver – perhaps by making themselves indispensable. One said that they just get on with the job in serving community and that they were only interested in making a challenge if it was something that directly impacted directly on their community. Power, it was largely felt, only comes from independence. They felt they had soft power though in doing the work that the public sector no longer feels capable of delivering. Their power and influence comes from delivering and responding to local people, not being invited to sit around a local authority table.

*I think that we have better influence delivering than we do sitting on boards, making decisions that never come to fruition.*

*Community Organisation 7*

*We have an influence on services which are similar to us and maybe slightly up a grade. We can talk and influence within those networks but I don't think we necessarily have a lot of power and influence at county level. We do at local level but at county level we have to work together. The networks have power and influence*

*Community Organisation 8*

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<sup>9</sup> During the research the Welsh Assembly changed its name so Assembly Members (AMs) are now known as Members of the Senedd (MSs).



*Relationships with Cardiff Council have been frustrating, haven't they? In a way I think we've accepted that might not be a bad thing. At least it gives us independence from them. But it has been frustrating*

*Community Organisation 1*

However, there were some cases, particularly where there were strong community/public service relationships, where other organisations might come to them for support. Some feel that community involvement and co-production is not really taken seriously by local authorities. However, being seen to involve local people in the work they do can give some legitimacy to the issues they raise particularly in local authorities where the language of, and commitment to, co-production is evident.

Some community anchor organisations did feel that they had the power to influence however. Particularly those with strong, but independent, relationships with public sector organisations. One also mentioned community organising as a mechanism and practice that now enables them to have an influence through an alliance of other civil society organisations. There was an acknowledgement in the online workshop however that this alliance

### 3.9 Impact

As with influencing most Community Anchor Organisations saw their impact through the lens of what they have achieved on the ground. However, again, their 'outcomes' are often misunderstood, particularly in the context of programme evaluations. Often the 'soft' outcomes, such as confidence or changing ideas about the benefits of education and employment that leads people to enter education and work in the first place, were the ones they focused on. The skills in providing those opportunities are poorly understood. The impacts of prevention work such as keeping people out of prison, from suffering from debilitating mental illness, addressing social isolation, for instance, are rarely reported on.

*Sometimes the difference is in hard outcomes: some many people into jobs, so many people into schools. Then the soft context is getting people to think about their own perspective of themselves in their community in a different way. There are lots of different examples of people who have been big enough to take that step into a new direction. ...Boy causing trouble, living with his nan because his mum didn't want him at home. Next step would be a children's home and prison. Years later X bumped into him, then aged 22 still hadn't been to prison. ...Boy involved with peers stealing cars. Bumped into him in a gym, now a builder working on the [major environmental] development.*

*Community Organisation 6*

It was clear that some Community Anchor Organisations found it hard to dissociate impact (as well as outcomes) from processes. One particular learning programme for women was discussed at some length. The project was acknowledged to have good outcomes for women who had never had any qualifications (nurses, police force, third sector support workers). However, the work was slow, skilled and responsive to the circumstance in which the women found themselves. They recognised the need to build self-confidence and focus on their wellbeing, as well as providing childcare to release them from ties of everyday parental obligations. The work was felt to be highly skilled as one to one support can go very wrong if not done properly. It is within the processes that you see change occurring, what Twelvetrees (2017) calls 'process goals' in community development. In discussions with focus groups on education and learning, it was also clear that it was not always appropriate to separate 'lived' impacts on people's lives and that the separation of health, learning and work in the latter stages of the Communities First programme, for instance, was unhelpful and inappropriate. Community Anchor

Organisations paid attention to the value of informal learning and felt that no-one else was doing it in places where people are experiencing financial strain. They both understand and respond patiently.

*You need those informal courses to get people interested or feel like they've got the skills to go and do these courses. You need to get them through the door initially with these informal, social gatherings. Informal learning is one of the hardest areas. If you're a family man and thinking you'd like to do an art class but you have to pay your electricity bill and can't afford to join a course. In a lot of ways your circumstances decide whether you can do something. You have to make a choice whether you go and do something that might be seen as a hobby, or do you keep the roof over your head and put food on the table for your children? FG3 CO*

Not only did they feel that what they gave people was a sense of better wellbeing and confidence to act in the world, but they created a gateway to more formal education where that was what they wished.

*We do a lot of it. Whenever we develop a project we develop it with money for facilitators in it to facilitate informal learning opportunities, groups peer mentor support because formal learning is great but not everyone is ready for it or wants to do it. But it's an option. You get people in, get them confident and more assertive. They get to know what they enjoy doing. That's a key because if they enjoy it you do it well. Then they decide the next steps. FG3 CO*

Furthermore, they felt that Local Authorities actually depend on their resources and skills to get more local people into colleges and universities in the first place.

*My argument is, when they say, 'We don't want to work in the community anymore,' 'Good, if you don't work in the community, give it five years, you'll have no people coming through your doors.' If someone's coming back to learning, if you haven't been in school for 10 years, you won't walk through the front door of a university or college. I had to retrain and walk through the door of the training centre. The first day I walked through there I was shaking. That's where the community venues feed into these higher establishments in the long run. That comes from the informal stuff. It's not going in for the academic stuff. FG1 CO*

*The people that we deal with would never walk through a college door. Not yet, but maybe when we've finished with them. They are the next step up on the ladder if someone wants to go into education or training.*

*Community Organisation 7*

Long established Community Anchor Organisations felt that they had actually had a major impact on 'hard' outcomes but that that investment had not been realised for many years. They also felt that they impacted on the local economy by employing people in their own right; as well as developing skills that can be used elsewhere. If the organisations were to fold many used words such as 'devastating' in terms of the effect on services, employment, education, local pride, crime, vandalism and so on. They saw themselves as providers of valuable employment that itself makes a difference to how people feel about the place in which they live and how other people view them. However, they also disliked the tick-box approach to outcomes with stories of people landing in poor and inappropriate jobs and receiving outside training that was of little use. Much of the discussion was also the lived value of informal education in managing the difficulties and opportunities that life presents as well as opening people's eyes to the unfairness of the social and economic structures that exclude them.

However, as well as contributing to neighbourhood wellbeing in ways that traditional public services are unable to deliver, some felt that they had a key role in thinking about building local economies and particularly the foundational economy. It may well be worth considering what Community Anchor Organisations could locally and collectively offer in terms of a different way of improving economic and social life for communities that have largely missed out in recent decades of acute social and economic change.

## 4 Conclusions

We see this report as a part of a living discussion regarding the role, value and characteristics of Community Anchor Organisations in Wales. Whilst the notion of community, upon which it necessarily rests, could be seen as essentially contested (Gallie, 1956) the term continues to be asserted and enacted. While Raymond Williams himself recognised it as a slippery, ‘warmly persuasive’ and performative concept (Williams, 1983), he also believed that no society was of worth that did not incorporate and adhere to some notion of community (Smith, 2008). Grassroots community organisations have been a part of democratic life for over two hundred years in the UK. Place based, rooted and networked organisations - what we are calling Community Anchor Organisations - have a more recent history, kept afloat by a multiplicity of state and non-state funding opportunities that recognise their validity and viability as platforms of innovation and reach. However, they slip in and out of vision, tend to be lumped together with the wider voluntary sector, battle to secure firm foundations for the work they were set up to do, and encounter a number of internal tensions.

Community Anchor Organisations aim to be independent from the State but sometimes find themselves dependent on funding through accountability structures that are out of step with the ways in which they work, their vision of what positive change looks like and their understanding of how change happens and at what speed. One problem, for instance, with Communities First funding is that what appeared to be a community led, bottom-up programme became a government-defined programme prioritising results; for instance by drawing on parts of Results Based Accountability methodology. Where Community Anchor Organisations became the delivery bodies this often hampered their ability to be agile and responsive to community needs and ambitions, as they saw them (Pearce et al, 2020). It is invariably the case that Community Anchor Organisations’ initial activity tends to focus on a limited number of functions, sometimes as few as one. Among our interviewees are organisations that started as providers of, for example, community transport, community education or a shop. The broader the range of services and activities they adapt to provide runs the risk of relying on a portfolio of funding, that brings with it the tensions of potentially losing grip on a coherent vision-led entity; of becoming dependent on the competing or incompatible requirements of a number of potentially disparate funders; and in commissioning frameworks, pressure to find economies of scale or internal ambition pushing organisations to encroach on new territories beyond their initial spatial canvas.

All have found some degree of sustainability and independence through contracts, service level agreements and, in one case, trading and that may continue to work for some organisations in some local contexts. Moreover, each Community Anchor Organisation had a defined ethical, practical or cultural value-system that governed for what and with whom they would *not* apply nor engage. However, the question that recurrently cropped up throughout our enquiry is: if there is wider social and economic value in what Community Anchor Organisations offer, are there other ways in which Community Anchor Organisations can be viewed and supported?

The challenge is to elaborate what a regulatory infrastructure might look like that could accommodate both the contribution and defiance of Community Anchor Organisations. They are necessarily both potential partners and antagonists, working for and against the state; and *only* independence gives them that power. But this appears to be contradictory. They are either part of the infrastructure or they are not. Perhaps it is more useful to think of social infrastructure as less about objects and technologies than of relationships and flow. As McDermont et al (forthcoming) argue: “Community organisations finesse rules with policy-makers where individuals cannot. They translate for, and facilitate conversations between, regulatory bodies and local groups and individuals. Community anchors, then, form a web of techniques and practices that act as conduits, roads, pathways and

channels – in short, a socio-political infrastructure that can create flows.” (McDermont et al, forthcoming)

Each organisation provides and/or facilitates access to rich networks of spaces, facilities, institutions, and further groups in and through which these socio-political relations flow, affording opportunities for social connection (Latham and Lane, 2019) and where traditional notions of free association can be engaged in. Anchor organisations have often provided audiences for consultation processes and are therefore well placed to aid in the facilitation of co-production with statutory bodies, having access and trust from a comprehensive cross section of local communities and access to familiar non-threatening settings.

Overwhelmingly people are welcomed non-judgementally in these spaces and valued for their social contributions and not on grounds of wealth or status. Neither is their presence in these spaces conditional on engagement in financial transactions, even though several of these Community Anchor Organisations run commercial activities such as a café or shop; Anchors broadly succeed in embracing marketized activities without sacrificing their social ethos. A greater tension is not with the market, however, and with the state where Anchors are delivering services or programmes, such as employability support, on its behalf. These programmes’ focus on disciplining people’s labour, modifying their behaviours and recourse to sanction for failure to adhere are an aggravating force within this socio-political infrastructure.

In relation to their independence is the capacity, desire and need for Community Anchor Organisations to have control over buildings and space. It was not the purpose of this report to propose a model of land and building asset ownership that they have, for instance, in Scotland. What Community Anchor Organisations challenge, as well as other activist movements, is the meaning of value and wealth as it applies to property and land. Post COVID-19 this challenge to make buildings and land both socially useful but also locally controlled may well become more salient as buildings fall into disuse, as property value fluctuates, demand for housing grows, and gentrification exerts local pressures. Ownership, or more important, control over buildings was felt to be important to Community Anchor Organisations. They were safe spaces, biographically inscribed, and spaces to open up the possibilities for creative thinking, deliberation and action as a consequence of free association and gathering – it is enough to be places in which to simply be and to talk.

Finally, there is also a sense in which they want to be seen as a sector in themselves with the capacity to network, share learning and develop their distinct voice in the making, and critique, of public policy and developing what has been referred to elsewhere as the Social and Solidarity Economy (Serrano et al, 2019; McDermont et al forthcoming) and in this report, the Foundational Economy. How this would be funded, what the model would be appropriate and who would kick-start it, are discussions that are already beginning to take place. The recent Building Communities Trust Manifesto (2021) most notably is framing this debate and with, pandemic permitting, Senedd and local elections in Wales in 2021 and 2022, the opportunity to shape political manifestos and programmes for government is one that Anchors might do well to take up. Individually at least, but there would be merit in a more collective front and voice.

Although diverse in terms of core activity, origin story, geography and demography whom they serve, and the partnerships and alliances they form, there are remarkable similarities between Anchors such as their commitment to investing in people in the long-term; their pride in independence; their tendency to do away with hierarchies; their agility and responsiveness; their experiences of dealing with the state; their cognisance of the importance of learning in their work; their commitment to place, and more. The likes of WCVA, CREW and others have been pointing out for more than a decade the qualities that Anchors bring to placemaking and the need for specific forms of support and finance; as well as means of incubation in areas that lack an Anchor. Yet it is still a very patchy picture in respect

of these. Despite the commonalities shared by the Anchors in this enquiry, they all tend to be isolated from one another with the only interaction with other Anchors usually confined to another in their local authority area or a neighbouring one.

Two exceptions are worth noting here. Firstly, the Talwrn network convened by the People and Work Unit and which is modestly funded by an independent trust, has a self-selecting 'membership' and which lies outside of the usual state (or shadow state) apparatus that often convenes such fora. Secondly, Community Movement Cymru, a new collective movement being established in 2021 inspired by Raymond Williams's belief that local action, ideas and innovation must grow and migrate beyond their place-inspired roots and to federate, providing an amplified voice for communities (see S. Williams, 2021).

A larger network and/or one more focussed on specific forms of support to Anchors is not something that the Anchors in this enquiry proposed or championed. They all spend a significant amount of time and energy in maintaining their professional partnerships, local networks and entering into broader alliances; an 'Anchor specific' network would make further demands on this exhaustible resource. However, the increased appeal of foundational economic theory and its recognition of the importance of anchor institutions – such as universities, hospitals, large government departments and other state apparatus – offers those Community Anchor Organisations who wish to, the opportunity to articulate that 'anchoredness' has virtues at different scales, not just at those served by large institutions. Collaborations between Anchor Organisations and Anchor Institutions that span these scales offer opportunities for multi and collective Anchor Organisation involvement in innovation platforms at local, regional and national levels.

We are sympathetic to Henderson's (2015) classification of the function of Anchors and believe it bears further examination and scrutiny in a Welsh context (Henderson writes from a Scottish perspective):

**Participation** – e.g., facilitating community planning processes, providing opportunities to volunteer, facilitating involvement in consultation.

**Partnership** – e.g., involvement with/representation on formal partnerships, connecting public bodies to 'community' issues and knowledge.

**Prevention** – e.g., by supporting local employment generation, provision of training and support, improving access to public services and benefits/welfare

**Performance** – using the vehicles of participation, prevention and partnership to increase and build local democratic accountability and advocate for relevant services.

There is potentially another P that could be added to these: Placemaking, i.e., activities that conceive more holistically a sense of place as spaces where people not only work or access services, but engage in cultural reproduction, develop responses to the climate emergency, tackle forms of oppression and so on, in ways that are shaped and informed by the places in which they take place.

It is important to note, however, that anchors do not unilaterally perform these roles. The role of anchors here can be enhanced by a deeper, more committed approach by public bodies – what Weaver calls 'relational contracting' (2009, in Henderson, 2015) – rather than partnership working dictated by the requirements of individual projects; mere technical contracting in terms of specified deliverables in return for payment; or which re-enforces an hierarchical client-contractor relationship in which an anchor is considered subservient and in hock to a contracting public body.

This report should not be read as saying that all Community Anchor Organisations are successful examples of what they aim, and claim, to be. Many have fallen by the wayside though local conflict, poor governance, lack of certain kinds of skill or expertise or just because of the increasingly competitive funding environment, one in which the authors have seen at first hand can often pitch Anchors in competition with one another. Some have been co-opted by the local authority, giving the impression of community responsiveness whilst being heavily regulated by their own requirements. Increasing populism and hostility to some groups in the population may also shape the ways in which they operate, though the values of inclusivity in recognising diversity were a prominent theme in the interviews. A danger of a more supported network of Community Anchor Organisations could also see an emerging inequality between those organisations that are seen as successful (which could also emerge in more affluent areas) and those that struggle to survive in harsher economic environments. However, Community Anchor Organisations exist, and they do have skills, relationships and networks that are simply not available to the public sector (though they also have a role in challenging public sector organisations in how they deliver services). A continued policy oversight too is the relevance and value of these unique cocktail of skills, experiences and expertise in coaching nascent Anchor Organisations that form in the future.

That the Scottish Community Alliance (2018) can find “no examples of sustained community empowerment without some such locally embedded [anchor] organisation” is testament to what broader potential and value to communities that anchors can have beyond service design, delivery and, ideally, co-production. The lack of government focus on them after the demise of Communities First is one of several implications of the lack of a coherent community policy, despite much Welsh Government rhetoric in 2016-17 about fashioning a new approach to building community resilience. Anchors have ploughed, largely, their own furrow in their own localities and though this has served to galvanise in many cases their independence and sense of identity of who *they are not*, it has also resulted in an erosion of what limited collective identity existed among them under the Communities First banner. With Welsh communities about to venture to the ballot box it is worth raising the question to Welsh Government as to where ‘community’ sits in terms of policy and ministerial oversight, as well as how they may relate to other anchor organisations and public institutions.

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