



Living Heritage in Rural Wales

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Contents

1	Executive Summary.....	3
2	Background	7
	2.1 Introduction	7
	2.2 Policy Context.....	7
	2.3 Literature Review.....	8
3	Approaches	13
	3.1 Theoretical Framework and Research Design	13
	3.2 Policy Analysis.....	13
	3.3 The Case Studies	13
	3.4 Archival Research – Welsh-language Community Newspapers (‘papurau bro’)	17
	3.5 Data Collection – Document Analysis	17
	3.6 Data Collection – Interviews	18
	3.7 Analytical Coverage.....	18
	3.8 Limitations	19
4	Findings and Discussion	20
	4.1 Processes that Produce and Reproduce ICH	20
	4.2 Factors Enabling and Hindering ICH Production and Reproduction Processes ..	31
5	Conclusions and Recommendations	39
	5.1 Conclusions.....	39
	5.2 Recommendations.....	39
6	References	42
	6.1 Academic Journals and Papers.....	42
	6.2 Research Reports and Statistical Reports	44
	6.3 Policy Papers and Other Documents.....	44
	6.4 News Reports, Blogs and Articles.....	45
7	Appendix	47

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1 Executive Summary

There is growing recognition of the value of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), or living heritage, as highlighted by the UK Government's recent commitment to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003 (UNESCO, 2024). However, while there is a clear policy shift towards identifying examples of ICH, there remains a lack of clarity about how ICH can be supported and sustained in practice, particularly in rural areas. Within the Welsh context, where cultural well-being is embedded in statute (Future Generations Commissioner, 2025, p.65), there is evidence of a gap between high-level policy ambition and reality at grassroots level, which could endanger the diversity of ICH and its future continuation.

This report addresses the aforementioned gap by examining the processes that produce and reproduce ICH in rural Wales, considering how to improve support for this sector. Rather than focusing on individual examples of living heritage practice, the study adopts an approach that focuses on ICH as a dynamic social process that is sustained through community participation. In this context, the report scrutinises the factors that enable and hinder the processes underpinning the vitality of ICH which are rooted in rural experiences.

The study uses a qualitative approach that combines analysis of local newspapers with semi-structured interviews in two study areas, Bro Dysynni (Gwynedd) and the Banwy and Tanat Valleys (Powys). This approach allows the identification of ICH based on the lived experiences of communities, challenging what is described as Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith, 2006), which tends to prioritise more formal, institutional, or civic forms of heritage. Through this process, the study builds a contextual understanding of how ICH is lived, transmitted, and adapted in contemporary rural contexts, which are often less visible.

The key findings of the study are presented below:

1. The processes that support ICH create an integrated ecosystem that operates across micro (individual or hyper-local), meso (institutional or regional) and macro (structural or national) levels (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). This system is fragile in several key areas, including the volunteering infrastructure, the resilience of ICH bearers and practitioners, and community infrastructure. Due to its interdependent nature, a decline in one element can undermine others.
2. There is a close relationship between the Welsh language and ICH in this context; where the viability of certain types of ICH depends on conditions that sustain Welsh as a community language, and vice versa. The data show that language is not only a vehicle for ICH but also drives ICH practices. The data suggests that full access to ICH depends on opportunities for residents to learn Welsh. However, this relationship may not be consistent in all areas of Wales, and further research is therefore needed.
3. Communities view adaptation and evolution as vital actions to ensure the continuity of ICH practices in response to a range of social, economic, and cultural challenges. However, these changes are not understood to be a *fait accompli*, but rather as social processes where communities discuss, debate and reach a consensus about what changes are considered valid or appropriate.
4. Widening access to ICH, particularly among young people, is recognised as an essential and important action for ensuring continuity, and the role of organisations in particular

is key in creating alternative and inclusive transmission processes. However, challenges exist in seeking to safeguard cultural diversity where contextual knowledge and commitment embedded in traditional practices are respected, and it is argued in some cases that cultural and linguistic “breathing spaces” (Fishman, 1991) are appropriate, i.e. spaces where cultural and linguistic practices can continue without external pressure. Communities and organisations alike strive to balance these considerations.

5. The viability of ICH is related to socio-economic factors such as housing availability, job opportunities, and the sustainability of communities. In the absence of a favourable context for ICH, an over-reliance on institutional structures to sustain ICH could risk disconnecting it from its roots and undermining its community resilience. At the same time, ICH itself contributes to the creation of vibrant communities where people wish to live, highlighting an interdependence between culture and wider structural factors where ICH can promote participation and create new social relationships.

The findings show that Intangible Cultural Heritage in rural Wales is produced and reproduced via a complex ecosystem of interdependent processes which operate across micro, meso and macro levels. At the same time, the report highlights the complex nature of the processes that shape ICH, including the influence of the Welsh language, the need to adapt and evolve, issues of inclusion and cultural diversity, and structural factors. The evidence shows that communities are continually negotiating these tensions, and that these dynamic processes help to ensure that ICH remains a ‘living’ and relevant contemporary heritage.

Based on these findings, the recommendations presented below call for a shift towards a whole-system mindset that recognises ICH as a living, contextual, and interdependent process. This includes using an inclusive and broad definition of ICH, integrating ICH with other policy areas such as agriculture and education, supporting community infrastructure and voluntary roles, and developing mechanisms that enable communities to strike a balance between inclusion and cultural diversity as appropriate. By doing so, policy can contribute not only to safeguarding ICH, but also to strengthening the viability of rural communities in broader terms, recognising that these two aspects are interdependent and are key to achieving well-being objectives for current and future generations.

Fifteen recommendations are presented below, and are targeted at macro, meso and micro level policies:

Macro (national)

1. Supporting the long-term viability of ICH and rural cultural well-being is dependent on policies that recognise and promote rural living heritage in a fair and equitable manner, recognising the structural challenges faced. As a result, it is recommended that broad definitions of culture, heritage and cultural well-being should be adopted across policy areas, reflecting UNESCO principles and increasing the visibility of ICH through its inclusion in relevant inventories. This needs to consider the limited capacity of volunteers to undertake such processes.
2. In order to support the sustainability of the cultural landscape, it is important to recognise the role of the family farm as a key location for retaining, transmitting and sustaining the knowledge, skills and community infrastructure that underpin ICH. As a result, it is recommended that objectives aimed at promoting ICH are more formally integrated into the Sustainable Farming Scheme as a clear priority.

3. In order to widen access to ICH and strengthen rural cultural participation, access to Welsh-medium education and language acquisition opportunities need to be strengthened as a key pathway to ICH. This should be done in a way that recognises the integral relationship between the Welsh language and ICH in certain contexts, but which also recognises that this relationship is not the same across rural Wales. There is also a need to ensure that opportunities to engage with local ICH continue throughout the learning continuum, ensuring that teachers have the support and resources to be able to offer children access to their living heritage. Sharing good practice and mentoring can support less confident teachers in this area of work.
4. Addressing the uncertain nature of the transmission of ICH to the younger generation within rural communities is key to sustainable practices. As a result, one recommendation is to pilot basic income models or similar financial mechanisms for ICH bearers, building on international experiences such as the Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) scheme in Ireland (gov.ie, 2026). A similar model in Wales could recognise ICH work as a community activity that requires significant commitment, helping to strengthen the basic ICH infrastructure in rural Wales whilst supporting the next generation of ICH bearers and practitioners.
5. In order to sustain viable cultural diversity, policy makers need to balance this carefully with inclusion objectives, recognising that cultural and linguistic ‘breathing spaces’ are sometimes needed alongside activities that widen access to ICH. Mechanisms that support communities at grassroots level should be used in order to confidently address these challenges by providing robust guidance and resources to pilot new interventions.

Meso (regional):

6. Ensuring the viability of ICH practices depends on the resilience of the processes that produce and reproduce ICH rather than protecting static forms of ICH. As a result, there is a need to develop new ways of evaluating policy, including appropriate funding frameworks and monitoring systems that reflect these dynamic processes, such as community volunteering.
7. In order to create new and inclusive access pathways, particularly for those without family cultural capital and for young people, new schemes need to be established. Alternatively, appropriate programmes that have proved effective in the past need to be re-established and embedded in order to support basic ICH processes such as experiential learning, engagement with ICH bearers and practitioners, and nurturing a sense of place. In this way, access to ICH can be provided for everyone, creating more resilient communities and a better standard of living.
8. In order to promote community resilience, funding mechanisms that are flexible and aligned with community priorities need to be established. Support for low-burden investment for grassroots ICH activities is recommended. These are relatively small investments with low administrative requirements. As a result, the cultural infrastructure of communities is supported without undermining their resilience.
9. Nurturing new volunteer community leaders is vital to the sustainability of rural ICH. Public organisations can support these processes in a meaningful way by developing and investing in new schemes, with a particular focus on young people, that promote informal community volunteering beyond organisational structures. This can develop trust by supporting local priorities.

10. In order to maintain the social infrastructure that is essential to the viability of rural living heritage, targeted support needs to be provided to sustain and regenerate key community assets that enable cultural events, social participation and ICH transmission. Where assets have been transferred to community ownership, policies should be implemented that support community management of such assets.

Micro (community):

11. In order to maintain cultural diversity and extend access at the same time, the associated benefits and risks to the cultural well-being and cohesion of communities need to be carefully evaluated. The ongoing piloting of new interventions that support both objectives is encouraged.
12. Rural communities in particular face barriers to access. Strengthening community participation in ICH activities is recommended, and this can be achieved by extending existing schemes such as Night Out (Arts Council of Wales n.d.) in an inclusive manner.
13. In order to strengthen the capacity and resilience of the cultural infrastructure of rural communities, collaboration with other local groups, organisations or sectors could be encouraged and facilitated. This can also be done across communities and internationally, facilitating the sharing of knowledge, resources and good practice.
14. Ensuring participation by children and young people is essential for the production and reproduction of ICH practices. Consequently, it is important to act in a proactive manner to seek ways of engaging children and young people with ICH. This could be done in collaboration with other organisations such as Young Farmers' Clubs, Urdd branches, or local schools.
15. In order to ensure visibility and raise the status of rural ICH, communities need to carry out appropriate surveys of existing local ICH as a basis for community planning in relation to support for transmission, adaptation and continuation over time. This could be done in collaboration with community councils.

2 Background

2.1 Introduction

The UK Government's recent commitment to the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is indicative of a growing recognition of the value of this type of heritage, also known as living heritage (UNESCO, 2024). However, for a long time, policy in relation to heritage and culture tended to prioritise physical assets, from historic sites in a heritage context, to sectors and centres in a cultural context (Vecco, 2010; Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and The Audience Agency, 2026). The increasing shift towards recognising living heritage practices represents an important change in policy thinking, but it also raises questions about how Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is supported and sustained in practice, particularly in rural areas.

This study addresses these questions by scrutinising the processes that produce and reproduce ICH in a rural Wales context, at a significant time in the development of cultural and rural policy. Apart from a contextual understanding of the experiences and realities of rural communities, there is a risk that policies and strategies will be formulated on the basis of urban or institutional models that do not reflect the nature of ICH at grassroots level. There is therefore a real need for a robust evidence base to inform policy development and cultural planning in a way that is appropriate to the context of rural Wales. This provides the focus for this report.

2.2 Policy Context

Wales is the only country in the world to recognise cultural well-being within a statutory definition of sustainable development (Future Generations Commissioner, 2025, p.65). Despite this, culture in Wales is considered to be “in crisis” (Future Generations Commissioner, 2025, p.4). As costs increase in areas such as social services and education, investment in culture has decreased, as it is often viewed as something “nice to have” rather than an essential element of well-being (Commissioner for Future Generations, 2025, p.4). Within this context, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has called for a Culture Act for Wales, with a green paper published in 2026 which discusses how culture could be “protected, promoted and prioritised by public bodies” (2026, p.3). However, while the document recognises challenges faced by rural communities, clear guidance is still needed on how to sustain and develop ICH in rural areas.

At the same time, the Welsh Government is working with the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport to identify examples of ICH for inclusion in a national inventory. After a delay of over two decades, the UK Government ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2024, providing the first formal framework for identifying and recording ICH at national and international levels. The Welsh Government is assisting the process by coordinating the work in Wales. In addition to this work, the Welsh Government has also recently published its ‘Priorities for Culture’ which is committed to helping ICH “to thrive” (2025, p.17). However, while the Welsh Government's policy direction is

clear in terms of ambition, with some investment recently beginning to emerge, this is yet to be fully underpinned by a specific action plan with designated resources, thus limiting its potential to drive practical change (Senedd Cymru, 2026). As a result, there is a clear gap between priority high-level policy and the practical mechanisms available to implement it. It could be argued that this gap is particularly complex in rural areas where institutional capacity is weaker and therefore the ability to convert national plans into local provision is more limited.

At a wider organisational level, the Future Generations Commissioner has expressed clear criticism of the failure of public institutions to define and implement cultural well-being goals beyond statutory requirements that focus on the Welsh language (2025, p.121). In this regard, there is less strategic focus on cultural well-being in Local Well-being Plans compared to other well-being goals (2025, pp.70–71). Again, it could be argued that this leads to a clear lack of action, meaning that ICH in rural areas in particular is excluded from public planning and investment frameworks, thus increasing the risk of losses to ICH.

The policy context of protected landscapes, such as National Parks and UNESCO world heritage sites, also plays a significant role in policy making in this context as they are statutory areas of governance with specific legal responsibilities for rural communities. These landscapes are now understood to be bio-cultural systems where community practices, knowledge, and identities are vital elements of the landscape (UNESCO, 2003; Buckley et al., 2024). This reflects not only the relationship between the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) (Albert, 2024), but also the principles of the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe, 2000), which emphasises landscape as the outcome of interaction between people and place. In light of discussions in Wales about the expansion of protected landscapes (Natural Resources Wales, 2024), there is clearly a need to consider the available opportunities for ensuring a positive influence on the structural context which underpins local systems and processes that produce and transmit ICH.

Overall, it could be argued that the importance of living heritage is recognised and that strong goodwill exists towards culture and ICH within national policy in Wales; however, the evidence suggests that there is a gap between ambition and action at grassroots level. In order to gain a better understanding of this gap, the review of literature in the section below shifts the focus from high-level policy to how ICH is created, transmitted and sustained in community contexts, highlighting gaps in our understanding of the factors that influence the viability of ICH in practice in rural Wales.

2.3 Literature Review

Defining ICH

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is defined by UNESCO (2003) as follows:

“the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”

The definition further states that ICH is transmitted from generation to generation and is continuously recreated by communities in response to their context, providing a sense of identity and continuity (UNESCO, 2003). In this way, UNESCO (2003) argues that ICH promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. Further, by the same definition, forms of ICH include, but are not limited to, oral traditions and expressions including language as a vehicle for the intangible cultural heritage, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festivals, knowledge and practices relating to nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO, 2003).

Some argue that this broad and inclusive definition has brought about a change in the way cultural heritage is understood, moving away from Western values rooted in museums towards a more anthropological and global approach (Bortolotto, 2007). In this regard, it could be argued that this shift offers a more compatible framework for understanding rural cultural practices, as the emphasis shifts to living practices and local contexts that often operate outside institutional structures. This definition is therefore used when considering living heritage within the context of this study.

ICH production and reproduction processes

There is a consensus within the literature that ICH is a dynamic and evolving process (Bortolotto, 2007). Central to the continuity of ICH is the way in which knowledge and symbolic values are transmitted across generations. However, as shared knowledge merges with personal experience and constantly interacts with conditions across time and space, it is recognised that such knowledge and values are not static but exist in a state of continuous change (De Figueiredo, 2015; Skrzypaszek, 2012). Bortolotto (2007) argues that the dynamic nature of ICH presents challenges for those seeking to protect it, as the very act of safeguarding a practice can threaten its essential living nature. As a result, she argues that the priority is not to safeguard ICH's static form of expression, but rather the processes that facilitate the production and reproduction of living identity and culture (Bortolotto, 2007).

However, within the context of rural Wales, we have little understanding of these processes. Creating a national living heritage inventory (UNESCO, n.d.) can go some way to identifying living heritage practices. However, if we want to avoid freezing practices and turning them into anachronistic relics, we must ensure a more detailed understanding of the processes that underpin them, and how these processes interact with economic, social, and environmental structures. This study responds to the research gap by identifying the processes that produce and reproduce ICH in rural Wales and by scrutinising what enables and inhibits these processes.

ICH in a rural context

Despite a broad definition of ICH that conveys lifestyle, preserving and reinforcing ICH practices in rural areas is a challenging task. Based on a review of international research, Richards (2026) argues that top-down conservation mechanisms, often based on economic investment, are suitable for sustaining physical assets. However, Richards (2026) also argues that the sustainability of ICH depends primarily on grassroots community efforts. As a result, the challenges faced by rural communities such as weak governance, lower population

density, and youth outward migration (Richards, 2026), coupled with a lack of resources and weak infrastructure, leads to significant pressure on communities responsible for sustaining ICH practices in rural contexts.

However, rather than focusing on the capacity of communities to sustain ICH practices, there is a tendency in the international literature to focus on the role or use of ICH in rural development, regeneration efforts, or tourism (Shakya & Vagnarelli, 2024; Liu & Qi, 2024; Cerquetti et al., 2022), where community participation in developments can be weak (Goussous, 2022). According to Richards (2026), this means that there is limited understanding of how living heritage practices are produced and reproduced in contemporary contexts, and policies and interventions can therefore fail to target the factors that support or undermine the practical viability of these practices. In a Brazilian context, De Figueiredo (2015) argues that ICH has an intrinsic value beyond its commercial value, and that consideration should be given in the first instance to ways of protecting the communities that sustain ICH, before turning to its use in relation to wider objectives. As a result, this study takes the view that ICH has intrinsic value and is therefore committed to approaches that focus on the processes that underpin it and to an analysis that is firmly rooted in the values of the community itself.

It could be argued that one of the main values of ICH is its contribution to cultural identity (Lenzerini, 2012; UNESCO, 2003). Through the transmission of ICH from generation to generation, individuals and communities acquire a sense of continuity while strengthening links between the past and the present. At the same time, others, such as Bakar et al. (2011), argue that a strong cultural identity is a key prerequisite for the reproduction of ICH and for ensuring the continuity of its value and meaning in contemporary communities. This suggests that there is a close interdependence between ICH and cultural identity, whereby a robust cultural identity is needed to reproduce ICH. At the same time, engagement with ICH is needed in order to strengthen cultural identity. Nevertheless, globalisation processes and migration patterns are endangering cultural diversity (Lenzerini, 2011) and the cultural identities that underpin it, giving rise to a process known as “cultural distancing” – where gaps are created between contemporary life and heritage (Skrzypaszek, 2012, p. 1494).

It could be argued that this process of “cultural distancing” is happening in rural Wales. Within the international literature, Richards (2026) refers to the particular challenge of ensuring that ICH remains relevant to the younger generation in view of this process. This is echoed by Howell’s (2013) evidence in a Welsh context that the number of participants in the National Eisteddfod competitions decreases as children get older. It therefore appears that engaging young people with ICH can be a challenge.

At the same time, young people tend to move out of rural Wales (Wales Centre for Public Policy, 2025), and once again it could be argued that this weakens intergenerational transmission processes. However, there is evidence in the international literature that engagement with ICH helps to strengthen young people’s attachment to a place (Carrasco Cruz et al. 2025; Chan et al. 2024), which in turn creates the conditions for ICH transmission (Cai et al. 2025; Mengyao Lu et al. 2025). Again, this suggests another close relationship, as ICH supports the viability of rural communities, and in turn, viable communities support ICH transmission. Further, research by Xue (2026) in a Chinese context shows that learning about ICH through the

curriculum contributes to community identity and cohesion, therefore motivating individuals to remain in rural areas or return to them. This suggests that the education system, alongside community processes, has a wider role to play in the process of sustaining ICH. This discussion highlights the importance of not only exploring the processes that produce and reproduce ICH at grassroots level in rural Wales but also scrutinising the interactions that take place between these processes and their relevance to ensuring viable and resilient communities. This is an important consideration when analysing the data.

Issues of inclusion are also relevant to this discussion. Although rural life is described as rich and meaningful, research shows that these benefits are unevenly proven, with experiences of exclusion and racism noted in some rural contexts (University of Leicestershire, n.d. p.3; Neal & Walters, 2008). While these experiences are not denied, others argue that a situation of “acceptance and accommodation” generally exists (Woods, 2022, p.316). Either way, it could be argued that in this context, the concept of “belonging” becomes more complex, since it is neither a neutral relationship nor an experience available to everyone in the same way (Hersland, 2020). This raises important questions about cultural identity and community ownership of ICH, as the processes that underpin it, such as intergenerational transmission and community participation, can act as mechanisms that limit the ability of individuals and groups to participate. In this regard, if we accept that ensuring inclusion and cultural diversity are both desirable objectives, then a serious discussion is needed about how to assimilate these two aspects in policy and practice within the processes that sustain ICH at grassroots level.

ICH in a Welsh-related and Welsh language context

Within a Welsh-related context, Howell (2013) identifies a range of practices, such as the Mari Lwyd and the National Eisteddfod, as clear examples of ICH. While he emphasises that social practices, oral traditions and competitive performances remain a living part of contemporary Welsh culture, he also recognises that they are in a “state of decline or change” (p.113). This further confirms the urgent nature of this study.

The National Eisteddfod is presented by Howell (2013) as a key entity in the viability of ICH as it enables audiences across Wales to engage with specific forms of ICH such as cerdd dant, clog dancing, and choral performances, through the medium of Welsh. At the same time, however, the author highlights tensions that arise in relation to changes to traditional aspects of the National Eisteddfod. While he emphasises that freezing the historical form of a practice is not the appropriate way to preserve it, he raises concerns that some changes are driven by a demand to ensure financial sustainability. In this sense, although evolution is a natural part of ICH (Bortolotto, 2007), the discussion suggests that some changes may be accelerated or shaped by institutional and economic pressures, with the potential to undermine some elements of ICH. The example of the National Eisteddfod therefore shows how organisations can enable but at the same time limit ICH activities, and in this regard continuous scrutiny is needed in order to ensure an appropriate balance. Consequently, one of the objectives of this study is to provide insights into how organisations can balance these tensions within the processes that sustain and transmit ICH at grassroots level in rural Wales.

Eisteddfod activities, as identified by Howell (2013) above, along with other practices he discusses – such as the Mari Lwyd – emphasise the social nature of culture. This view aligns with Raymond Williams’ (1958) argument in *Culture and Society*, that culture is essentially a participatory act. Rather than something that is created for passive audiences, culture is claimed to be an everyday act, created by people together. Young et al. (2017) extend this discussion further by showing how communities, on the Llŷn Peninsula in this instance, co-produce the conditions that support ICH through participatory approaches, integrating them with economic development, social well-being and cultural and linguistic sustainability. They suggest, however, that such projects depend on a wider supportive structural context. It seems, therefore, that ICH in a Welsh context is essentially participatory, contributing to the well-being and viability of communities. For these reasons, this study specifically scrutinises participatory forms of ICH in these contexts.

Before concluding this section, it is appropriate in a Welsh context that we recognise the significance of the Welsh language in relation to ICH. Although the UNESCO Convention (2003) views language as *a vehicle* for the transmission of practices, some increasingly argue that it should be seen as a form of ICH in itself, which *drives the* way practices are understood and carried out (Nic Craith & McDermott, 2025; Lonardi & Unterpertinger, 2022). However, some doubt exists within UNESCO, possibly due to the sensitivity of minority languages (Ubertazzi, 2020). Within the Welsh context, there is a close relationship between ICH and the Welsh language (Howell, 2013; St Leger, 2025). However, the green paper ‘Culture for Future Generations’ argues that “the conflation within the WFGA outcomes of Welsh language with culture – and the framing that this carries with it – is not always helpful to cultural diversity”. This suggests that a more detailed understanding of this relationship is needed, particularly in terms of how it is supported by policy and implemented in practice at grassroots level.

Summary

Overall, the literature demonstrates a clear tension between high-level policy ambition and the reality at grassroots level in rural Wales. Despite the recognition in Welsh policy that ICH is a key element of cultural well-being, frustration exists about how it is supported in practice at community level. In this study, ICH is understood to be a participatory action that is primarily sustained by communities. It is suggested that such communities constantly negotiate structural challenges and ethical tensions in order to sustain these practices. However, the identified tension between policy ambition and practical realities highlights significant gaps in our understanding of the processes underpinning the production and reproduction of ICH in rural Wales, therefore limiting the ability to support them in practice. This study therefore responds to this gap by examining the following questions:

- i) Which processes underpin the production and reproduction of Intangible Cultural Heritage in rural Wales?
- ii) Which factors enable and limit these processes?
- iii) What opportunities are there for policy to support this reality in practice?

3 Approaches

3.1 Theoretical Framework and Research Design

This section begins by recognising that the act of identifying and supporting ICH is not a neutral process. Rather, it is a cultural and political process of choosing what is considered to be heritage. Smith's (2006) concept of Authorised Heritage Discourse explains the influence of a hegemonic discourse that favours grand buildings, ancient artefacts, and expert perspectives at the expense of living practices rooted in everyday life. As a result, this hegemonic discourse is associated with inequality (Smith, 2006).

This raises methodological questions about how to identify ICH practices which can be studied in ways that reflect the values of rural communities. Smith's (2006) emphasis on heritage as a cultural process supports this approach, highlighting the need to move away from hegemonic definitions towards approaches focused on lived experience and community participation. In this regard, ICH needs to be self-identified by the communities that espouse it (Vecco, 2010) reflecting UNESCO's process of coordinating national inventories of living heritage (UNESCO, n.d.).

This study therefore challenges the Authorised Heritage Discourse by highlighting grassroots ICH practices in rural Welsh communities. However, ICH practices are a strong feature of these communities, and it must therefore be recognised that the process of limitation could potentially be viewed as an act of bias. In order to address this challenge, our intention was therefore to openly acknowledge this bias and offer transparency around inclusion and exclusion processes.

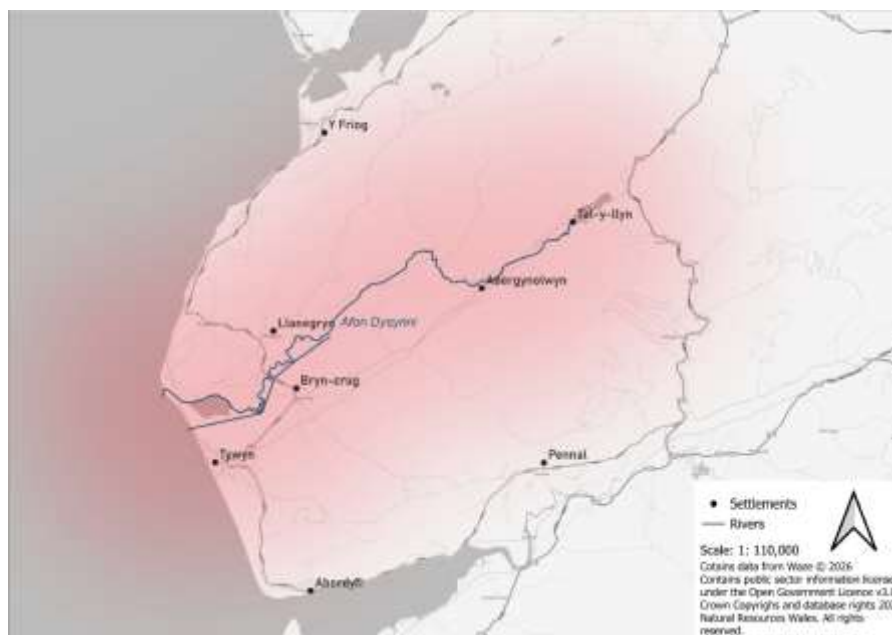
3.2 Policy Analysis

The first step of this study was to undertake a light policy analysis in order to map the current policy context which is relevant to intangible cultural heritage in Wales. This analysis focused on key policy documents at national and organisational level, identifying key themes, priorities and clear gaps between policy ambition and the practical mechanisms needed for implementation, particularly in rural contexts. This provided an informed background to the work, allowing us to ensure that the research aligns with relevant policy and the main discussions in this area.

3.3 The Case Studies

This study uses a case study approach, focusing on two areas that are characterised by strong cultural identity alongside significant socio-economic changes, enabling an in-depth investigation of these processes in their real-life context (Yin, 2014).

Bro Dysynni



Map of Case Study Area: Bro Dysynni*

Bro Dysynni is a rural area located in south Gwynedd; it includes communities along the Dysynni valley and the surrounding coast. Residents of the county feel a sense of pride in the strength and vitality of their culture, as evidenced by the many local societies, eisteddfodau, young farmers' clubs, shows and concerts in the area (Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board, 2022, p.16). In Bro Dysynni in particular, heritage and community spirit are identified as positive traits; however, local residents feel that the area is often ignored or forgotten (Gwynedd Council, 2025, p.5). In this regard, the area offers a relevant context for the exploration of ICH, as it shows how living cultural practices are valued at local level, but are not necessarily fully reflected in policy and governance priorities, in a way that echoes Smith's (2006) criticism of the Authorised Heritage Discourse.

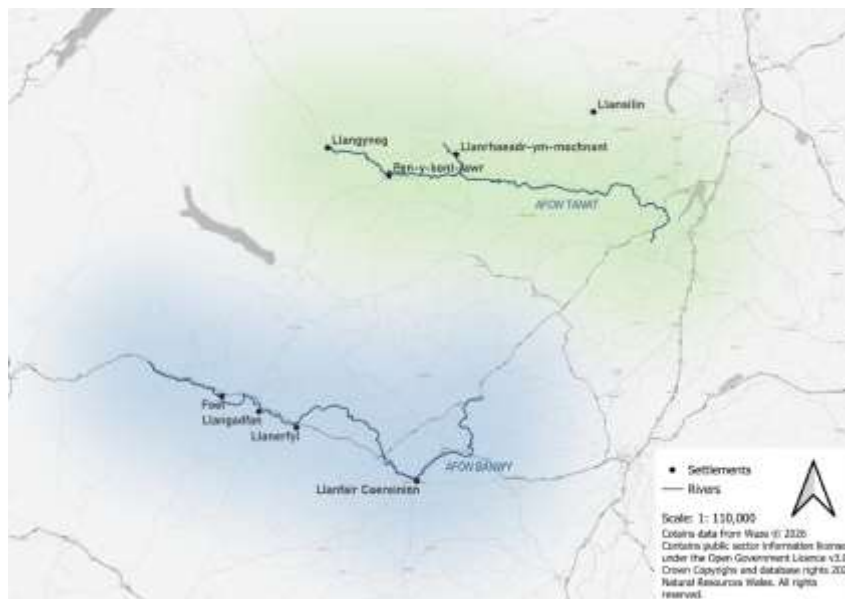
Bro Dysynni is located within the boundaries of Eryri National Park, which is a statutory protected landscape where the authority has a duty to protect and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area (Eryri National Park, n.d). The Abergynolwyn and Tywyn area is also part of the Slate Landscape of North-west Wales UNESCO World Heritage Site (<https://www.llechi.cymru/home>). Historically, in addition to the slate industry, the landscape has been shaped by economic activities such as agriculture. Tourism and leisure are also important parts of the local economy (Gwyn & Davidson, 2009). Linguistically, although Gwynedd is the county with the highest density of Welsh speakers in Wales (64.4%), Bro Dysynni has the lowest density of Welsh speakers in the county (40.1%) (Gwynedd Council, 2023).

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A view of Bro Dysynni.
Crown Copyright.

The Banwy and Tanat Valleys



Map of Case Study Area: The Banwy and Tanat Valleys[†]

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The Banwy and Tanat Valleys are located in north-west Powys, in the former Montgomeryshire. Like Bro Dysynni, these valleys represent a rural context where ICH practices remain a central part of community life. In particular, the area is known for the Plygain tradition, which has been a living and continuous part of the area's intangible cultural heritage for centuries (Owen, 1959; plygain.org). Although the area is not currently part of any national park, recent discussions about creating a new national park that would include some parts of the area have divided local opinion. This clearly demonstrates the tensions that exist between conservation, development and the needs of rural communities (nation.cymru). Issues relating to the Welsh language are also of key importance in this context, as these areas have a higher density of Welsh speakers than other parts of the county (Welsh Language Commissioner, n.d.). This is in contrast to the situation in Bro Dysynni. Within this linguistic context, there are ongoing discussions about Welsh-medium education provision in the area (Powys County Council, 2024a). In a similar way to the Bro Dysynni area, the local economies continue to rely on agriculture, tourism and leisure as key parts of the rural economy (Banwy Community Council, n.d.; Powys County Council, 2024b).



A view of the Tanat Valley.
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Bro Dysynni and the Banwy and Tanat Valleys therefore have both similar and contrasting features. However, the aim of this study was not to directly compare these areas, but rather to identify contexts in which rural ICH practices are reproduced within complex systems of social, economic, and governmental factors. In both cases, the socio-economic complexity of the areas offers suitable opportunities for exploring how processes interact with structures, including policies, landscape designations, economic changes and linguistic dynamics, in order to shape how ICH is produced and reproduced in contemporary rural contexts.

3.4 Archival Research – Welsh-language Community Newspapers ('papurau bro')

As discussed previously, it is the role of individuals, groups and communities to identify and define ICH practices, rather than academics or outside observers. Consequently, it was necessary to explore a systematic and equitable approach to identifying examples of ICH that reflect communities' own experiences and priorities. It was therefore decided to use Welsh-language community newspapers for this purpose, as a source of community and contextual data.

Welsh-language community newspapers ('papurau bro') have been a prominent feature of Welsh-speaking communities since the 1970s (Jones, 2016: 11; papuraubro.cymru, n.d.) and they owe their existence to the hard work of dedicated volunteers (Barnett, 1995: 19; Jones 2016: 10). It could be argued that this contributes to what Hughes (2008: 53) describes as a "phenomenon", referring not only to newspapers' community origins but also to their wide reach among Welsh speakers, even though they "break all the rules in terms of design, news values and competition". Their main purpose is to share local news and information of interest to Welsh-speaking communities (Barnett, 1995: 18). The newspapers are available to buy in local shops, and the Bro360 service - led by the Golwg media company - now supports the traditional print papers by providing local websites (bro360.cymru, n.d.).

From a methodological point of view, Welsh-language community newspapers provide a unique data source as they are produced within and for local communities. They therefore reflect everyday cultural life from an internal and local perspective. They record events, practices, and forms of cultural participation, creating a grassroots account of community activities. (See Appendix 1 for an exemplary list of ICH practices identified in Welsh-language community newspapers). In this regard, they could act as a way of avoiding any external imposition of categories or research priorities that underpin Smith's (2006) criticism of Authoritative Heritage Discourse. (See Appendix 2 for an example of the available information that could serve as a basis for changing practices over time).

3.5 Data Collection – Document Analysis

Welsh-language community newspapers were analysed in order to identify examples of ICH. A purposive sample of Welsh-language community newspapers was selected from the study areas, namely *Dail Dysynni* (Bro Dysynni), *Yr Ysgub* (Tanat Valley) and *Plu'r Gweunydd* (Banwy Valley). The analysis focused on all editions published during 2024 in order to provide a contemporary snapshot of community life during a single year.

The documents were read systematically, citing examples where local events, practices, or activities were described, including Plygain services, young farmers' activities, concerts, and agricultural shows. In particular, the focus was on identifying local events and forms of participation. These categories were used as a flexible framework rather than a rigid code, allowing for the identification of practices that were clearly rooted in their local contexts. The selection criteria were therefore based on relevance and evidence of active participation.

The examples identified in this analysis were used as a basis for sampling participants for semi-structured interviews. This was supported by the researchers' personal networks and by snowball sampling. This approach is suitable for ICH research, as it reflects the related and rooted nature of these practices.

3.6 Data Collection – Interviews

Following a review of the ethics process by Bangor University, semi-structured interviews were conducted (See Appendix 3 for the interview schedule) in order to further explore these practices, building on the examples identified through the analysis of the Welsh-language community newspapers. Participants were selected to reflect a range of roles involved in ICH creation, transmission and support, including ICH bearers and practitioners, volunteers who organise community activities, and wider stakeholders.

A total of 16 interviews were conducted: six represented the Banwy and Tanat Valley areas, and five represented the Bro Dysynni area. There were also five additional interviews with stakeholders who work in professional ICH roles at regional and national level, such as landscape conservation organisations, local authorities and national groups with local membership. However, these categories were not entirely separate. Very often, participants undertook multiple roles at the same time, such as working in a professional capacity while volunteering within their communities. This is analytically significant, as it illustrates the rooted and interdependent nature of ICH in rural communities at local level in particular.

Category	Code
Bro Dysynni	Int4; Int5; Int6; Int7; Int11
Tanat and Banwy Valleys	Int1; Int2; Int3; Int9(A+B [‡]); Int15; Int16
ICH Stakeholders	Int8; Int10; Int12; Int13; Int14(A+B+C)

Table 1: Participants by area or type

It is also important to note that a significant number of participants noted in their interviews that they come from an agricultural background, and in most cases continue to live on a family farm. This is significant as it offers further evidence of how the cultural and social capital of family farms contributes to the social and cultural fabric of rural areas, something that is all too often ignored (Mansfield, 2019, p. 8).

Most of the interviews were conducted online (11), but some were conducted face-to-face (4) and over the phone (1). The interviews lasted for about an hour on average. In two cases, more than one individual contributed to the same interview, e.g. as family members or colleagues.

3.7 Analytical Coverage

Qualitative thematic analyses were used to interpret the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The process was iterative, identifying patterns and processes that appeared in the data. The themes were interpreted through a framework that considered micro (individual or highly local), meso (institutional or regional) and macro (structural or national) levels (Serpa &

[‡] Int9B and Int10 represent the same participant

Ferreira, 2019). This enabled a shift from specific examples to an understanding of the wider processes that shape ICH and the interactions between them.

3.8 Limitations

The active role of the researchers in the research process (Dowling, 2008), as well as their positionality, identifies them as practitioners with lived experience of rural culture. This allows the research to be based on local perspectives and information systems (Smith, 2021).

Although Welsh-language community newspapers are a community resource, the interpretation still relies on the choices made by the research team and the personal contacts that helped to identify individuals in communities. A reflective approach (reflexivity) is adopted (Dowling, 2008) in order to mitigate any unnecessary bias.

There are also limitations to the study. The fact that these are Welsh-language community newspapers introduces a natural bias in terms of the events included, and this trend prioritises particular types of ICH, especially by emphasising social and participatory activities. It could be argued, however, that given the theoretical tensions identified in this study concerning the relationship between ICH and the Welsh language, and its participatory nature in rural Welsh communities, these factors are not limitations but are appropriate features for the focus of this study. At the same time, however, it must be recognised that the contextual nature of the case studies limits the ability to generalise the results, and there is still a need to undertake further research to explore a wider range of types of ICH in alternative contexts. This, however, does not undermine the contribution of this study, which seeks to establish a new evidence base in an understudied field, emphasising the contextual nature of ICH.

4 Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study in the context of the research questions. See Appendix 4, where confidentiality and anonymity conditions allow illustrative citations to support the specific findings discussed in this section.

4.1 Processes that Produce and Reproduce ICH

The data shows that ICH is produced and reproduced in rural Wales through the interaction of interdependent processes at micro, meso and macro levels (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). Starting at the micro level, this section explores some of the processes involved in the transmission of ICH as a living practice through everyday practices and interactions.

4.1.1 Living heritage practice and transmission at micro level

4.1.1.1 Intergenerational transmission

ICH acquisition in families was a prominent trend among the participants of this study [Int3, Int7]. Transmission was described as being an integral part of childhood and early experiences, with a sense of being immersed in a culture that was ubiquitous in everyday life, as the following quote suggests:

“I used to have to go out on the farm and spend hours watching my grandfather laying a hedge. And that’s where these conversations came from, we’d chat, have some banter, or sing a song”.
Int2

This highlights the central role of the family in sustaining practices. As a result, participants from both areas expressed a desire to pass on these traditions to their own children, as a means of sustaining family customs and ensuring cultural continuity [Int2]. This was sometimes associated with a sense of lineage, especially in the context of singing Plygain songs or carols, which was framed as an aspect of family identity [Int3].

In describing the experience of acquiring ICH, participants referred to the process as a ‘natural’ part of everyday life [Int6, Int2], although some stated that they had no choice in the matter as children [Int3]. This highlights the complexity of the tradition, where family expectations can create pressure. However, the majority noted that early immersion had fostered enjoyment, alongside a sense of responsibility for ensuring the continuity of the practices [Int11]. The sense of responsibility is a theme that also emerges later on in the context of volunteering.

While patterns of ICH inheritance generally involve transmission from older to younger generations, there were also examples in the opposite direction, with parents coming into contact with practices through their children’s experiences [Int1, Int3]. This type of transmission relies heavily on organisations like schools, Mudiad Meithrin, the Urdd and the Young Farmers, who all play a key role in the transmission of ICH at meso level, as examined in the following section.

The data shows that families are key to ICH transmission; however, this also highlights potential inequalities as this type of transmission relies on significant social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). We shall return to this tension when discussing issues of inclusion on page 33.

4.1.1.2 ICH acquisition and transmission by bearers and practitioners

Beyond the family, participants in this study regularly referred to specific individuals who were considered ICH bearers or practitioners in the local community. People who were known for their wealth of knowledge, expertise or proficiency in sustaining the living heritage were often named [Int2]. Alongside their technical skills, participants emphasised the ability of these individuals to bring traditions to life and inspire others, encouraging deeper engagement with ICH.

While the family is key to transmission, the data shows that the production and reproduction of ICH also stem from informal contacts in the community between experienced bearers and younger practitioners. These interactions, which take place in community settings every day, enable continuous transmission based on observation, collaboration, and collective practice, as illustrated by the following quote:

“I was taught this by [name], who produced a play I was in 40 years ago. So I’m hoping now I can... Well, I feel now, some of those I’ve been teaching are now ready to produce something themselves. They’ve had the experience. And you hope that’s what’s happening, don’t you? You learn from someone, and you try to pass on what you know to the next generation so that it continues.” Int3

This quote supports the data which shows that the process of becoming an ICH bearer requires significant time investment, with the need for continuous immersion and repeated practice over a number of years in order to develop the level of expertise typical of craft bearers. This reflects Bortolotto’s (2007) argument that the processes that produce and reproduce ICH, rather than the expressions themselves, are at the heart of its viability.

In a similar way to family lineage as discussed above, a strong sense of learned lineage was also expressed, which is often treated with the same respect as blood lineage. Being able to trace who taught others contributes to a sense of authenticity, emphasising that it is not only the skills that are being transmitted, but also the history, values, and personal connections inherent in the practice [Int10].

However, significant concerns were expressed about the ageing nature of experienced bearers and practitioners and uncertainty about who will succeed them in the future [Int2, Int16]. This highlights the fragility of this transmission system and the challenge of ensuring sustainable continuity in the community through engagement with young people.

4.1.1.3 Experiential and practical participation

One feature of the transmission process within families and the community is informal learning by watching or listening to others, before proceeding to practice the skill. In a musical context, this was described as learning ‘by ear’ [Int10], ‘by hearing’ [Int2] or within wider contexts as the ‘oral tradition’ [Int5]. Observation was also central to the transmission of skills and knowledge [Int15]. The participant below discusses how her daughter’s musical talents developed:

“And the same thing happened when [name] [was] learning to play the triple harp. I would whistle a tune to her, and she would work it out on the harp. And so the traditional way of learning to play the triple harp is by ear.” Int9A

This type of learning, through experience, contrasts with more formal or structured approaches that sometimes lead to qualifications. While these informal approaches are more common within families and the community, evidence suggests that they are also used in more structured contexts such as strategic projects. For example, *The Twmpdaith* project trained young people ‘by ear’ and it was felt that this approach to learning, which is different to learning from copy, ‘liberated’ the programme participants as musicians [Int10]. It was also noted that the less formal style of learning was more compatible with folk events, enabling musicians to become participants rather than performers – another aspect that is reiterated later when discussing the participatory nature of ICH.

In some cases in both areas, informal learning in the community was supported by more formal lessons at school. For example, individuals described how instrument lessons at school were supported by opportunities to practice and play the instrument socially as a member of a musical band [Int6]. This suggests that different learning approaches can coexist and support each other.

In summary, the data shows that informal approaches to learning, whether listening, observation or participation, continue to play a key role in knowledge transmission and skills development, even when that learning takes place alongside more formal provision. However, it could be argued that the informal nature of these approaches, which are not documented and therefore create an ‘under-the-radar’ context, means that they are more fragile and difficult to support than more formal approaches.

4.1.1.4 Well-being as an incentive

A constant theme among participants was the contribution of ICH to the well-being of individuals and communities. Reference was often made to the instant pleasure of participation, making people happy as they have fun with others [Int2; Int3; Int6]. This was noted by the participant below:

“But, yes, it’s just the health and fitness well-being it brings and the physical and social benefit of mixing with other people. It’s a no-brainer. Dancing ticks all those boxes.” Int10

One participant referred to keeping busy by participating in face-to-face social activities away from digital screens [Int12] while another participant was convinced that ICH has indirect economic value by contributing to healthier and more productive individuals [Int1].

However, the data suggests that the contribution to well-being is often more complex and emotional and is difficult to express in measurable terms. For some individuals, ICH was linked to every aspect of life, contributing to a sense of identity and personal fulfilment [Int6]. The evidence shows that ICH has different meanings for different people. For example, it acts as a spiritual experience for some people (Int9A), and an expression of Welshness for others [Int9B]. Whatever its form, it appears to be a part of individual identity and well-being.

In addition to the individual benefits, the data shows that ICH makes a significant contribution to community well-being. Participants felt that it brings people together, strengthens community identity, and builds social resilience [Int1; Int8]. In challenging times, there have been examples of ICH acting as a social balm, maintaining a sense of belonging and continuity, as in the case of local school reorganisation [Int2] or supporting individuals with dementia to sing in a choir [Int6].

More broadly, participants associated ICH with developing a relationship with place and a sense of continuity [Int3], together with an understanding of themselves and taking pride in that [Int2]. Related to this, there was also a sense of being rooted and belonging to a place and a particular community [Int9B, Int10]. Participants believed that this understanding of their place in the world, and the security it brings, was central to the well-being of individuals and communities. The evidence therefore shows that well-being is a key part of ICH and reinforces the desire to continue to pursue it over time.

4.1.2 Community infrastructure and social organisation at meso-level

We will now move on to scrutinise the processes that produce and reproduce ICH at meso-level. This is the community infrastructure and social organisation that creates opportunities for regular participation in and practice of ICH.

4.1.2.1 Staging social and participatory events

The data shows that social and participatory events are vital for the production and reproduction of ICH practices at grassroots level. Activities such as concerts, eisteddfodau, local shows and Plygain services are vital to the cultural life of an area, acting as places where culture is practised collectively. It must be acknowledged that such activities are prioritised in this study because they appear regularly in the Welsh-language community newspapers. However, the data suggests there is a close link between culture and community in the context of rural Wales, setting a clear context for understanding the role of these events, as the participant below explains:

“And I know that I’m combining a lot of cultural and community aspects. I’m not sure in terms of theory. There may be no direct link. But in my mind, in this area, there is such a link. That probably isn’t true on the whole though, is it? I don’t know. Maybe it is. But I do know that I use both these aspects alternately. However, I would argue that every community experience in this area is a cultural experience. And every cultural experience is a community experience.” Int1

Such events bring people of all ages together in the same community space [Int7, Int16], creating the conditions for intergenerational transmission and experiential learning as discussed earlier [Int10]. These processes are not limited to sustaining a tradition, but also act as inspiration for collaboration and revival, as illustrated by the example of a local choir and musical band joining forces to revive a historic carol at a community event [Int6]. It could therefore be argued on the one hand that the community creates the circumstances and opportunities for ICH, and on the other hand that ICH provides the incentive for bringing the community together. This shows that ICH and communities are inter-related.

Another prominent theme in the data was the participatory nature of this culture [Int9B]. In addition to performance, participation also includes support in other areas such as providing or serving refreshments and continuing other ICH practices such as Welsh cake and bara brith recipes. Attending an event is also a participatory act in itself, as actively supporting an event contributes to its viability [Int3]. One participant argued that this, on the whole, is different to the experience of attending an arts centre where the audience is a passive observer rather than an active participant [Int10]. This builds on Williams' (1958) theory that culture is not something grand, but rather an everyday participatory act. In this way, all engagement with ICH - from sustaining the tradition, to organising it, and even supporting it - could be understood as a participatory act that contributes to the production and reproduction of ICH.

4.1.2.2 Volunteering

The data shows that volunteers are central to the sustainability of ICH in rural Wales, particularly with regard to holding community events as discussed above. Often, the success of these activities depends on the dedication of individuals acting in a voluntary capacity [Int3]. These volunteers undertake a wide range of tasks, including fundraising, organising, and maintaining community spaces and structures that are essential for the continuation of ICH practices [Int1].

However, one common perception is that responsibility for these tasks is often shouldered by a small circle of individuals, which can become a burden on them [Int3, Int1]. Concern was also expressed about who will take over from these volunteers as they get older [Int3, Int12, Int3]. Once again, this highlights the fragility of the processes involved in sustaining ICH in rural Wales.

In this regard, some suggested that the ethos of volunteering is in decline [Int10], with busy lives, care duties and a lack of support hindering the participation of the younger generation [Int11]. Despite these challenges, there have been conscious efforts to pass on responsibilities, often in an informal way by building relationships and supporting younger individuals [Int11], but also via more strategic support from organisations to help attract young volunteers [Int10]. While there are obvious barriers, many see volunteering as an expression of social duty or responsibility, as the following quote demonstrates:

"It's almost our duty to pass it on and provide these opportunities. Someone was kind enough to give up their time to pass it on to us, so our job now is to pass it on to the next generation."
Int10

Emotional terms such as "duty" [above] and "responsibility" were used [Int2; Int12], reflecting a moral commitment often associated with a desire to see community and linguistic continuity [Int11, Int3]. However, the data also highlights a thin line between privilege and burden [Int9A, Int3], as this commitment leads to a sense of honour but also expectation [Int12]. In summary, it could be argued that volunteers are the backbone of ICH, sustaining not only cultural practices but also the soft infrastructure needed for community and linguistic cohesion and continuity. However, once again, concern was expressed about the future resilience of this critical infrastructure.

4.1.2.3 Sustaining community assets

This section highlights the role of community assets, particularly physical spaces and local infrastructure, in relation to ICH production and reproduction processes. The data shows that halls, chapels, churches and other community spaces provide vital infrastructure for cultural activities such as concerts, fairs and eisteddfodau, offering convenient spaces for co-production and transmission of practices [Int1]. This supports the view expressed by Richards (2026) that physical infrastructure in the form of traditional buildings is often the backdrop or platform for rural practices.

However, the data shows that this infrastructure is under increasing pressure. Concern was expressed that the closure or loss of community spaces limits the range and type of activities that can be provided [Int10]. In this regard, it was emphasised that ICH relies on a diverse ecology of spaces, with different requirements for individual activities, small group activities or larger-scale events [Int11]. This suggests that rationalising spaces can undermine cultural flexibility without the provision of adaptable and multi-purpose spaces.

Historically, chapels and churches were central to the cultural life of rural communities, and the data shows that activities are still held in chapels and churches in some areas. Despite this, there have been examples of chapels being closed and activities moved to other spaces [Int16], chapels being converted for secular use [Int11], or chapels being sold and re-purposed privately for cultural activities [Int3]. This suggests that such spaces have a permanent role to play in the social and cultural infrastructure of communities and that communities are adapting to economic and social challenges.

In addition, participants referred to private spaces such as pubs as informal community assets [Int1], and in one case it was noted how owners' priorities in terms of commercial profits were limiting activities [Int7]. Participants also referred to the burden of voluntarily sustaining assets such as community centres and pubs, and concerns were raised about their long-term sustainability and capacity [Int11].

More broadly, other assets such as Welsh-language community newspapers were also identified. These were seen as an important way of promoting and normalising ICH, but their reliance on an ageing voluntary capacity was also noted [Int1; Int3].

Overall, the evidence shows that the viability of ICH depends on the ability of communities to adapt and develop sustainable community assets that provide physical and symbolic spaces for culture to be lived, valued and transmitted.

4.1.2.4 Creating and maintaining a sense of place

The data shows that rural ICH is rooted in a sense of place, where participants are acutely aware of the influence of the relationship between agriculture, the Welsh language and ICH [Int1; Int8]. This relationship is understood and valued in terms of the identities of individuals and communities, and the landscape is seen as a place of work and livelihood [Int1; Int11]. In this context, the data shows that family farms are key bearers not only of the Welsh language, but also of values, local knowledge of old characters or stories, skills such as sheepdog training, and collaborative practices such as gathering sheep from the mountain or supporting

events, with the family farm lineage contributing significantly to local identity and community resilience [Int6].

Local knowledge, such as the names of land features and local stories, are another important aspect of the link between ICH and a sense of place. This knowledge was identified as a valuable cultural resource, but it was noted that it is becoming lost as family ties to the land weaken [Int3]. In this context, changing place names was interpreted as undermining local cultural memory and seen as a disrespectful act, as noted by the participant below:

“And another thing that makes me seethe is the fact that they don’t know the names of rivers or the names of streams or hills in the area. I know they’re giving them English names. There’s a bridge between here and Mallwyd, and they’ve... The devil’s elbow. What’s the devil’s elbow? Pont Nant-yr-ehedydd, you know. And you think, wow, that bothers me too, that people are losing things like that, losing names. Ref3

This possibly explains why one participant has deliberately tried to raise awareness of these names [Int11]. At the same time, the data shows that ICH is also used as a basis for coining new names, for example the name for a new local school [Int2], which suggests that a sense of place can be dynamic rather than static. In the Banwy Valley area, dialect also plays a similar role in terms of strengthening identity, contributing to cultural diversity. However, it is susceptible to the influence of migration trends which can lead to certain linguistic features becoming weakened or lost over time [Int2]. Although UNESCO (2003) recognises language as a vehicle for Intangible Cultural Heritage, it does not specifically protect dialects, meaning that a central feature of local identity still has no formal recognition or support (Braber & Howard, 2023).

Taken as a whole, the evidence shows that a sense of place is a structural basis for ICH, linking practices to local social networks, language and knowledge. Furthermore, the wider literature (eg. Young et al., 2017) suggests that ICH is also key to creating a sense of place, which is a strong appeal for visitors and the tourism industry. As a result, there is both an economic and cultural incentive for maintaining the relationship between language, landscape and the social ties that are central to a sense of place. However, when these ties are weakened, for example by destabilising family farms, the ICH transmission processes are also weakened. In this regard, it could be argued that the relationship between people and place is vital to the sustainability of ICH and the associated economic benefits.

4.1.3 Governance, policy, institutions and resources at macro level

Finally, we focus on the processes that produce and reproduce ICH at macro level.

4.1.3.1 Institutional support and enabling infrastructure

The data shows that institutions play a key role in the production and reproduction of ICH in the context of Rural Wales. In the past, religious institutions such as chapels and churches played a significant role in the areas concerned [Int9A], and some participants referred to the role of these institutions in teaching skills such as singing in harmony. However, while there is a perception that these institutions remain a part of the rural cultural ecosystem, there is also a recognition that their influence is declining [Int1]. This raises questions about the future of

these entities as part of the living heritage of Wales and emphasises the importance of the current research being undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales which is carrying out a census of Welsh nonconformist chapels in order to “build the first accurate picture for over a century of the condition, use, and status of chapels across Wales” (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, 2026).

In their place, participants regularly referred to other institutions including the Young Farmers, Urdd Branches, Language Initiatives, Merched y Wawr and schools. Although many of these institutions are national bodies, their local presence appears to offer a framework, resources and space for cultural activities that are valued by rural communities [Int1, Int5, Int2]. In addition, alongside other services, institutions such as these appear to play a key role in widening access to ICH experiences for individuals who might not otherwise have access to them through family or community links [Int16, Int6].

National activity also feeds back to local activity, with events such as the Urdd Eisteddfod prompting community activities such as fundraising events or concert “highlights” events following success on the national stage [Int1]. However, participants were keen to emphasise that it is unwise merely to rely on institutions to sustain ICH, as more institutionalised forms of ICH practice, such as competing, can be significantly different to more social approaches to sustaining traditions [Int10].

Participants also identified institutions such as the Federation of Young Farmers and the Language Initiatives as being particularly significant, not only because of the ICH experiences they offer, but also for the leadership and community responsibility skills they nurture through democratic structures [Int3, Int7]. It was noted that these transferable skills are relevant to other voluntary roles in the community, for example, chairing committees, thus strengthening local resilience and capacity, as highlighted by the participant below:

“But they know how to organise. They’ve been taught all about organising things, fair play. And as I say, you see how they evolve from being Young Farmers to organising things, or from being Friends of a School to serving on a community centre committee or something like that.” Int3

However, while many participants appreciate institutional support, there was a clear difference in the type of institution that gains trust and respect. There was particular praise for national third sector organisations that have local membership and offer hands-on cultural experiences. Conversely, some were concerned about the lack of understanding of the potential of other public institutions to support ICH [Int3; Int11]. One participant cited a historical experience of non-Welsh medium delivery, and it could be argued that experiences like this continue to define individuals’ perception of non-locally rooted organisations [Int3].

Although it could be argued that the Welsh language is now given greater consideration in institutional engagement processes, the evidence suggests that translation alone is not sufficient to foster meaningful relationships. One participant raised questions about whether bilingual engagement produces the same level of collaboration as separate Welsh-medium engagement [Int14C], emphasising the importance of cultural sensitivity as well as linguistic conformity.

Participants' understanding of the role of public institutions in supporting ICH was often limited to the provision of funding [Int10]. While external grants can facilitate access and support practitioners who are ICH bearers [Int1], others stressed that over-reliance on external funding can undermine the voluntary infrastructure of communities [Int9B]. The 'Night Out' programme delivered by the Arts Council of Wales was identified as an effective example of supporting rather than undermining the community infrastructure that underpins rural culture, by reducing risk to communities that deliver cultural activities. More broadly, it was suggested that favourable economic and linguistic policies, rather than direct aid, create the conditions for ICH to thrive in the long term [Int9A].

Some organisations were aware of these tensions and engaged through ICH to help communities see how policies and activities are relevant to their own experiences, as this quote demonstrates:

"But I think we've become more empathetic to people, hopefully, over the last few years. Historically, and I know some people still feel the same, there's been a criticism that, "You don't care about the people who live here." And I could see that this had happened, definitely. But I hope that fewer people feel like that now. And I think one of the reasons for this is that there's more cultural heritage work being done and people can see themselves in this work. I told you before that I view this like a mirror. And if people see themselves in the work and in the policies, they're more likely to accept aspects of planning policy or biodiversity than they would otherwise be inclined to do." Int8

Others, however, stressed that ICH has an intrinsic value beyond facilitating engagement, with one participant noting, for example, that preserving traditions such as flock habitat is an activity of basic cultural value, even when "easier" landscape management options are available [Int14B].

The results therefore suggest that institutions need to be understood as part of a connected cultural infrastructure which offers communities an ongoing cultural journey from cradle to grave [Int1, Int2]. However, it is vitally important that this support increases, rather than undermines, community capacity. Furthermore, it could be argued that the role of institutions is extremely important in terms of widening access as it provides opportunities for those who do not have family ties to ICH. However, the quality of the relationship between organisations and communities is key, and there is a need for a continuous presence which considers grassroots community priorities in order to establish trust.

4.1.3.2 Integration of ICH through schools and the national curriculum

A prominent theme in the data of this study was the central role attributed to schools, and primary schools in particular, in supporting the viability of cultural activities involving ICH. Participants saw schools as key points of contact between children, families and local cultural life [Int11]. However, one participant suggested that closing village schools and establishing community schools could weaken the local community links that facilitate this relationship, despite the undoubted praise for the work done by the community schools themselves [Int4 – telephone interview not transcribed].

Within this context, there was a common perception that the national primary curriculum, together with related strategies, provides a supportive framework for ensuring that children get ICH experiences which are relevant to their local context [Int1]. Participants working in education were convinced that the freedom given to teachers to develop a locally rooted syllabus enables children to engage with ICH on their doorstep, as shown by the quote below:

“In terms of the new curriculum, what’s nice about the new Welsh curriculum is that as a headteacher or a teacher, I am able to choose the learning pathways. It doesn’t tell us we have to learn about the Celts or the Romans. I am able to select the learning pathway of my choice. As long as the skills are covered, I can do anything I want. Last year we did an entire theme based on “Yma rwyf finnu i fod” (Here I too am meant to be). Well, the history was based on local legends, folklore, looking at churches in the local area, the history of the area.” Int2

These findings echo arguments in the international literature that education systems can play an important role in supporting ICH transmission and strengthening attachment to community and place (Xue, 2026). Nevertheless, while the curriculum is seen as a supporting mechanism, it was noted that the wider social discourse continues to prioritise hegemonic cultures, undermining local cultures in the process [Int9A]. In this context, the national curriculum could be understood as a counterbalance approach, offering structured opportunities to build skills, locational knowledge and a sense of belonging. However, one participant suggested that there is less potential for this in the secondary sector, where the weight of assessments, subject organisation and timetable constraints can potentially limit the kind of ongoing engagement considered essential for sustaining ICH at local level [Int9A]. This suggests that responsibility for promoting ICH outside the family is shouldered by the institutional and community sector after the age of 11, limiting the cultural journey of children and young people.

Linked to this was the general perception that an integral relationship exists between language and ICH, with the Welsh language being understood as a key element of ICH. In the absence of opportunities for language acquisition, it was argued that children are being deprived of deeper and more meaningful experiences of ICH [Int9A]. This relationship between the Welsh language and ICH will be discussed in more detail later.

4.2.1.1 Identifying, Measuring and Supporting ICH through policy

Professional stakeholders working in the area of ICH were convinced of the need for an effective policy framework to provide structural support for ICH [Int8]. However, a consistent theme raised by some stakeholders was that significant challenges exist when seeking to identify and record ICH, particularly when trying to ensure fair representation and consensus in diverse rural contexts, as the following quote suggests:

“We know that vibrant communities are a key feature, but we’re conscious that that can mean lots of different things. You know, it can mean [a] really active bowls club, but that the Chapel is no longer functioning. So it’s changing, isn’t it? So we’re trying to sort of identify, you know, what it is we value and I think it’s [...] probably very difficult [...] to get a consensus, because you know, you might as well say no, the Plygain is what we value in this community and the community well, not really. You know, we’d rather, you know, have a bowls club, but that’s

because that community has changed, so we need to sort of understand that and try [to] find areas we can hang on to these bits of intangible heritage.” Int14A

This suggests there is a need to establish suitable ways of identifying and recording ICH. As mentioned previously, a process is already underway to identify ICH practices for inclusion in the UNESCO national inventory. This suggests there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of this process before planning how to promote ICH in the long term.

As well as identification challenges, difficulties exist in terms of understanding and expressing the value of ICH. One participant identified the need to collect data on the economic and social value of culture in order to justify investment [Int13]. In addition, others emphasised that measuring the viability of ICH is complex and an ongoing challenge, as monitoring techniques do not always reflect lived experiences [Int8; Int14A]. One participant also felt that community perceptions were a key measure, but noted that practical difficulties exist in gathering them in a reliable manner [Int8].

Even when ICH is identified and measured, a lack of strategic clarity continues to hinder effective action. One participant noted that the role of culture can be unclear within strategic partnerships, despite the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act [Int13]. This participant also noted that the fragmented nature of larger organisations leads to a lack of integrated strategies for culture [Int13]. Conversely, the case of Bradford, as a city of culture, shows the potential of an approach which puts culture at the heart of all policy areas [Int8; Int13]. It is still necessary to consider what such a model would look like in a rural context.

Taken as a whole, the evidence shows that identifying, measuring, and supporting ICH through policy is vital in order to create the conditions that allow these practices to thrive in the long term.

4.2.1.2 Financial investment and resource support

A recurrent theme among institutional stakeholders and professional practitioners was the lack of investment over recent years in the cultural sector, which was described as a significant structural barrier to the viability of ICH. It was argued that years of underfunding have undermined local cultural infrastructure, and that withholding funding for previously successful projects and institutions has limited opportunities for transmission and expansion of access [Int7; Int13]. In this context, participants emphasised that supportive policy alone is not enough without equivalent resources for practical implementation [Int13].

At community level, volunteer organisers and financiers emphasised the value of relatively small amounts of money for reducing financial risk and adding value to existing activities [Int13]. It was noted that flexible funding of this nature enables groups to achieve their own objectives without excessive intervention or reporting requirements. In contrast, it was recognised that larger grants are often informed by the strategic priorities of financiers, which do not always align with the goals of community groups, as the participant below explains:

“A lot of changes in culture, especially from a landscape perspective, happen [through] initiatives driven by funding. You know from a farming perspective, you know farmers change their practices to conform to funding streams because they’re reliant on those funding streams

unfortunately. So that's changed landscape in a particular way. And I think you can see it as well with things like events and stuff, you know. Like, oh, well, you know, to be eligible for funding for this event, you have to host so many activities for yes, x group, y group and whatever. So it does change and I think that's just the way we are now because we're all so reliant on funding. [...] No, not many things are self-sustaining." Int14B

This raises questions about how to balance institutional or national objectives with local priorities, and the importance of sustaining the capacity and independence of communities. It could be argued that there is an opportunity here for developing funding criteria and evaluation frameworks that recognise the need to support processes that are essential to the production and reproduction of ICH together with the resilience of rural communities.

While larger institutions view this alignment as inevitable when applying for major sponsorship, it was noted that short funding cycles create uncertainty and additional administrative burden at micro, meso, and macro levels [Int8; Int10]. Overall, the data shows that the nature, duration and flexibility of investment is central to the viability of ICH, and that long-term funding that is sensitive to local priorities plays a key role in strengthening sustainable cultural infrastructure.

Key Finding 1: The processes that support ICH create an integrated ecosystem that operates across micro (individual or hyper-local), meso (institutional or regional) and macro (structural or national) levels (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). This system is fragile in several key areas, including the volunteering infrastructure, the resilience of ICH bearers and practitioners, and community infrastructure. Due to its interdependent nature, a decline in one element can undermine others. At the same time, there are opportunities for more robust processes, such as ICH integration through the education curriculum and targeted investment in projects, in order to support less resilient processes such as family transmission and experiential learning. However, this should not happen at the expense of creating the favourable conditions that are vital for producing and reproducing ICH by more traditional methods. In light of this, it could be argued that there are clear opportunities for policy to support the processes that sustain the production and reproduction of ICH in rural Wales. To do this effectively, policy needs to adopt a whole-system approach that considers the relationship between these mechanisms and the context in which they operate.

4.2 Factors Enabling and Hindering ICH Production and Reproduction Processes

The section above highlights the interdependent processes that operate across the levels in order to sustain ICH in rural Wales. In the following section, we consider the cross-cutting tensions that interact with these processes.

4.2.1 The Welsh Language

A prominent and cross-cutting theme in this study was the multi-dimensional relationship between ICH and the Welsh language, which interacts with a large number of the processes identified above. Participants in this study were acutely aware of the linguistic shift that has occurred over time in their areas and they considered this to be a key factor when reflecting on the future of ICH [Int3; Int7]. There was a perception that a large number of community

activities are still held through the medium of Welsh, although participants noted that bilingualism is becoming more common in contexts involving schools and non-Welsh speaking families. This highlighted an ongoing tension between being inclusive on the one hand and the desire to sustain Welsh language domains on the other [Int3]. This will be discussed later on. What is clear from the data is that consideration of the Welsh language played an important part in discussions about ICH, and this is clearly an aspect that residents are very keen to protect.

The data highlights a clear interdependent relationship between the Welsh language and ICH. On the one hand, participants believed that the Welsh language is used to convey more detailed knowledge, skills and understanding of the traditions, including place names and names associated with nature [Int14A]. On the other hand, they believed that ICH provides the key social and community framework for Welsh language use – including offering opportunities for new speakers. Where this interdependence exists, one participant argued that the Welsh language would not have survived in these areas without the cultural practices in question [Int9A]. This relationship was clearly expressed by one participant: “The language is a vital part of it. You can’t separate them in my opinion.” [Int9B]. In this regard, it could be argued that the Welsh language is not only a “vehicle” for ICH, but also “drives” it (Nic Craith & McDermott, 2025, p. 76).

At the same time, this crucial relationship raises important questions about the nature of non-Welsh language ICH in Wales [Int13]. The data collected does not offer sufficient insight into this aspect, suggesting that further research is needed in the future.

There was a common perception that both ICH and the Welsh language are under pressure. Given the interrelationship of the two entities within the context of this case study, it could be argued that the decline of one is likely to have an adverse effect on the other [Int1]. Many linked the decline of the Welsh language and ICH to an inward flow of people, noting that it is sometimes difficult to attract newcomers to support ICH activities, particularly through the medium of Welsh [Int7].

One participant argued that some ICH practices can be appreciated without proficiency in Welsh [Int9], while others believed that the language was key to full participation and meaningful access. The participant below elaborates on this:

“I believe that people’s lives here in this area are really enriched if they can speak Welsh. So there’s a selfish interest in being able to speak Welsh, because we all know that there are very few communities in Wales now where you can’t function if you don’t speak Welsh. But in terms of enjoyment and being able to reproduce cultural and artistic experiences and so on, and getting to know people in their own language, it’s clear to me that being able to speak Welsh is an advantage. And efforts are being made to welcome non-Welsh speakers to the area. There are opportunities to learn Welsh too. I almost think that the individual has to ask him or herself, “Well, can I live a full life in the Banwy Valley if I don’t speak Welsh?” I know this is politically sensitive, but I believe the answer to this question is that they probably can’t.” Int1

The relationship between the Welsh language and ICH will be further considered later on in the study when discussing how communities adapt and evolve in order to expand access and

ensure inclusive coverage, while at the same time balancing these efforts with the desire to preserve cultural and linguistic diversity.

While it is possible to engage with ICH in rural Wales without Welsh language skills, it appears that an understanding of the Welsh language offers more comprehensive engagement in a more meaningful way.

Finding 2: There is a close relationship between the Welsh language and ICH within the context of this study, and evidence shows that the viability of certain types of ICH is linked to the conditions that facilitate the continuation of Welsh as a community language, and vice versa. As well as being a vehicle for ICH practices, the data shows that communities also view language as an entity that “drives” such practices. Furthermore, the data suggests that full access to ICH in this context depends on the opportunities available to residents for Welsh language acquisition. However, it is recognised that there may not be a corresponding relationship between all types of ICH and the Welsh language in all areas of Wales, and further research is clearly needed in this regard. Despite this, the evidence shows that this core relationship is a feature of some rural communities and should not be undermined or disregarded within the wider policy discussion.

4.2.2 Adaptation and evolution

Another cross-cutting theme identified was adaptation and evolution as key mechanisms for enabling ICH to continue, ensuring its ongoing relevance in changing social contexts. This echoes a wider consensus in the literature that ICH is a dynamic process that is repeatedly recreated in response to changing contexts (UNESCO, 2003; Bortolotto, 2007). The evidence shows that adaptation and evolution support the production and reproduction of ICH by operating across different levels and contexts and therefore play a key supporting role in a range of ICH processes.

Participants acknowledged that this process is inevitable as communities respond to demographic changes, social pressures and contemporary needs. As one participant noted:

“Believe you me, I’ve seen lots of ups and downs and changes over the years. But there’s still a culture here.” Int3

However, the data shows that adaptation is not a hasty process; rather, it is based on discussions which consider various aspects in order to distinguish between those which are adaptable and essential.

An example from the Young Farmers shows how inclusion objectives were balanced with historical identity by retaining the name of the movement as a cultural symbol even though it was no longer an ‘accurate’ description of the membership which is no longer limited to children from farming families [Int12]. In this case, a deliberate decision was made to evolve by expanding access to membership, but a deliberate decision was also made not to change the name of the organisation which is fundamental to its heritage and identity. In the case of local eisteddfodau, there were examples of adapting organisational changes to ensure sustainability [Int3]. Reference was made to a particular case where a committee intended to engage with a local private enterprise that provided music training for children. Although this business

operated through the medium of English, the committee reasoned that as language was irrelevant to the eisteddfod's instrumental competitions, non-Welsh speaking competitors could be included in instrumental competitions without undermining the eisteddfod's Welsh language policy [Int4 – telephone interview which was not transcribed]. It therefore appears that communities are aware of the need to adapt in order to survive. However, this is done carefully in order to ensure the essence of the practice.

The data shows that the Covid-19 pandemic was a catalyst for rapid adaptation, with activities such as Plygain services and agricultural shows moving online. This is in keeping with a trend identified by the Senedd's Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee (2020) [Int9B; Int11]. However, even though offering experiences on the internet widened access and awareness, the social element that is central to ICH was often lost, and this may explain why most activities have now returned to being live events following the relaxation of the pandemic restrictions. However, it could be argued that the semi-unique circumstances of the pandemic have fostered new capacities within communities with regard to promoting events. For example, reference was made to numerous examples of the use of technology to generate interest, expand access, and record ICH practices [Int9B], which is consistent with the claim made by other scholars (Richards, 2026; Young et al. 2017) that technology can offer solutions for contemporary challenges. However, there were risks associated with these actions as practices were reinterpreted, or possibly misinterpreted, beyond their original context [Int7], a point echoed by De Figueiredo (2015) who identifies the danger of undermining collective memory.

Practical adaptation was also evident by relaxing rules and changing venues in order to attract new participants, especially young people [Int1; Int9B]. However, this led to tensions around validity [Int9B]. One example of this related to the Plygain tradition; it was noted that it is not customary to clap during a Plygain event, as it is actually a form of service. However, when children step up to sing, the congregation tends to applaud, thereby setting a precedent for clapping throughout the service which displeases some individuals. In such cases, the participant reasoned that it is important to provide clear guidance in this context in order to remove any uncertainty. This example illustrates how adaptation occurs continuously, but that tensions also exist which communities must negotiate in order to find a way forward.

Finding 3: Communities view adaptation and evolution as vital actions to ensure the continuity of ICH practices in response to a range of social, economic, and cultural challenges. However, these changes are not understood to be a *fait accompli*, but rather as social processes where communities discuss, debate and reach a consensus about which adaptation are considered valid or appropriate. In this context, the evidence shows that ongoing ICH is related to the ability of communities to make collective decisions about direction and boundaries of adaptation, rather than to adopting externally defined changes.

4.2.3 Inclusion and cultural diversity

Issues around inclusion and maintaining cultural diversity were very prominent cross-sectional themes in the data. This often stemmed from a desire to ensure that activities can continue by fostering wider participation. However, the data shows that there are risks associated with this

process in relation to maintaining cultural diversity and the Welsh language. There are clear links here with the previous sections which discussed themes like the Welsh language and Adaptation and Evolution. In this regard, it is important to remember that this study focuses on ICH in the specific context of Welsh-medium participatory events which are based on a specific historical context; consequently, there is still a need to explore issues of inclusion and diversity in other rural culture and ICH contexts.

The data shows that rural communities' networks are often closely linked and based on long-standing family and social relationships. While this acts as an effective enabler for ICH transmission, as discussed previously, participants also felt that it can exclude those who are not directly involved in these networks [Int1; Int6; Int9B], which echoes the wider literature (e.g. Hersland, 2020). This section therefore focuses on the tensions between widening access and maintaining cultural diversity.

Specific groups who are at risk of being marginalised from cultural activities were identified – community participants often focused on newcomers and non-Welsh speakers, while sector stakeholders identified wider groups such as LGBT+ people and young people. It was reported that organisations and communities alike seek to respond in a proactive manner by creating more inclusive access pathways [Int13]. ICH bearers and practitioners and volunteers in particular recognised that sustaining ICH practices in the future depends on welcoming new people, and they therefore felt that adaptation was essential, as the participant below explains:

Yes. You've got to welcome new people to the tradition. You can't just say, "Oh, you've never sung before. You can't come." Because that attitude will guarantee that something is going to die. We have to make an effort to keep renewing the culture by including new people." Int9

However, widening access creates challenges. The data suggests that introducing new ideas and people can challenge the traditional ways of organising and holding activities. While there was clear recognition that new ideas support continuity, there was also a perceived danger associated with ideas that are developed without a full understanding of the context and specific nature of ICH [Int11; Int10]. One clear example was where an unintentional change in a committee's language from Welsh to English stemmed from the expansion of the committee's membership responsible for organising cultural activities [Int11]. Given the close relationship between the Welsh language and ICH, as discussed previously, the data shows that language change can disrupt the cultural context in which ICH is produced and reproduced. Sometimes this change felt inevitable but was nevertheless lamented by members.

Conversely, some participants stressed that there was no need to change the language or form of an activity in order to be inclusive. It was argued that the Welsh language and the original form of the practice are integral parts of the authentic experience, and that non-Welsh speaking participants can immerse themselves in the experience even if they don't understand every word [Int13; Int03]. In this context, it was suggested that certain groups need to have domains or "breathing spaces" (Fishman, 1991) in order to protect minority languages and ICH

practices, and that this does not necessarily conflict with inclusion, but rather promotes cultural diversity, as the participant below explains:

“But there is tension here because if you want to be completely inclusive and say, “Right, this provision is going to be bilingual,” what you’re really doing is replacing the Welsh language and elevating the English language. Because we know from global forces that English as a language is naturally going to take over. So I think it’s important that we don’t think that inclusion always has to mean being everything to everyone and that it’s okay for us to have domains for groups of people. This can be women like Merched y Wawr. It can be young people like Young Farmers. And the Welsh language in this case provides a means of bringing people together, encouraging new speakers to come and learn or improve and chat through the medium of Welsh.” Int1

At the same time, it was recognised that bilingual activities or English language versions of certain events may be appropriate in specific contexts. For example, it was noted that the Young Farmers’ Eisteddfod is a bilingual event that offers a gateway for those without Welsh language skills to experience the culture of the eisteddfod [Int12].

Similar tensions also arise in terms of cultural ownership. An example was highlighted where widening access can lead to a disconnect between practices and their original context, such as hedge laying competitions where very few local farmers now compete, and most competitors are volunteers or conservation workers [Int14A]. According to De Figueirido, there is a risk that a disconnect between practices and their context can lead to “the emptying of sense of the cultural meaning” (2015, p. 1038 and 1045), although at the same time it could be argued that new cultural meanings are being created. Similarly, traditions such as the Plygain highlight a historical sense of family ownership of particular carols [Int9; Int16]. It could be argued that this is less relevant now, as the process of recording and publishing has already widened access and thus weakened family claims, which in itself underlines the point that widening access can weaken a sense of ownership. Ownership issues were also evident in decisions about traditional skills training, where priority is given to training local people in order to ensure that the skills remain in the area where they were traditionally used and ensure that these communities benefit economically and culturally from the experience [Int8]. These examples convey the complexity of a sense of ownership, which on the one hand contributes towards sustaining meaningful contextual information, but on the other hand can lead to social exclusion. This represents a clear challenge to policy.

Finding 4: Widening access to ICH, particularly among young people, is recognised as an essential and important action for ensuring continuity, and the role of organisations in particular is key in creating alternative and inclusive transmission processes. However, challenges exist in seeking to safeguard cultural diversity where contextual knowledge and commitment embedded in traditional practices are respected, and it is argued in some cases that cultural and linguistic “breathing spaces” are appropriate, i.e. spaces where cultural and linguistic practices can continue without external pressure. Communities and organisations alike strive to balance these considerations.

4.2.4 Favourable and unfavourable conditions

Another prominent cross-sectional theme among participants was the influence of wider socio-economic factors on the viability of ICH, with many believing that sustaining ICH depends on thriving social conditions, as the participant below explains:

“Economic policy, housing, language, work and so on are clearly going to be important because without work there is no community. It is harder to reproduce cultural experiences without a community. It’s harder to avoid a brain drain and persuade people to stay in their communities. So the work of the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities is also very important in terms of policy. So I would say that several policy areas are interlinked to influence this agenda.” Int1

Within the rural Wales context, participants seem to understand the relevance of social and economic structures to ICH viability. In this regard, significant concern was expressed about the housing situation in rural Wales. Some linked this to the extractive nature of certain forms of tourism; for example, reference was made to how local homes were converted into holiday accommodation during the pandemic, weakening the stability of communities [Int7]. Participants felt that the ‘housing crisis’ has led to demographic changes that limit the voluntary capacity to hold activities locally [Int9B; Int9B]. The lack of local work opportunities was also a clear concern for residents, with the perception that the need to travel long distances reduces the time and energy residents have to contribute to cultural activities in the evening [Int3; Int12]. Concern was therefore expressed about the lack of individuals steeped in the area’s culture and community values who are able to sustain ICH in the long b-term [Int3].

These challenges are compounded by poor public transport [Int8], although some suggest that such structural barriers can build resilience and commitment among participants [Int10]. More broadly, individuals highlighted their lived experience of how structural systems and wider challenges such as agricultural policies, the bovine TB crisis, and globalisation have an indirect impact on the viability of ICH [Int1; Int14A]. Tourism was also identified as a significant influence, with many claiming that it destroys the viability of communities. However, others argued that rather than rejecting tourism altogether, the tourism economy should be reshaped by promoting a type of tourism that is rooted in local culture and attracts visitors who respect cultural experiences and are interested in them, as expressed by the participant below:

In my view, tourism in its current form has to be moderated, in a way. And I think participatory tourism is more justifiable than extractive tourism. That is, maybe people don’t travel to another country just to soak up the culture. Maybe they travel with their dance group, their choir, their singing party, and take part in the culture. Int9B

In this context, ‘selling’ ICH was not necessarily considered harmful; rather, there was an opportunity to attribute the economic value of ICH by raising its status [Int8]. However, it was emphasised that this process needs to be handled with caution, as indigenous heritage risks being uprooted or completely changed if marketed inappropriately [Int14C]. Some organisations seek to mitigate these tensions by developing tourism policies that use ICH as a moral and practical lens [Int13]. Reference was made to opportunities for cultural exchange by welcoming visitors who take an active interest in local culture, and several examples were noted of programmes that offer this type of experience [Int9A; Int10]. Nevertheless,

participants warned against reducing ICH to a mere economic development tool, emphasising that its cultural and community value is central to its long-term viability. This viewpoint echoes De Figueiredo's (2015) argument that ICH has an intrinsic value that extends beyond its use as an economic or developmental resource.

Finding 5: The viability of ICH is related to wider socio-economic factors such as housing availability, job opportunities, leisure time and the sustainability of communities. In the absence of a favourable context for ICH, an over-reliance on institutional structures to sustain ICH could risk disconnecting it from its roots and undermining its community resilience. At the same time, ICH itself contributes to the creation of vibrant communities where people wish to live, highlighting an interdependence between culture and wider structural factors where ICH can promote participation and create new social relationships.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This report highlights the fact that Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in rural Wales is produced and reproduced through a complex ecosystem of processes spanning micro, meso and macro levels. The results show that the viability of ICH does not depend on individual activities or events, but on a combination of interdependent social processes that enable cultural transfer, participation and evolution (Bortolotto, 2007).

At the same time, the report underlines the fact that considerations in relation to the Welsh language, adapting and broadening access, inclusion and cultural diversity and ensuring favourable conditions are racked with tensions, and are not neutral in their impact. The data suggest that communities are constantly negotiating these tensions, and that it is through these ongoing processes that the type of heritage focused on in this study remains ‘alive’.

In this context, the recommendations presented below call for a move towards a whole-system mindset that recognises ICH as a living, contextual and interdependent process. By focusing on the processes that enable ICH over time, rather than just outputs, policy and practice can contribute to creating the conditions in which ICH can continue to thrive as an integral part of well-being and community life in rural Wales, now and in generations to come.

5.2 Recommendations

Fifteen recommendations are presented below, and are targeted at macro, meso and micro level policies:

Macro (national)

1. Supporting the long-term viability of ICH and rural cultural well-being is dependent on policies that recognise and promote rural living heritage in a fair and equitable manner, recognising the structural challenges faced. As a result, it is recommended that broad definitions of culture, heritage and cultural well-being should be adopted across policy areas, reflecting UNESCO principles and increasing the visibility of ICH through its inclusion in relevant inventories. This needs to consider the limited capacity of volunteers to undertake such processes.
2. In order to support the sustainability of the cultural landscape, it is important to recognise the role of the family farm as a key location for retaining, transmitting and sustaining the knowledge, skills and community infrastructure that underpin ICH. As a result, it is recommended that objectives aimed at promoting ICH more formally in the Sustainable Farming Scheme need to be integrated as a clear priority.
3. In order to widen access to ICH and strengthen rural cultural participation, access to Welsh-medium education and language acquisition opportunities need to be strengthened as a key pathway to ICH. This should be done in a way that recognises the integral relationship between the Welsh language and ICH in certain contexts, but which also recognises that this relationship is not the same across rural Wales. There is also a need to ensure that opportunities to engage with local ICH continue throughout the learning continuum, ensuring that teachers have the support and resources to be able to

offer children access to their living heritage. Sharing good practice and mentoring can support less confident teachers in this area of work.

4. Addressing the uncertain nature of the transmission of ICH to the younger generation within rural communities is key to sustainable practices. As a result, one recommendation is to pilot basic income models or similar financial mechanisms for ICH bearers, building on international experiences such as the Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) scheme in Ireland (gov.ie, 2026). A similar model in Wales could recognise ICH work as a community activity that requires significant commitment, helping to strengthen the basic ICH infrastructure in rural Wales whilst supporting the next generation of ICH bearers and practitioners.
5. In order to sustain viable cultural diversity, policy makers need to balance this carefully with inclusion objectives, recognising that cultural and linguistic 'breathing spaces' are sometimes needed alongside activities that widen access to ICH. Mechanisms that support communities at grassroots level should be used in order to confidently address these challenges by providing robust guidance and resources to pilot new interventions.

Meso (regional):

6. Ensuring the viability of ICH practices depends on the resilience of the processes that produce and reproduce ICH rather than protecting static forms of ICH. As a result, there is a need to develop new ways of evaluating policy, including appropriate funding frameworks and monitoring systems that reflect these dynamic processes, such as community volunteering.
7. In order to create new and inclusive access pathways, particularly for those without family cultural capital and for young people, new schemes need to be established. Alternatively, appropriate programmes that have proved effective in the past need to be re-established and embedded in order to support basic ICH processes such as experiential learning, engagement with ICH bearers and practitioners, and nurturing a sense of place. In this way, access to ICH can be provided for everyone, creating more resilient communities and a better standard of living.
8. In order to promote community resilience, funding mechanisms that are flexible and aligned with community priorities need to be established. Support for low-burden investment for grassroots ICH activities is recommended. These are relatively small investments with low administrative requirements. As a result, the cultural infrastructure of communities is supported without undermining their resilience.
9. Nurturing new volunteer community leaders is vital to the sustainability of rural ICH. Public organisations can support these processes in a meaningful way by developing and investing in new schemes, with a particular focus on young people, that promote informal community volunteering beyond organisational structures. This can develop trust by supporting local priorities.
10. In order to maintain the social infrastructure that is essential to the viability of rural living heritage, targeted support needs to be provided to sustain and regenerate key community assets that enable cultural events, social participation and ICH transmission. Where assets have been transferred to community ownership, policies should be implemented that facilitate community management of such assets.

Micro (cymunedol):

11. In order to maintain cultural diversity and extend access at the same time, the associated benefits and risks to the cultural well-being and cohesion of communities need to be carefully evaluated. The ongoing piloting of new interventions that support both objectives is encouraged.
12. Rural communities in particular face barriers to access. Strengthening social participation in ICH activities is recommended, and this can be achieved by extending existing schemes such as Night Out (Arts Council of Wales n.d.) in an inclusive manner.
13. In order to strengthen the capacity and resilience of the cultural infrastructure of rural communities, collaboration with other local groups, organisations or sectors could be encouraged and facilitated. This can also be done across communities and internationally, facilitating the sharing of knowledge, resources and good practice.
14. Ensuring participation by children and young people is essential for the production and reproduction of ICH practices. Consequently, it is important to act in a proactive manner to seek ways of engaging children and young people with ICH. This could be done in collaboration with other organisations such as Young Farmers' Clubs, Urdd branches, or local schools.
15. In order to ensure visibility and raise the status of rural ICH, communities need to carry out appropriate surveys of existing local ICH as a basis for community planning in relation to support for transmission, adaptation and continuation over time. This can be done in collaboration with community councils.

6 References

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7 Appendix

Appendix 1: A list of examples of ICH customs

Below is a list of some examples of ICH customs identified in Welsh-language community newspapers. Practitioners who were directly involved in the activities in bold text were interviewed, either as ICH bearers or volunteers.

Plygain

Local eisteddfodau e.g. cerdd dant, folk song, recitation etc

St David's Day celebrations e.g. plays, lunches

Agricultural/horticultural shows or country fairs e.g. shearing, cooking, stock judging

Activities related to chapel and church e.g. services and hymn singing festivals

Christmas celebrations e.g. Christmas fairs, carol singing

Societies e.g. historical societies, women's societies etc

Young Farmers' Club activities e.g. drama competitions, fieldwork, rallies

Silver band

Welsh-medium youth clubs e.g. choral singing, clog dancing

Carnival

Fundraising events e.g. coffee morning, duck race, whist drive, skittles night

Sport e.g. football, hockey

Appendix 2: Examples of the information available in Welsh-language community newspapers

The information below was obtained from the Welsh-medium community newspapers ('papurau bro') of the Dysynni Valley (Dail Dysynni), the Banwy Valley (Plu'r Gweunydd) and the Tanat Valley (Yr Ysgub) catchment areas during the year 2024. It offers a valuable insight into the viability and evolution of customs.

Plygain Services

Dail Dysynni

Plygain services were held during December 2023 at St Peter ad Vincula, Pennal and in January 2024 at St David's Church, Abergynolwyn. In Pennal's case, it was the first Plygain since the 19th century, which is perhaps an indication of the growing interest in reviving the tradition. The community of Abergynolwyn took pride in the fact that 'so many in the area are keen to see the old custom continue'; a sentiment shared by the community in Pennal. Both cases featured a variety of performances, with particular reference to the vocal parties from both Abergynolwyn and Llanegryn. However, disappointment was expressed that there weren't enough men present to sing the traditional 'Carol y Swper' (supper carol) in Abergynolwyn. This might suggest that while there is a growing interest in the tradition, the knowledge or confidence to uphold it may be lacking. According to tradition, it is also viewed as an opportunity to socialise, with refreshments to follow in the case of Abergynolwyn.

Plu'r Gweunydd

Plygain services were held at various locations in the Banwy Valley during December and January including St Erfyl's Church, Llanerfyl and Moreia, Llanfair Caereinion – and more widely in the Plu'r Gweunydd catchment area. It is interesting to note that it was spelled 'Plygien' in Llanerfyl, which perhaps reflects the word's pronunciation in the local dialect. There were 14 items in this Plygain, and the men came together at the end of the evening to sing 'Carol y Swper', with refreshments to follow in the hall. A Plygain for young people was also held at Moreia, Llanfair Caereinion, which suggests that there may have been an effort to ensure that the tradition continues.

Yr Ysgub

The first Plygain of the season in the catchment area of Yr Ysgub took place in Llanfyllin on 1 December. Five vocal parties contributed to the service, namely the parties of Merched y Wawr, Y Briw, Henlle, Gad and Ieuan ap Siôn. 'Carol y Swper' was sung at the end, according to tradition, followed by a cup of tea and a chat in the vestry. A Plygain was also held at Cefnblodwel chapel in Pen-y-bont-fawr on Sunday, 7 January 2024. The audience enjoyed two rounds of carols by vocal parties from Fronheulog, Llansilin, Henlle and Pen-y-bont-fawr, as well as a duet. The traditional 'Plygain Fawr' took place on 14 January, this time in the village hall in Llanfihangel, which was well-attended. There were 11 parties this time, including a party of local children.

Appendix 3: Interview schedule

Objectives

- i) What processes underpin the production and reproduction of Intangible Cultural Heritage in rural Wales?
- ii) What factors enable and limit these processes?
- iii) What opportunities are there for policy to support this reality in practice?

1. ICH forms and processes

- 1.1. Can you describe the customs, traditions or cultural knowledge in your community and are considered part of your intangible cultural heritage?
- 1.2. Are there any customs that you personally practise or are aware of?
- 1.3. How are these customs created and maintained in your community?
- 1.4. How is the custom passed down from generation to generation?

2. Enablers and barriers

- 2.1. What factors help these customs to continue and thrive in your community?
- 2.2. What challenges or obstacles have you faced in maintaining or sharing these traditions?
- 2.3. Have you or others found ways to overcome these challenges?

3. Meaning, well-being and placemaking

- 3.1. What do these customs mean to you and your community?
- 3.2. In what ways do they support well-being?
- 3.3. How do these customs contribute to placemaking?

4. Inclusion and ICH

- 4.1. How do different groups within the community (e.g. age, sex, gender, disability, ethnicity, newcomers, language) see themselves represented in these traditions?
- 4.2. What barriers limit the participation of minority groups within the community?
- 4.3. Are there challenges to the authenticity of the customs as they become more inclusive?

5. Practical or strategic support

- 5.1. What kind of practical support is needed to ensure the sustainability of your ICH?
- 5.2. How can the public sector support the sustainability of these activities more effectively?
- 5.3. What policy areas are relevant to the viability of your ICH?
- 5.4. What would you like people in influential positions to understand about the importance of ICH in rural life?

6. Reflections and final recommendations

6.1. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?

6.2.

Remind participants that information about the project can be found in the Participant Information and Consent e-mail and repeat your offer to answer any questions they might have.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Appendix 4: Quotes

Please see below, where conditions of confidentiality and anonymity allow, examples of quotes to support specific findings in the Findings and Discussion section, namely 4.1 and 4.2.

Living heritage practice and transmission at micro level

Intergenerational transmission

I came from a very cultured family. So I was literally immersed in the culture of the Banwy Valley. Int3

So, yes, I just learnt songs like Ar Lan y Môr and Dacw 'Nghariad and things like that. A lot of them from my family, really. Through my grandmother, really, more than anyone. Int7

And I'm now trying to teach my own children, [the children's names], which has been quite successful, they have done well singing cerdd dant at the Urdd Eisteddfod over the years, and also at school. Int2

And families who have maybe been singing at the plygain for nearly a century, well, their descendants are still in plygain parties too. Int3

I never questioned it. Being like that all came so naturally to me. Int6

It's just come naturally. Because I was about three years old. That's the way we were raised. Int2

I don't enjoy music that much. I prefer to go to see plays etc. It's in my family. I was brought up in the tradition, my mother sang at the plygain. So it's there. She would go to every plygain that was being held. And when I was smaller, I tagged along, I suppose. But given a choice, I don't go because I don't enjoy it. Int3

[Quote omitted]. Int11

And I feel that it's important that the little ones have those culturally rich experiences, opportunities to sing, opportunities to perform, opportunities to dress up, opportunities to move, opportunities to dance, opportunities to be outdoors and to understand more about their locality. And the [YFC] does that in a way that's very, very powerful, which in turn attracts families into the process. Because a lot of the children we work with at the [location] come from families who aren't from the area, families who speak English at home. And through children, they are opportunities to experience local culture and their locality as well. Int1

And parents come, and grandparents come, even though they don't necessarily speak Welsh, and they have to sit there, and they're immersed in a good hour of just here we are, this is the school, everything is in Welsh, and that's it. Int3

ICH acquisition and transmission by bearers and practitioners

I'm just thinking about people I... or not me... that people in this area remember, the characters, some who are still with us, some who aren't. Those people had created so much impact and customs in the area, people still talk about them. Int2

If you play the triple harp, there's a lineage... Not in a family sense, a blood lineage, but quite an important lineage of who has taught you to play. So [name 1] was taught by [name 2]. And name 2] was taught by Nansi Richards and Eldra Jarman. And you can trace your way back from who taught you, in a way. So there are things like that. Int10

And just, unfortunately, as we get older, the people that I have put on a pedestal disappear pretty quickly. So for me, those are obstacles, the people who aren't there any more. Int02

Sian will. [...] Gareth might. Int16 (pseudonyms used).

Experiential and practical participation

And in the same way [name] has learnt to play the triple harp, by ear. Int10 (Stakeholder)

For example, I can't read music at all, and the whole family is like that. It's all by ear. Once again, sol-fa singing, that's the way it was taught. And I know, they used to sit down with us at the piano, and we just used to harmonize with each other and just make melodies up on the spot. And I think that's the way. I'm now interested in setting [cerdd dant]... I probably break every rule under the sun when it comes to the rules of cerdd dant, but I can set two melodies that sound right together by ear. Int2

Yes, very basic things, I know, but in a Welsh pantomime, it's different from an English pantomime. Someone has said that to me. It's the oral tradition, certainly, that passes it down. Int5

I suppose technology just has brought on so much that there's stuff that I teach my father, but then there's other stuff that he would teach me down. So it's like no one's ever right. Int15

Project [project name], we get the callers and we get the musicians. We use [name] as a tutor to create the music. He trains the youngsters to play by ear. Musicians who come from a classical background, they might never have played without a copy before, so they learn a new way of reading music. That frees them up as musicians, and they are able to participate in sessions in the pub. Then it changes their style of play and their willingness to join in community events. I think classical music may be more isolated because you learn the pieces to perform, while folk music allows you to participate in more things, to share. Int10

So, basically, by the time we were six years old. Every Tuesday night, off we went in the van. I went after school. And we were taught at school by Mr [name]. He would go round the schools teaching. And then, yes, you had a band to play with. Int6

Well-being as an incentive

Yes, it just brings a smile to my face, anything to do with plygain singing. Int2

Just being on stage meant everything to me. It was just the fun of it all and being with people who were... It was fun. It didn't matter if you worked all day. It was just, ooh, practice tonight. And you just had fun, didn't you? Int3

Yes, and then I'm back in the band. And that's where I was happiest, in the band. In a way, in the band, since my time at school, you'd go to the schools around Meirionnydd. You'd appear at a concert here and a concert there. And it always gave me that thrill. Int6

What do they say? Active minds? There's no time for them to be at home on their mobile phones. There's always something going on. There are rehearsals. There are social trips, or the club meets every week. There's something to do outside of school hours. There's also something to do outside of work every day. It's just somewhere where everybody comes together. Everyone knows each other at club level. I think it's so important. I think we play a big part in young people's well-being. We give them confidence. We give them the confidence to be able to express their feelings. I think that's vitally important. And feeling that they're in a safe place. For example, they may be having a hard time at

school, but this is an escape from the reality of life. There's no time to think too much. I think that's important. They keep very active. Int12

And, of course, some would argue strongly that those cultural experiences enrich one's health and make someone a better worker or... So there are a lot of various utilitarian but also abstract reasons about the importance of culture to us as individuals. Int1

But my mother always thought, because she hadn't been to college, she thought that it was really important for us to get good grades and do well in school. But for me, in terms of what I'm doing today, I was always out milking, working the sheepdogs, horses, and I was in the band, and I've played the piano since I was six. So it's been my life, I'm 60 this year, and to be perfectly honest... And I've always been fairly fit. So I was involved with sport, hockey, football. So in a way, it's been my life... And I know that culture is changing, but in a way now, everything that's happened in my life, I'm still doing the exact same things. I still love those things. But there's religion as well, I really like going to church. I remember the hymns. If you're asked what your religion is, I think it's the comfort it gave us as children, the comfort it gave our parents, especially when they were dying. The comfort of remembering the hymns. They keep your mind sharp. So then those things, I think, have created who you are today, who I am today sitting in the library. That's why I'm so comfortable. I never, I never wanted an important job. I just wanted to be myself, to be who I used to be, which is me. Int6

Yes, the theology is quite profound in some of the carols. They refer to everything from the birth of Christ to the death of Christ and so on. So that's part of the... The words, they're an important aspect of the culture. A lot of it is in strict metre, the old... Int9A

You asked me before. For me, it's all part of my Welshness, the fact that I'm taking part in those Welsh cultural and traditional things. It's all part of my identity as a Welsh woman, the fact that I'm able to sing these Welsh words and sing these Welsh harmonies. Int9B

Because in this technological age, artificial intelligence and what have you, it would be very easy to think why would this matter? Why would people enjoy it or decide that it's important? Ultimately, I think it's because it makes us better people, it makes us more rounded individuals, whose world is richer. And that there's a benefit to that work of coming together as a community. Because experiencing heritage or a cultural, cultured experience is usually a mass experience. There's value in that process of coming together and bumping into each other and getting to know people that way, laughing with each other, crying with each other and so on. It makes us more human, I think. And if you think about a situation, if you take extreme examples of adversity or war, people don't have the luxury of being able to reproduce or enjoy those culture experiences. Looking at those extreme experiences helps us to remind ourselves why we value these things, why there is a need to invest in them, why taxpayers' money isn't just ploughed into health and education. Because, ultimately, there's more to life than that. Int1

Communities that understand their identity and value their cultural connections makes for communities that have better cultural well-being and physical well-being. So, yes, it's all intertwined. Int8 (Stakeholder)

Well, you know, I think the school is here, and I'm so pleased that it is, because I know, as I've said before, there was a lot of bad feeling in this area in [year]. I accept that, because there's nothing nice about closing any school. And when I see the success [of the school] now, not just with Estyn, but when we get invitations to perform in concerts, even in [village name] the other day. And at one time, [named village school] didn't mix with [named school from another village]. They were two schools. Although we were less than two miles apart, we were different. But the area has begun to accept that [the name of

the area school] is this valley's school. We're successful in what we're doing. And it's lovely to receive invitations from different people to perform. Int2

So the choir, we have a dementia choir on Monday afternoon. That's great. I really like that. [...]. It's just a place where a warm welcome awaits. Int6

So for me, what could be better? A local choir and a local audience, and everyone having a good time. So we're still here. We're still here. Despite all the things that are against us, we're still here, and we're still trying to do our best, yes. Int3

To get to know them themselves. To get to know the area. To appreciate the area. I try to say to them every day, "You don't understand how special you are. You don't understand how lucky you are. One day, you'll thank me for the fact that you can sing plygain, that you understand what a hymn is." It heartens me when children talk about these things naturally. Because they wouldn't do that if they hadn't been taught. Int2

For me, it gives me a sense of belonging to a community and grounds me here. Because I've moved into the area, I feel like I'm being accepted by people because I'm involved in such things. We're both people who strongly believe in traditions, folk culture and passing such things on. It's all so important, isn't it? Int9B

Certainly, that feeling of belonging. As I've said before, the feedback we've had from young people who have been part of the [programme] is that they feel that they are truly rooted in Welsh culture, in their country. A legacy, in a way. A lot of them haven't had those opportunities through the school. Int10

Staging social and participatory events

That's what's nice about folk culture, it attracts people of all ages, basically. I'm thinking about the sessions at [pub name]. There are people, they're not really old enough to be in the pub, teenagers. They come with parents. Sometimes I take [son's name] with me if I'm not going to be too late. Up to old people. Everybody's there. Folk culture is really inclusive. Int7

If there are young children, they will usually be the first to get up and then up to the age of 90 odd sometimes. Int16

There's something so social about them. And also that element of drawing people together. We live in an age where people don't come into physical contact with each other because everyone is on their screens. People don't hold hands. You don't hug people as much any more. You don't make eye contact with people. But if you go to a folk dance, you have to hold on to somebody. Int10

She wanted me to get the band... It had been written on Cader Idris many years [previously]... She had found it in the library. And she wanted us to play it, and one of the members of the Bro Dysynni choir sang it. And we did that at the memorial concert. And that was really special. Int06

But I think for me, as a person who does those things and participates in those things, for me, that's what culture is, it's something that you do. Int09B

And then in a close-knit society, you almost feel like it's a necessity to support. Because, well, our children have all been in the cylch meithrin, or our children have all been to the school. And you do feel, well, if the schoolchildren are putting on a concert, well, I should go and support them, fair play, because they work hard, and it's our place as a society to support them. Int3

I see traditional dancing, traditional events, folk events as amateur events, and perhaps those people who take part feel the same as me. And this may be completely wrong, but that we aren't included in the arts. I see the arts as something more highbrow, something you go to watch, something you pay to go see rather than something you participate in. Int10

Volunteering

But you have to have people who are willing to volunteer, who are willing to give of their time, or those things are never going to succeed. Volunteers are so important. Int3

Oh, yes, there are individuals, [...] volunteers [...], who play a very important role in volunteering their time, organising things. Usually, as I say, in order to raise money, but they also recognise and think about the various activities that would appeal. Int1

And I can see it becoming more of a burden on some of them as they get older. There are fewer and fewer of them, and as they get older, organising things is going to become a heavier burden on them. Int3

The school, the committees involved with the two halls, the hall in [village name] and the community centre in [location name]. The community councils also play an important role in providing grants, providing support. [...] So that's part of the picture. Int1

But, no, there are lots of things going on. But you do tend to find that it's the same people who organise everything, who are behind all these things. Int3

There are fewer of you about, so there's more pressure on you then. You can't share the burden. And I think maybe a lot of people feel like that in their communities, that the same people do everything. [...] And I think you can suffer burn-out. Int12

But people may be more reluctant to organise things themselves or maybe they just need us to hold their hands to help them go for the grants to pay for the things. So, yes, the volunteers and the communities, supporters are more important than anything in that respect. Int10

[Quote omitted]. Int11

[Quote omitted]. Int11

We're working closely with the [name] society. But they're getting older. They are run by volunteers. We're working with them now to produce a five-year strategy to try and move things forward. They're getting more young people on the committee. So the long-term goal is just to get a lot more people interested and involved in our tradition. Int10

Yes, I just see that it's my responsibility, having been brought up here. Int2

And taking responsibility. You learn at a very young age how to take responsibility. And your values of contributing to local communities. Int12

[Quote omitted]. Int11

There's still a group of people in the area who are still determined, we're still going to hold things, we're still going to be here, and we're not going to turn to the medium of English. Because we think it's important that these things continue in Welsh. Int3

But it's a responsibility that I'm happy to accept. [...] It isn't a burden, because it's such a sociable and wonderful thing to do. Int9A

It's an opportunity to give something back'. Int3

I think we all feel a certain... Maybe that's the advice we've always been given, you're never supposed to say no. You're supposed to take every responsibility, every opportunity, and you just do it. And I think that is instilled in you at a very young age when you are a member. And I think you feel a responsibility to contribute in our communities. Int12

Sustaining community assets

I'm more familiar with the Banwy Valley, namely the communities of Llangadfan, Foel and Llanerfyl, where there are two community halls which are an anchor for cultural activity such as concerts. So we had a concert very recently in Llanerfyl village hall to celebrate the centenary of Bethel chapel, which is next door. It was an opportunity to showcase local talent, musical talent, and a chance to recall the chapel's contribution to the community. Int1

Places are closing, the community centres and village halls, chapels. Fewer venues within our communities to hold events. Int10

[Quote omitted]. Int11

The interest is still there, and as I said, they're [...] using village halls now where the places of worship are closed, so. Int16

[Quote omitted]. Int11

[...] We have a small chapel that belongs to [name], [...], in the village [name of the village] which she has renovated, and we hold things there too, little cultural events about twice a year. Int3

And then you have notable places like [pub name], which is also a community resource or an anchor in that it not only provides a service in terms of food and drink and a place for people to come and socialise, but that's where the local book club meets, that's where the local football club holds its meetings, that's where we as a cylch meithrin committee come together, and that's where the Urdd Eisteddfod committee locally holds its meetings. So [pub name] provides a service like a community hall, but it also has the added benefit of being a comfortable and comforting place where you can have a drink and food at the same time and meet friends. So in that sense, I think the pub [name] is important in terms of contributing to culture. Int1

And also for years, I ran the open mic in the pub here. That came to an end because [name of brewery] said that they weren't going to pay for any more entertainment. Int7

[Quote omitted]. Int11

I think that Plu'r Gweunydd, our Welsh-language community paper, is an example of an important community asset or resource that acts as a kind of glue for the community. And it's also a way of celebrating our own culture by sharing news about families, stories about houses and habitats, but also to promote what's going on in the community. Int1

You know what, we were talking the other day. I'm involved with the [Welsh-language community paper]. I've been involved with it for 40 years, since when I was 19 years old, typing and designing the layout. And I thought to myself the other day, dear me, there's going to be a big change in ten years' time because I've noticed, over the last five years, that people are dying, naturally, and you realise, wow, there's no-one taking their place. But there are no people to take their place. That's what's unfortunate. Int3

Creating and maintaining a sense of place

Industry in this area is more or less agricultural, and ancillary industries that supply and support that agricultural industry, and musical, visual culture, what the Young Farmers are doing to encourage young people to be able to have those cultural experiences, to be able to perform, to be able to create culture. Int1

Well, something that the residents of Eryri aren't short of is enthusiasm [...] for cultural heritage. I think we live and work in an area where people understand their roots, or where a lot of people understand their roots. And there's a relatively close relationship perhaps because of the prominence of the agricultural industry in the area. There's a close link between people and the land, and hopefully between people and nature as well. I know that's generally dwindling, but I think we're still relatively fortunate in terms of rural communities that we're quite close to the land and to nature. So that's certainly something that's a big help. The fact that people understand why it's important and appreciate it in an emotional way, that they feel it's something that belongs to them, that's a huge help. Int8

Montgomeryshire's pleasant landscape is gentler, more hilly and particularly beautiful. And there's a risk or there's a tension there as well because we feel, as a family that is, that there's no culture without industry. Int1

[Quote omitted]. Int11

But especially Cader Idris, because there's a special culture on Cader Idris. It isn't as if we're farming one farm. We farm with a society of farmers. You know, when it's time to gather the sheep, around ten of them come along. And that's a solid hard core, we're so lucky to be a part of that. And it's going to provide a living, a future for my sons because they're going to follow that tradition in their neighbourhoods. Int6

And another thing that makes me seethe is the fact that they don't know the names of rivers or the names of streams or hills in the area. I know they're giving them English names. There's a bridge between here and Mallwyd, and they've... The devil's elbow. What's the devil's elbow? Pont Nant-yr-ehedydd, you know. And you think, wow, that bothers me too, that people are losing things like that, losing names. Int3

[Quote omitted]. Int11

And the reason it was named Ysgol Cwm Banwy, we had people from the area suggesting names. They were [submitted by] schoolchildren. They were [submitted by] elderly local people. As a governing body, we were given a list of names from which to choose the name of the school. And, oh, I remember, one suggestion was Ysgol yr Argoed because years ago, there used to be a small house on the school grounds. It appeared on tithe maps, but it isn't there any more, and the name of that house was Argoed. So Ysgol yr Argoed was on the list. We got Ysgol y Wiber because of the legend of the serpent that lives on Moel Bentyrch. And we got Ysgol Cwm Banwy. I remember that. We got Ysgol Cwm Banwy. And the reason we chose Cwm Banwy, from what I remember, is because of a poem written by Gwyn Eryl. And in the poem, he referred to Cwm Banwy. And that's why the school was named Ysgol Cwm Banwy. Int2

Well, the dialect more than anything. As I said, I have children here... The way this school has changed. Years ago, the children were all from this area, everyone spoke the Montgomeryshire dialect. That dialect is very uncommon now. But what brings a big smile to my face is when you hear children from Essex using words like "glew" and "ne." I really love that. Int2

Institutional support and enabling infrastructure

The chapels were still busy when I was young. And you would hear all four voices singing loudly back then. Int9A

The chapels are suffering. And where the chapels would have been much more active 50 years ago, they are a lot less influential nowadays. They would also have been producing a lot of the cultural experiences then, because they had a drama club, for example, or would there be things going on in the chapel that weren't really religious experiences but cultural experiences as well. Int1

[...] What the Young Farmers are doing to encourage young people to be able to have those cultural experiences, to be able to perform, to be able to create culture. Int1

[...] I don't think there's anything more important than the Young Farmers club in the Dysynni valley, especially given that we're a fairly rural community. The Welsh language is declining in the area. And we as a movement are a stronghold of the Welsh language. Int5

[Name] has just started going to Aelwyd Sycharth to learn clog dancing because I think that's important. Int2

Maybe not enough young ones getting involved at the moment, but having said that, the young farmers did have their eisteddfod recently and there was a competition and they all sang plygain carols. Int16

We did different things like Deio i Dywyn, and we went for a walk around the area with the children from the library and then made a film. We created three, actually, Cantre'r Gwaelod, Llyn Barfog. Again, we used the traditions or Welsh tales and brought them to life. Mair Tomos Ifans, wow, she came in with the harp. Int6

And, you know, things like the National Eisteddfod or the Urdd Eisteddfod coming to the area are some kind of catalyst for cultural activity as well, although the fundraising element is obviously the biggest impetus. Int1

And even now [name], who has been appointed as [role] on the project, she grew up in a family involved with [name of custom], yet they weren't heavily involved in [a custom in the form of a grass roots participatory activity]. They were just competing. That was what they did. But the [participatory grass roots nature of the] culture and the fun that can be had has been a real eye-opener for her. Int10

"But they know how to organise. They've been taught all about organising things, fair play. And as I say, you see how they evolve from being Young Farmers to organising things, or from being Friends of a School to serving on a community centre committee or something like that." Int3

And [name] came up with the idea of arranging a workshop to show the teenagers how to organise gigs, and then get funding to pay the bands. But they're the ones who create the posters. They're the ones who arrange everything. They're the ones who [indistinct 00:11:35] and everything, so it's their baby, really. But Menter Iaith pays for the gigs, pays for the venue and whatever they need. So maybe that will create some kind of scene for them [...] Int7

Yes, I can't imagine [name of a national public institution] offering anything culturally. Int3

[Quote omitted]. Int11

It's a shame that there isn't something we're able to offer to educate people and young people about their locality and nature and things that are all around them, through the medium of Welsh. I mean, you had [name of an organisation] and the like, but I don't even know if they're still going. They did things, but through the medium of English. Int3

I think one of the things we had discussion after our Citizens panel, which was a really, really good and interesting as an exercise for us. But we did question, if we had the same exercise again in Welsh language only, whether the outcomes would have been different, which they probably would, and the priorities would be different as well. Int14C

I don't know how that could be done, except for financing projects. Int10

We applied for a grant [...] and we then used that grant to get the artist, [name], to come to [location] to hold a painting workshop with the children. And that's a great cultural experience because of the strong influence of the Montgomeryshire landscape on her work, and the legends, the Mabinogi and so on. Int1

Securing strategic and official support can... not harm it, but change its nature. And that's what's nice about it, the fact that it still happens naturally. I work with [name of a third sector organisation], and they've all been set up by volunteers, but as we get Welsh Government funding over time and hire more staff, and I'm sure the same is true for [another organisation] and for [another organisation], people are more... where people were prepared to volunteer to do these things, now the attitude is, "Oh, people are paid to do that, so we'll let them get on with it," instead of taking the responsibility for themselves. Int9B

As things stand, on the subject of the plygain and folk dances, it's nice to let them be and run as they are by volunteers. What you want the government to do is not to make it harder and harder to maintain these things by stopping young people from learning Welsh. Int9A

So that we retain those hefted flocks. So we could say actually the hefted flock is not that important, we just need the land managed in a particular way. But actually that's not what we're saying cause you know we'll value both of those. Int14B

So the impetus comes from the people who are involved in the Cylch from day to day, and the relationship that exists with [named primary school] as well. Int1

We've got a sol-fa chart on the wall, and we practise singing. Just things like that, little things, but just to maintain that interest into the future. Then they become part of Aelwyd [name]. [...].

Integration of ICH through schools and the national curriculum

[Quote omitted]. Int11

As far as legends and stories and the Mabinogi and local tales are concerned, a lot of the impetus comes from the interest of the staff and a policy drive from the [organisation] as well, because the [organisation] has resources involving how to link local legends into play activities with the children. Int1

That's the danger with Welsh-medium education, in a way. The language is Welsh, but the education imitates English education, in a way. For many children, there's nothing intrinsically Welsh about the experience. Introducing the language is very, very important, and that's the focus of it, but if you can make it Welsh education, it really grounds the language and people in the rural area. We're still worried about people leaving rural areas. Well, what is there to keep them here if all they're getting is Anglo-American stuff, anyway. They're just doing Anglo-American stuff through the medium of Welsh. It's pointless, in a way. Int9A

And you just want everybody to know about it, in a way. And at the moment, we're having to fight with the education system, which has no interest in it in this area. Well, at secondary level. I have to be careful. Int9A

That's the pivotal point, the key aspect, just ensuring that children can grow up bilingual. In that case, we can then keep the doors open for them . [...] Just accepting and allowing the importance of the cultures to be highlighted, that teachers know something about their own culture. Because that's the problem. Int9A

Identifying, Measuring and Supporting ICH through Policy

Yes, the institutional support is important too. The authority itself must continue to see this as important. Our members and the Welsh Government certainly view this as very, very important at the moment. And there's no reason to think that will change. I'd like to think that their understanding of why this is important and how it helps to interconnect the other elements will increase. Int8

I'm looking at the economic value and the community or social value of culture. [...] But everybody says, "Oh, yes, culture is important." I'm still challenged, "Well, how much is culture, what is culture worth? What's the value of the activities you're doing?" And you, well, they're really important for health, well-being, the vibrancy of a community. And when you're in a period of endless cuts, culture and cultural services are always... Even though everyone says, "Oh, culture is so important," that's always what probably gets the chop before anything else. Int13

The report then looks at each of the special qualities, collects data about them. And that can be quite difficult as far as some of them are concerned. You know, in terms of inspiration for the arts, for example, it looks at things like employability in that field, or at the creative industries and so on in the area. Yes, collecting all sorts of data on the nine special virtues. Int8

It's a key thing for us to reflect in our management plan so that we can value it and actually monitor or measure what we think's happening to it. Int14A

Or often it's about living heritage, because it's to do with people, how people feel about it. That method in itself is quite... You have to invest a lot of time in that, don't you? Building relationships so that people are happy to tell you how they feel. I'm sure that's the main thing, I'd say. The feedback from people and the way they feel about things is something we're not used to measuring, but for us, it's the most revealing thing when it comes to these types of projects. Int8

Obviously, that's where [...] the Future Generations Commissioner officer, is trying to push things right now. In terms of the [strategic partnership], I've never been invited to go there. I don't know who's representing the cultural sector, for example, you know. Int13

[Quote omitted]. Int13

That was something that came through very clearly. I've mentioned the trip to Bradford in the spring previously. So they've had to work together on an incredible scale and you've just got to bring in the highways and environmental departments and so on with you for such a huge cultural project. You can very easily come up against a brick wall within the organisation sometimes, you know. It would most likely be planning issues or such like [within the context of our work]. But try to bring them into the project planning process and get them part of the team and try to work that way. I think we've got a long way to go in this respect. There have been good examples, but it's definitely something that needs to be improved again, I think. Int8

We went on a visit to Bradford [...] in February to see what they were doing there with their city of culture plans. And it was just stunning. Their plan was Culture is Our Plan. I don't know if you've read it. But they put culture at the heart of everything they do across the council. And, of course, they're the city of culture now, aren't they? But culture would permeate through their social services. It would permeate

through their education services. It would permeate through their environmental services. So it was meant to have permeated through everything. That's what they were saying. Int13

Financial investment and resource support

Well, as with everything else, funding is the problem. In an ideal world, it would be nice if there was a pot of money affirming, "Right, we want to organise something. We want to make sure that everyone is paid properly." Because it isn't fair that people have to play for next to nothing because it's their salary. It would be great to just have a pot of money available to put on gigs and pay everyone. Int7

There was over [omitted information] in it years ago, but now we only have [omitted information] in the strategic grants pot for the arts. And, okay, that really focuses on the arts more than living cultural heritage, but it supports arts activities that you would equate with living culture and living heritage. Int13

We have a new cultural priorities plan from the Welsh Government. That obviously sets out ambitions and priorities. [...]t. We have the Well-being [of Future Generations] Act. So you've got a pretty strong policy framework there, don't you? It always comes down to money. So without money and support, support that isn't financial, practical support, I think it's really challenging to be able to implement those policies and priorities. So, for me, it comes down to resources. Int13

But intentionally, the members wanted to see us pass that money on to communities and other groups, not just [an organisation]. So we had [various funds] [...] that have helped a lot of organisations across the county. Int13

Searching for money all day long. Developing good relationships with funders such as the Heritage Fund. And the National Grid and the capital work they fund. But we've been fortunate to be able to include that as match funding in other applications. Archaeology is one of the aspects that they fund, so even though it's not essentially living heritage, the links to living heritage, it opens a door, in a way. I think that's very important. Int8

We were hoping to get funding for another two years, but we didn't get it. So we had to submit a new application and got money for a year. It is a burden, having to draw up applications for finance all the time. Because the government money more or less just pays for our existence and for our jobs and the office and stuff. If we want to develop any projects, they either have to pay for themselves through the income from tickets or whatever, or we have to find grants to pay for them. Having annual core funding in place would lighten the burden a little. Int10

Factors enabling and hindering ICH production and reproduction processes

The Welsh language

When you're in the Banwy Valley, everything tends to be in Welsh. Everything that we organise tends to be in Welsh. If we're holding something in the hall in Banwy, in Llanerfyl or whatever, they're Welsh things. Once you go to Llanfair, the language changes. In the market towns in Montgomeryshire, like Llanfyllin and Llanfair and places like that, even though a lot of the residents are Welsh, they are non-Welsh speakers who have lost the ability to speak the language over the generations. But they are still Welsh. They are the local farmers, but they have lost their Welsh. Their children will probably have been educated through the medium of Welsh, but that older generation... Int3

OK. Aberdyfi is very different from the rest of the area, really. I'm sure you know, there's a load of second homes and what have you here. Since I was a child, Aberdyfi has become increasingly anglicised. But there are still Welsh speakers here. We're still here. The children, of course, even those who have moved in, all speak Welsh because the schools are all Welsh-medium. So that's changing. That has turned things on its head, really. Int7

There was a concert in Llanerfyl a week before that, organised by the chapel, (name). But that would have been entirely in Welsh. We don't tend to do things bilingually up here. I think that [a group] holds something like a beetle drive and stuff like that. But there you are, a lot of the parents don't speak Welsh, you see. When it's a matter of [activities for children], where the parents don't speak Welsh, they have to do things more bilingually, don't they? But as far as we're concerned, you know, if the chapels have something on or if Merched y Wawr are hosting a concert or things like that, or the Historical Society is hosting something, we tend to do it in Welsh up here, everything. I don't know how long that will last, but that's still the norm as it stands. Int3

[...] [...] the project was all about curlew conservation. But you know, it transpires that, you know, there's more more words for curlew in Welsh. There's about 100 different words for curlew in Welsh, you know, depending where you are in Wales and what you'd call them, you know and. And so that shows, it's a really, you know, it's very much you know, part of that culture, you know that very local sort of culture and a lot of the words for curlew will relate to, you know, the coming of the seasons, you know, like Deryn y glaw. So you know, tell you something about the landscape. So I think those are things to hang on to and not so much in it because we tend to do that in a kind of a touristy way, you know, or let's, you know, sort of talk about Welsh language in a, you know, but actually that it's more than that tells you about our communities and our landscape. Int14A

Yes, absolutely. Culture has helped the Welsh language survive at this end of the country. Nothing else has done it. Nothing else has done it. The only reason I speak Welsh is that my family spoke Welsh, Welsh was spoken in the chapels and our neighbours spoke Welsh. Int9A

I know that language and culture, they're very closely intertwined here, in [this area]. Was there a question in Cardiff about non-Welsh cultural heritage in Wales? It's not as obvious here in [this area] potentially, but it may be prevalent in communities that have seen a lot of inward migration. Int13

Changing language, linguistic changes, are also probably a challenge because, you know, there may be pressure from some to offer more bilingual opportunities, but bilingual opportunities turn into a proxy for English activities, which is obviously a threat then, I think, to the survival of the Welsh language and to the continuation of some of those cultural experiences that are connected to the Welsh language or that belong to the Welsh language. Cerdd dant, the Welsh-language community paper, strict metre poetry, whatever it may be. Those examples of culture that, to all intents and purposes, are linguistic assets as much as they are cultural assets. Int1

There was a real community here when I was young. And that has changed. Half of the houses in the village, about half, are now second homes or holiday lets. So you can imagine. And then a lot of people have moved to the area. So are the people who live in the village as well who don't speak Welsh. And there are real cliques of different people, second home-owners who have moved here, and there's a clique of them. And some of them are actually very much anti-Welsh. [...] There are some people who are really anti-Welsh in the village, and that's really difficult. Int7

But there's nothing stopping people from enjoying our culture even though they can't speak Welsh, especially folk dancing and clog dancing and folk dances. That's a great way for people. The artistic things, the things that you can watch or listen to, people can enjoy them even if they don't understand

the language. But I think for me, as a person who does those things and participates in those things, for me, that's what culture is, it's something that you do. Int9

Adaptation and evolution

What's interesting is that there are fewer members who are traditionally from a farming background. The members are from the Welsh countryside, rural members. You don't have to be a farmer. What's also interesting is that members don't want to change the name. They still want to be known as the Wales Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs, but most of them aren't farmers. They just come from rural Wales. That's important. It shows that this tradition is very important to them. Int12

But things have changed. When I was a young girl, say 20 years ago, it was an eisteddfod that ran from midday until 1 o'clock in the morning. And you had the children's competitions, then the youth competitions, and adult competitions after that. But unfortunately, the numbers of young people and adults competing fell, they dwindled, and it was decided, well, we'll make it an eisteddfod just for children. Int3

During Covid, we held numerous virtual plygain services, recording some of them to share on YouTube. But the interest has grown, partly because of that. People all over the world were watching them. Before that, I can remember going to plygain services, and part of the tradition is that there's a supper afterwards. And that's the part that all the carollers enjoy, getting the chance to mingle and talk to each other. Int9B

[Quote omitted]. Int11

Then someone would always stand up at the end to thank everyone involved and announce the location of any upcoming plygain services in the area. Before this, there was no formal list of plygain services. Maybe they would be mentioned in the Welsh-language community newspaper, but if you didn't live in that area, you didn't know where or when the plygain was on. That's why we set out to create the plygain.org website with a small group of people who were interested in the plygain. Int9B

And hymn singing festivals etc. Okay, they featured a lot more hymns, but... Yes, there were ways, traditional Welsh ways like the noson lawen, hymn signing festivals, the Eisteddfod. That's how I learnt. But now, anyone, anywhere in the world can just go online and learn that stuff. So hopefully that will have a beneficial effect rather than... There are so many versions of the same song on websites now and people are learning the wrong lyrics. Okay, I misspoke. Folk songs, there's a sort of evolution between the generations, but we don't want things to be changed too much so that the old versions are forgotten either. You used to just learn from a book or through family or whatever. Int7

Again, I can point to examples from Sunday school. I think we're the least religious Sunday school in the world. At Sunday school, we... I shouldn't say that either. But it's more about values and a lot of cultural experiences, singing, moving, dancing, performing. But it's interesting because when I was a little girl, Sunday school was every Sunday. Well, that's just not going to happen any more. Nowadays, Sunday school meets once a month because everyone has such busy lives. And Sunday school has to compete with the football club or the hockey club for the children's interest and time. So I think that for [indistinct 00:48:17] to thrive, it has to adapt to the community and to changing lifestyles as well. Int1

But we're talking about a project maybe with her singing hymns in a pub so that people can learn to sing in harmony. Int9B

They aren't rules. [...] But they are guidelines. Because traditionally, a lot of people would argue that you're not supposed to use an instrument to accompany the singing, that you're supposed to sing

unaccompanied. But some plygain services will allow people to sing with a guitar or organ. Also traditionally, you're not supposed to applaud. Int9B

Inclusion and cultural diversity

[...] In this area, there are so many people who know each other, who are related to each other, and so you feel a bit like someone who... and it's not a negative thing, but you're always on the fringes a little bit. Int1

In a way, I come from Llanegryn, but I might as well come from Birmingham. You're either from Abergynolwyn, or you're from away. [Husband's name] is from the area, so that's great. So, you know, that's how the village, how society works. My mother was from Montgomeryshire, and she always said that she was never fully accepted into village society, even though she played a big part in it. Int6

Unless you were related to a folk dancing family or to a specific family that was part of a folk dancing group, then the others had very little experience of our culture. Int9B

I'm talking about the newcomers who come, and how we try to pass on our culture and language and place names to them. [...]. I think those people are a cohort that we want to continue working with. We have identified LGBTQ+ as one cohort, and young people as another cohort, women as another cohort, and disabled people as another cohort we're trying to work with. Int13

[Quote omitted]. Int11

Certainly in terms of the [name] project, we've deliberately targeted young people because as far as we were concerned, they were the future. And we've been reporting back to members [of the society] on the project, and they've pointed out that the current groups aren't included in the project much, which is fair enough. And those groups are older, and there's a very important place for them because they've maintained the tradition for years, and if it weren't for them, it would have died out. Int10

[Quote omitted]. Int11

It's hard, isn't it? It's challenging. Because you want to be inclusive. But being inclusive doesn't mean you have to switch to another language. Some people enjoy having that sense of being immersed in an experience. If I go abroad, I prefer to have the authentic original experience, not something twee or false, in the native language, in their mother tongue. Int13

They go hand in hand, don't they? As I was telling you, I think we're stubborn when we refuse to hold things bilingually, because I feel that it'll ultimately damage the Welsh language. When you're stubborn and saying, "No, this night is totally Welsh, and we're not going to start going down the road that makes it bilingual," because once you start to do that... We've seen it in the past, things tend to turn English afterwards because it's just easier. Without the Welsh language, there wouldn't be any of this culture going on. It would be a completely different culture. Without the Welsh language, you wouldn't have the plygain. Do you know what I mean? The plygain would be a very strange thing without the Welsh language. So we need the Welsh language because it's a completely different culture. Yes, you can have bingo or a beetle drive, which tend to be bilingual, but there are some things, I think, that have to be Welsh. The eisteddfod is in Welsh. The plygain is in Welsh. And the small concerts that we organise, they're Welsh. Int3

But the pinnacle for us as the Wales YFC is the Young Farmers' Eisteddfod. Now that is growing year on year. Every county in Wales now competes at the eisteddfod. And it's a bilingual eisteddfod. But what's nice is, you're welcome to compete through the medium of Welsh or English. For the most part, the competitors will take part through the medium of Welsh. But what's good is that you get counties or

members who wouldn't ever go to an eisteddfod usually, you'd never see them at the Urdd Eisteddfod, and you'd never see them at the National Eisteddfod, but they come to the Young Farmers Eisteddfod, and they get a taste of Welsh tradition and culture. And I think that it's important to promote that aspect. Int12

So we have a hedge match every year because it's traditional and it's nice to do. But most of the people who come on that hedge match work in conservation or they're volunteers, very few farmers, and we're so we're saying "where are all the farmers?" Why? You know, how can we get farmers to sort of, you know, to do this because they used to? That's where the skills lay, you know. But the farmers haven't got the time, or you know, or because it is more time consuming than running a tractor up the hedge. Int14A

As for the plygain tradition, it is likely that certain families had specific carols that they tended to sing. By now, it has moved on to everyone singing anything since carols have started to be published and annotated. But families would be very protective of their carols, and they wouldn't be at all happy if someone else stood up and sang the carol they intended to sing. There are stories of people taking their books of plygain carols to their graves with them because they didn't want to share the carols with other families. But that's before our time, obviously. Int9

They're their carols. [...] Some families, you know, they've always sung those carols. Int16

Thinking of something like the traditional skills courses we've been offering, the demand for those has comes from all over north Wales and into Chester. And we have to prioritise the people who live and work in the area, because you want to see the impact of those skills on the local landscape with something like slate pillar fencing and so on, and you want the contractors who work in the area to have the skills to be able to do that kind of work locally. So in terms of the authenticity of the skills and customs, yes, they certainly belong to the people who live and work here. Int8

Favourable and unfavourable conditions

Something that made a big difference to me is that, during lockdown, I did a lot of campaigning about the housing crisis, seeing what was happening in villages like Aberdyfi, people being evicted from their homes in order to change them to Airbnbs and things like that. So I met a group of people who felt the same way and started campaigning. Int7

Housing, it's obvious in this area, you have two nephews and [name] from the farm, who is a farmhand on the farm next door, three young Welsh lads who have had to buy houses over the border in England because they can't afford a house in Wales. Int9B

The decline of the language in this area comes about when farmers die or move away or whatever, and non-Welsh speakers buy properties and come here to live because it's a nice place to retire. You go around trying to encourage them to come to Welsh lessons. "Oh, no. We've moved here, so we don't have to mix with people." They don't contribute anything to the local community then. Int9B

Young people are moving from here anyway. There's no work for them. I have three children. One of them works in [name of town], but I know she wants to move from here to live closer to [name of another town] to be with her boyfriend. I have a son who has just come home after 12 years, but he doesn't work here. He works in [town in another county]. And I don't know if he wants to live here. I don't know. But he said the other day, "I'll never be able to afford to buy a house here." It's very disheartening, certainly. Int3

The other challenge I see is that there are young people living here who are in their twenties, a lot of them from farming families who are no longer members but have been members. I think that a lot of

those young people work somewhere else during the day, and go back to the farm at night, because they've had to go elsewhere to secure an income. But by the evening, they're [tired] and they won't go there late. Int12

As I was saying, inward migration is the big problem, definitely. And we're losing young people. And we're not unique in that respect. I think that's happening not just in Wales but in every rural area throughout the United Kingdom. I'm worried, as I say, that in ten years' time, there will only be a small hard core of people left to try to keep things going. And where are you going to get the audience, especially for Welsh things? Int3

The public transport links just aren't there. We're not within easy walking distance for a lot of people. Int8

The rural nature of the county is a challenge, you know, everybody being so far apart. And that can be a challenge and an advantage because it also means that people are more willing to travel to things and work harder to maintain things and to support things than they would be living in a town. Int10

And we know that it's under... I don't know if 'threat' is the right word. I'm sure that there is a threat. But no-one has forced us to watch TV. No-one has forced us to have mobile phones. But the availability of entertainment experiences such as television and so on, leads to fewer opportunities then for people to feel that they have to go to something that is available in terms of culture in the community. Int1

And then you've got sort of, you know, technological challenges as well, you know, sort of the influence of, you know, global media, you know, which is kind of like a massive steamroller across, you know, sort of other cultures, isn't it? It's one massive sort of global culture now, which is coming through. So those are the kind of things that you're kind of trying to push against a little bit. Well, a lot, to try and sort of retain some kind of local identity within this, these kind of massive global [influences]. Int14A

As for the economic aspect, the traditional skills element is so important. And we're generally seeing that those skills are dwindling more and more. Recently, we've been thinking specifically about the structural and physical elements, in a way. But they are traditions even so, traditional roofing, traditional boundaries, stone walls, laying hedges, slate pillar fencing. Then when we have offered the skills courses, we're trying to target employers and contractors to make sure that those skills are still, well, not just available in the area, but are vibrant as well. And ironically, you're almost seeking commodification of those skills, in terms of people seeing why they're important, and attracting private investment to boost them, in a way. You want home owners and property owners to realise, yes, having a traditional boundary or a traditional roof on this traditional house is extremely important. Because we're trying to ensure that those skills are respected, that the customs and the characteristics of living heritage, in a way, are interpreted in an honest manner. Int8

But we are guilty of putting it in the context for an English reader, rather than trying to instil the pride in the first language, first language first, which would naturally, you know, I think we always try and change it to ohh you know. This is Moel Fenlli. This is how you pronounce it. This is what it means. Int14C

A while ago, we had the [name] scheme, how you make somewhere a nice place for people to come and visit. So we've turned that on its head. That isn't our objective any more. So we're putting people of [name of the county] at the heart of things now. How do we make [the county] a good place for people to live in. Then if people want to visit as a result of that, all well and good. It will be a good place for everyone. So our priorities have changed a lot in that respect. And the cultural element is an important part of that. How we're creating a vibrant community culture through events that make local people feel

proud and excited, but which are also open to visitors. So those are the areas that we're looking into at the moment. Int13

And they contribute in return. It enriches life so much more, and you get a much better experience of other countries when you mix with the local people and so on. And you welcome people who come to wherever so that they put on a concert in your local village. It's so much more interesting than just watching people speeding past in cars and blocking the roads and so on. Int9A

The team leaders are young and enthusiastic and give dancing an exciting image. But then we'll take them round Wales and beyond. We've taken them to Lorient and to Switzerland. And this year, we got a grant to take them to Colombia to take part in a dance festival there. And that opportunity to go abroad and learn about different cultures and share different cultures reinforces your appreciation of your own culture when you learn about the similarities and differences. That's all part of the process. Int10

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