A WAY AHEAD?

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*'What if we displace the idea of left behind by thinking about staying behind as an **active**, **positive choice** not the default of the less capable and adventurous?'*

CWMNI BRO FFESTINIOG

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CONTACT FOR THIS REPORT
Karel Williams:
williamskarel@hotmail.com

WWW.CWMNIBRO.CYMRU

INTRODUCTION: RETHINKING PERIPHERAL PLACES

"The adventure implicit in staying- the labour, the harshness, the beauty, the ethics of remaining- is no less decisive and foundational than the adventure that goes with travelling.... For many people, then, staying behind hasn't been a short cut, a symptom of laziness, a comfortable choice. On the contrary, it has been an adventure, an act of foolhardiness and, perhaps, of bravery, something presupposing both toil and pain" (Vito Teti, Stones into Bread, p. 18)

Places like Bro Ffestiniog, after 100 years of deindustrialisation, have a centrally assigned identity and value as peripheral and inferior. Intellectually in the established political economy of capitalism and politically in the gaze of policy makers they are "left behind". They are defined by loss and deficiency: in the national income accounting that frames economic thinking, peripheral places are characterised by low and stagnant per capita output; within social deprivation indices, by ageing, dependent, unskilled, unhealthy populations, abandoned buildings, inadequate and withdrawn services in health, education and transport.

From this point of view, the problem is always why can't peripheral places "level up" and "close the gap" with central places whose success is defined by the inversion of all these characteristics. And mainstream policy is about how to do this (without disturbing the market) through inward investment, skills and transport infrastructure. All this is maintained despite the problem that policies of becoming like somewhere else encounter obvious material limits: Blaenau cannot emulate Central Cardiff. It is unsurprising that large disparities in regional and district GVA per capita have not been reduced by policy.

In the world as it is, the practical result is the migration of the young from peripheral and failing places to central, successful places in or near cities. Some think tanks (supported by urban studies academics) then celebrate cities as the nesting places of the educated and ambitious where agglomeration effects boost innovation and productivity. This celebration tends to gloss over the obvious point that successful cities have more than their share of problems about internal inequalities and high-cost housing so that an English city like Cambridge is only liveable for the higher income groups. As Brecht observed about the city of Los Angeles, the one place can serve as heaven for the rich and hell for the poor.

This report attempts to disrupt these established, unconstructive and condescending ways of thinking about Bro Ffestiniog by introducing a subversive notion: what if we displace the idea of left behind by thinking about staying behind as an active, positive choice not the default of the less capable and adventurous? Here we draw on the thinking of the Italian anthropologist Vito Teti[1] whose life work has been centred by his study of the Calabrian village of San Nicola Da Crissa and the relation of those who stayed to the paesani who emigrated to Toronto and created a Calabrian version of Little Italy in Canada. Teti still lives in the village where he was born and brought up. From Teti's viewpoint, staying behind is not an easy choice but an active and difficult process in a place which doesn't stay the same. Staying behind is "an art, an invention, a practice" so that remaining is an "extreme version of voyaging". In thinking about those who stay behind, Teti has developed the concept of "restanza" which plays on the idea of staying and resilience. In the passage below, an Italian academic Desire Gaudioso usefully summarises Teti's thinking on restanza. From this passage, readers will understand that restanza is the active, constructive opposite of the Welsh concept of "hiraeth" or nostalgia for what has been irrecoverably lost.

> *Restanza means choosing to stay in a place in a conscious active and proactive way by actively guarding it, being aware of the past while enhancing what remains with an impulse towards the future where a new community is possible. In this sense, staying is a dynamic concept, it is a form of journey, a manner to affirm a different existence and existence made of presence and action to hinder absence and abandonment. Presence brings life back, places become liveable and are perceived as sources of opportunities not only for the ones who stay, but also for those who arrive. Moreover, the meaning of staying, is strictly linked with inhabiting as an intense relationship that is characterised by enjoyment and realisation of resources and, at the same time, by care of collective assets*[2].

This report is about the Bro Ffestiniog, a slate valley with a population of under 5,000 which includes several hamlets and villages and the one small town of Blaenau Ffestiniog with just over 3,500 population at the end of a branch railway line. It is peripheral by any standard measure. In travelling time from the political centres, Blaenau is more than 5 hours by car or train from the House of Commons in London; and Blaenau is not much closer to the Welsh Senedd on Cardiff Bay because that journey takes nearly 4 hours by car and 6 hours by train. In terms of service provision, like other low-density areas, the Bro has lost out through regional centralization, so the secondary school has no sixth form and primary care is the only locally available medical service.

This report summarizes the results of a modest survey of just over 150 respondents which brings out the importance of attachment to place for those who could leave but chose to stay. The policy question then becomes how can we enable and empower restanza? Leaving aside the non-sense about "levelling up", the policy question is refocused in foundational economy terms: when the local population wants to stay, what practices and policies would enable them to do so at the point where bottom up meets top down in complex multi-level governance systems?

"sicrhau dyfodol, gwireddu potensial," (Securing a Future, realising potential)

01
CONTEXT FROM THE NUMBERS: A GROUNDED POPULATION

"We have a tendency to be reductive, to trivialize, to simplify things" Vito Teti, Stones into Bread, p. 172)

How do we resist this tendency? The reductive trivialization of mainstream thinking is to suppose that the story of a place can be summarised in a few numbers- like GVA per capita or indices of multiple deprivation which render any and every place legible and comparable so that policy makers can embark on redressing deficiency. Instead, we would separate the numbers from the narrative because each form of knowledge has its place as supplement to the other, but it is wrong headed to suppose that either can displace or evict the other. In this section we consider the numbers which establish the distinctive local context of the Bro and Blaenau before the next section arranges survey responses into a narrative of attachment.

The numbers show that the context is very different if we compare the Calabrian hill village with the town of Blaenau using basic official statistics from the IWA's Understanding Welsh Places web site[3]. In San Nicola those widowed by out migration and old age pensioners classically dominated an elderly population. But the age distribution of Blaenau's population is not biased towards the old but is much the same as that for Wales as whole: those aged 65 and over account for 20.5 % of the Blaenau population as against 20.6% of the whole Welsh population, younger adults aged 25-40 years account for 21.7 % of Blaenau's population as against 23.4 % of the Welsh population.

In the long run, Blaenau has been depopulated through out migration as the town's population peaked at 11,000 in the 1890s before the slate industry went into a century long decline. But the population has recently stabilised. It was almost exactly the same at just under 3,700 in the 2001 and 2011 censuses and has since increased by a couple of hundred. Balancing in migration is now important and the in migrants to the town divide broadly into one third from England and two thirds from Wales with more than half of those Welsh in migrants coming from Gwynedd.

Thus, the percentage of those born locally is lower than in say the ex-coal mining valleys of South Wales, but there is a substantial, local grounded population. In 2011 75.3% of Blaenau residents were born in Wales as against 72.7 % of the whole Welsh population born in Wales. The dominance of the local born is reflected in the high proportion of Welsh speakers with 78.6% of Blaenau residents reporting themselves as Welsh speakers; the town has some capacity to assimilate monoglot in migrant children because primary school inspections report the percentage of Welsh speaking children is even higher.

Against this background Foundational Economy Research Limited and Cwmni Bro organized a questionnaire which was designed to explore the relation of attachment between the Bro and the grounded community, especially those members of the grounded community who have job choices through education and qualifications and have decided to stay or return after an absence. The resulting 161 responses are not a representative sample, but their unrepresentativeness (as reported below) skews the responses towards an interesting subgroup of Welsh speaking, better educated, men and women for whom the Bro is a matter of active choice.

On ages we do have a bias towards the relatively young. The respondents to Q21 include a significant number of young people (with 36 aged 15-24) and young adults (with 31 aged 25-35). Altogether we have 42% of respondents in these two groups where out migration is most likely, and this age distribution makes our respondents younger than the whole Blaenau population where only 1/3rd are in these two age groups. The gender distribution of respondents is biased to female as 104 or 65% of respondents identify as female.

Welsh speakers are overwhelmingly preponderant. Q 15 shows 147/ 91% claim to be fluent Welsh speakers. Some will have learnt Welsh, but the vast majority will be native speakers and most of these will be born in Blaenau or the surrounding districts. The responses are from Welsh speakers whose local attachment is culturally reinforced by being embedded in a district where Welsh is the everyday language.[4]

In educational terms, the sample is well qualified. Many of these respondents could find more job opportunities outside the district and those with university education will typically have left the Bro to study before deciding to return. Almost exactly half of respondents, some 81 of 163 or 50 % are university educated. These respondents are much more likely to have higher education qualifications than the population of Blaenau or Wales as a whole: only 19.7 % of all Blaenau residents and 24.6% of the Welsh population have a first degree or higher qualification.

To sum up, the sample disproportionately includes the most interesting group from our point of view: those who could relatively easily leave the Bro but have decided to stay or return. Almost all the respondents are prima facie culturally grounded by virtue of language. But the respondents include a substantial group of young and middle aged respondents who have the educational qualifications to take up career opportunities outside the district. To a significant extent, the questionnaire is about how this group understands the balance of the socio cultural and economic forces, the conflict between push and pull.

In a broader context, the role of women and the young is particularly interesting. In Teti's anthropology the village remains a narrower place than its double in Toronto's little Italy. The women who move to Toronto with their husbands find it is a place of opportunities outside the household, while their children with "a Canadian approach to life" assimilate to a city with a music scene where they can explore their sexuality and much else. San Nicola vs Toronto is a cultural choice between broad and narrow for women and the young with the village representing closure, isolation, social immobility and lack of communication.

Interestingly, as we shall see, Blaenau seems to have shed this defensive carapace. It illustrates Teti's larger point about how places are mobile and can reinvent: in Toronto the village of San Nicola "was born again but different from itself". Blaenau has managed a reinvention which is more far reaching at the same location without crossing the ocean. Blaenau may still be visually dominated by slate spoil heaps but the radical political debates of the slate workers' caban or the policing of respectable morality from the chapel "set fawr" are all well beyond living memory or recall. Blaenau is now part of a different 21st century lived experience.

The Bro is a place which has historically had a strong and distinctive identity built on shared experience and close social relations. That is memorialised in Isabel Emmett's anthropological studies of Blaenau and the Bro from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. Emmet observed that in the town of Blaenau: "the shared knowledge of a particular place and its people enables all members

to participate in a continuous fashioning and telling of the story of the place"[5]. This does not mean Blaenau and the Bro was ever at any one point in time a closed and unitary social world and it is certainly a changing social world where story and story tellers are continuously refashioned. From this point of view, identities in the Bro are not about staying the same but about the capacity to reinvent (for better and worse) while maintaining an attachment to people and place. The slate valleys have a glorious collective past when the slate workers of the Ogwen valley sustained the longest strike in British industrial history from 1900 -1903; but Unite is only now attempting to organise the Bro's largest industrial employer, Rehau plastics, which has been non-union for the past 40 years[6]. The chapel was a central institution in Blaenau past but it is now, as we shall see, barely mentioned in our survey responses. The Biblical household with male bread winner was the model of waged employment and the template for gender identity; now, on gender, four of our respondents identify as non-binary and a larger number "prefer not to say".

"dwi'n gobeithio fydd geni rywbeth i gynnnig," (I'm hoping I'll have something to offer).

02
A NARRATIVE FROM THE RESPONSES: A STORY OF ATTACHMENT

"The only thing that remains are stories and with them the people who live to tell them" (Vito Teti, Stones into Bread, p. 192)

The text below presents an overview of the responses to questions arranged into a narrative which begins with place-based identifications. These identifications are of some importance in Wales where the place an individual originally comes from is often used as an identifier in private conversation or public introductions[7]. Wales is a country which in its imaginary often becomes a network of (urban) villages. Politically, in nationalist thought, this is Wales as a " cymdeithas o gymdeithasau" (community of communities). Practically, in everyday life, this is a matter of local tribal identities so that only outsiders would fail to understand the difference between Morriston Monkeys and Swansea Jacks who live a few miles apart. But this imagined world rests on a continuously reinvented material basis as we see from the community based facebook groups which have sprung in South Wales over the past five years: Morriston Monkeys is now a facebook group with 5,600 members.

Locality matters and place based identifications are certainly important in Blaenau and the Bro as we can see from respondents answers to questions 10 and 11 about how they would reply to the "where are you from" question asked by a local and a stranger. Unsurprisingly, respondents use fine grained local place identifiers when talking to a local person who is from the Bro and would understand its topography and settlements. More than half of the respondents (54%) chose Blaenau Ffestiniog as their place identifier when talking with a local person. Most of the other respondents selected one of the villages around the town, including Manod (13%), Tan y Grisiau (9%), Trawsfynydd (9%) and Llan Ffestiniog (7%).

Table 1: Responses to "where are you from" (for a local)

Blaenau Ffestiniog	87	54%
Tan y Grisiau	14	9%
Trawsfynydd	15	9%
Llan Ffestiniog	11	7%
Gellilydon	0	0
Manod	21	13%
Maentwrog	1	1%
Other	12	7%
Total	161	

When asked the same question from a stranger (a non-local) and allowed the option of choosing more than one response, the answers are altogether more interesting. The responses showed a continued preference for local place-based identifications and against the use of larger area identifiers though these would be more intelligible to outsiders. 73 % of respondents chose the small town of Blaenau as a place based identifier with 11% choosing the Bro or valley and most of the 8% in the "other " category choosing a village in the Bro. With multiple responses possible, the larger territorial identifications are interesting. Wales leads with 33% of respondents choosing the nation, Gwynedd as region comes close behind with 22% for the region and a handful under "other" giving Eryri/ Snowdonia as a regional identifier. 'Britain' barely registers, as that identification was chosen by just three respondents.

Table 2: Responses to "where are you from" (for a stranger)

Blaenau Ffestiniog	117	73% of respondents
Bro Ffestiniog	17	11%
Gwynedd	35	22%
Wales	53	33%
Britain	3	2%
Other	23	14%

It is sensible to allow more than one response on place-based identifications because territorial identifications are multiple and overlapping. But it is then relevant to ask, as question 12 does, "which of the above identities is more important to you". The responses on priority show that local identification is as much a matter of intensity as of relative frequency. When asked to choose just one identification, two thirds of respondent, some 65% rank Blaenau Ffestiniog and Bro Ffestiniog identities as most important. Welsh identity is also relevant as 28% rank Wales as most important with a further 14% selecting Gwynedd. Only one respondent chose Britain as most important which confirms the suspicion that British identity is often more important to London based unionist politicians than it is to four nation citizens[8].

Table 3: Responses to which one identity is most important

Blaenau Ffestiniog	76	47%
Bro Ffestiniog	29	18%
Gwynedd	22	14%
Wales	45	28%
Britain	1	1%
Other	8	5%

Respondents were then asked in question 13 why they chose their most important identification which (after their responses to question 11) became in effect a question about why did you choose to privilege local identifications. The answers reveal that the prioritisation of the local is not a prosaic matter of reporting place of residence but reflects attachment by community roots reinforced by current sentiment. On motivators of place-based identifications, 42 % explained "this is where I was brought up" and another 38% said "this is how I feel". Only 14% replied "this is where I live now" as though they were applying for a passport or driving licence. Though asked to choose just one, several respondents mentioned 'all of these' identifications were relevant. One of the respondents with a Chekhovian sensibility, went further in noting the complexity of the issues and the inescapable entanglements:

> *" cyfuniad o 1,3,4 uchod , hefyd dyma lle fy ffrindau a nheulu a'm hanes a'm dyfodol, ac ychydig o 'Duw a'm gwaredo , ni allaf ddianc rhag hon'" (Combination of 1,3,4 above because this is where my friends and family, my past and future are; and, partly, God forbid, I cannot escape this)*

Table 4: reasons for choosing most important place identification

Mae'n seiliedig ar lle cefais fy magu / It's based on where I was brought up	67	42%
Mae'n seiliedig ar lle cafodd fy rhieni eu magu / It's based on where my parents were brought up	0	
Mae'n seiliedig ar lle rydw i'n byw rwan / It's based on where I live now	22	14%
Dyna sut dwi'n teimlo / It's how I feel	61	38%
Rheswm arall / Something else	11	7%

Questions about likes or good things in your community then bring out views and values which centre on how the social relations between people make Ffestiniog a good place to live. Question 1 asked an open question about " tell us about three good things in your community" and the results are tabulated in table 5. To improve intelligibility, the table brackets the same word in Welsh and English (e.g. pobl and people) and brackets synonyms in Welsh and English (e.g. helpu, support and cydweithio)

Table 5: Respondents on " three good things in your community"

KEY CONCEPT	SYNONYMS IN WELSH AND ENGLISH	CITATIONS
People	32 Pobl + 10 People	42
Community	19 Cymuned + 10 Community spirit + 1 Perthyn	29
Language	14 Cymraeg + 2 Welsh + 3 Iaith	19
Mutual support	11 Helpu + 2 Support + 1 Cydweithio	14
Tight knit	10 Clos + 2 Cymdogion + 3 Cyfeillgarwch + 2 Agosatrwydd + 1 Ffrindiau	18
Long thin tail of good things which individually get 3-4 mentions	School, Family, Games, Mountains and Walks, Businesses	All 3-4 individually

The Bro could be considered a fairly self-contained area where individuals and households have spent most of their lives getting to know each other intimately. This in itself creates valued identities which are expressed in table 5 in the form of a cluster of related words and concepts where fraternity is the common theme. The primary identifiers are "people" and "community" which are most often listed as "good things" with 42 and 29 citations respectively. Two attributes of functioning community, "mutual support" and "tightly knit", score citations in the teens. And Cymraeg, the Welsh language as the medium of everyday social communication has a special place as support of these district identities. Nothing outside this fraternity cluster rates more than a handful of mentions, with family, school, sports and mountain walks all rating no more than 3-4 citations. The structures of government and governance (town council, Gwynedd Council and Welsh Government) are completely invisible, and the processes of secularisation are nearly complete with chapel getting only two citations

The responses to question 1 on likes are narrowly clustered around the theme of fraternity (rather than liberty and equality which have dominated political and economic intellectualising in the modern era)[9]. But the Bro is no utopia and the responses to question 3 about "three things you dislike" range much more broadly across the inconveniences of British life in small towns and this explains why table 6 has more rows than any other in this section. When asked to list three 'dislikes', there were many issues that came up repeatedly. Those most frequently mentioned include various kinds of anti-social behaviour: dog mess and/or litter mentioned by 27% and drug use or vandalism mentioned by 25%. As we have noted earlier, community is seen as a defining strength for many respondents, but differences within the community and various complaints about a lack of tolerance or generosity trouble others (12%). Some 12% of respondents specifically mentioned difficulties caused by 'incomers' and a further 4% considered use of Welsh language under threat or already damaged.

The condition of public infrastructure such as parks and the condition of the public realm including the high street with empty shops were also noted by many (17%). Another common theme was the inadequate provision of services of different kinds: 14% noted a lack of private services (including banks, ATMs, petrol and the range of retail); 12% mentioned inadequate public services (including transport, health, police, dentist) and 12% specifically highlighted insufficient facilities for young people (including pre-school children and teenagers) with a smaller number (5%) citing a more general lack of things 'in the community'.

Table 6 – Respondents dislikes (ignoring things mentioned only once or twice)

Housing (lack of, cost etc)	37	23% of respondents
Tourism, including second homes (often linked in answers to housing problems)	35	22%
Lack of jobs, lack of good work	22	14%
Anti-social behaviour (especially drugs, also vandalism)	40	25%
Dog mess, litter	44	27%
Parking problems (lack, inconsiderate)	8	
State of the high street, including empty shops	28	17%
Lack of (private) facilities eg bank, ATM, petrol, retail choice	22	14%
Lack of (public) facilities eg health, transport, police, dentist	19	12%
Lack of activities/ facilities for the young (teens & pre-school)	20	12%
Lack of 'community' activities	8	5%
Community differences and intolerances (various)	20	12%
Incomers, English people	19	12%
Welsh language threat or decline	7	4%
Weather	8	5%
Poverty (of the place)	5	3%
Prices (in the shops)	4	2%

While many of these problems are relevant in other urban communities (as we saw with our Morriston survey) the distinctive local issue is availability of affordable housing (mentioned by 23%) which intersects with the issue of second homes and Airbnb (mentioned by 22%). While there were a few general dislikes of tourists (usually connected to parking or littering), there were strong views about how the expansion of tourism taking up homes and making it more difficult for those who want to stay. Access to jobs was here mentioned by far fewer (14%) than housing; these were often expressed in an impersonal way including a lack of work opportunities 'for the young'.

If urban life is never without its stresses and tensions, the rural surround is a release and relief. The environment matters in the Bro not just because of nature and climate emergency but because it is a driver of wellbeing as we can see from table 7 which tabulates responses to question 6 about "three places that make you feel good". This tabulation has very interesting implications again for traditional policy which has been focused on economic output and income (GVA per capita and wages) as drivers of welfare; because the responses show that well-being can be sustained by what's free and available in spectacular abundance in the Bro. To improve intelligibility, the answers have been grouped under three headings; places of urban sociability, access to outdoors and named industrial heritage sites.

When people and community figure so prominently amongst the good things in the Bro, it is not surprising that places of sociability figure strongly with 37 citations. In this category, the interesting point is that in Blaenau, as elsewhere in the UK, the café culture of coffee and cake is now more important than the pub culture of beer and crisps. Mentions of cafes outnumber pubs by just over 2:1. But these transactional, over the counter places are much less important than access to nature and the outdoor environment. In general terms lakes, mountains and forest get 35 citations and named places that make you feel good get 45 citations.

Table 7: Respondents on three places that make you feel good

	LOCATIONS	CITATIONS
Places of urban sociability	22 Cafes and Café Gorlan + 10 Pub and Meirion and Pengwern + 5 town centre	37
Access to natural environment outdoors	17 lakes, + 7 mountains + 7 forest + 4 walking	35
Named industrial and ex industrial sites	24 Cwmorthin disused slate quarry + 11 Manod mountain + 6 dam and Stwlan + 4 Trawsfynydd	45

But individuals who appreciate their magnificent natural surroundings in the Bro, are not exempted from difficult choices which were explored in questions 7 and 8 about reasons for staying and leaving as individuals reconcile following their hearts and pursuing opportunity.

The responses to question 7 about *"3 reasons for staying"* show that Blaenau people have not arranged their lives around good jobs and schools (as in a cartoon English middle class life). The responses are tabulated in table 8 where again, to increase intelligibility, we have bracketed he same word in two languages (e.g. Cymuned and Community) and synonyms (e.g. ffrindiau and cyfeillgar)

Table 8: Respondents on three reasons for staying

REASON		CITATIONS
Family	Teulu/ family	26
Language	Iaith/ language	17
Community	13 Cymuned + 7 community	20
Friends + friendly	10 Ffirindiau + 5 cyfeillgar	15
Work		4

By this point readers will understand that community and language figure prominently. But this question brings out the importance of smaller scale affective soft ties of kinship and social network. The number one reason for staying is family which gets 26 citations and friends with 15 citations is almost as important as language or community with 17 and 20 citations. The capacity of the local economy to generate jobs is heavily discounted and only four respondents cite work as a reason for staying; this is in line with our findings in the Morriston survey where few believed the local economy would generate a better job for them.

In a very restanza way the reasons for staying reflect a mix of grounding in the place and aspiration for a different place. "Yma gefais fy ngeni" (I was born here) as one respondent put it or as another added "sicrhau dyfodol; gwireddu potensial" (Securing a future; realising potential). Of course restanza is partly about preserving what the Bro values. "Gwarchod hanes," (Protecting history) "Cadw y gymuned Cymraeg i fynd am flynyddoedd maith eto" (Keeping the Welsh community going for many years to come) and "Cadw ysgolion yn agored," (Keeping schools open) were evidence of this. But there was also hope for a different future which respondents could shape. For one respondent it was "gyffrous byw yma a gweld be' mae pawb yn ei wneud yn newid pethau!" (excited to live here and see what everyone is doing to change things!) and another volunteered

"dwi'n gobeithio fydd geni rywbeth i gynnnig," (I'm hoping I'll have something to offer). The will for active change is strong in Blaenau though it may not have the motives and forms recognised by knowledge at a distance.

What then could disrupt the further reinvention of the Bro whose inhabitants are embedded in community and tied by family. Question 8 asked respondents to give "three reasons for leaving" and the results which are tabulated below give a sobering view of a lack of jobs and affordable housing as push factors. The responses are tabulated in table 9 where again we have bracketed the same word in two languages (e.g. Gwaith and Work). Because jobs and housing can be both push and pull factors, we have tried to separate out the push factor by separately tabulating respondents who cite lack of work and affordable housing in the Bro as reasons for leaving.

The slate valleys are grey, wet places and seven respondents were not reconciled to "glaw byth yn stopio" (the rain never stopping). The reinvention of the Bro is also ongoing work which leaves some dissatisfied. Three respondents claimed the Bro was not sufficiently LGBTQ friendly so that "micro aggressions about gender and sexuality" were a reason for leaving. But, more broadly, the affective and small scale (family, friends, romance) has a different place in the hierarchy of reasons for staying and leaving. The affective is the dominant reason for staying but a subsidiary reason for leaving. Only 14 respondents cited the affective as a reason for leaving, either responsibly invoking "teulu yn gadael" (family leaving) or romantically backing "cariad" as marvelously in the response "if I find love".

Table 9 Respondents on three reasons for leaving

Work related	11 work + 22 lack of work/ dim gwaith	33
Housing	2 housing and 15 anodd prynu tai/ house prices	22
Public services/ community facilities	Various , including youth clubs, night life, medical services and shops	27
Affective, soft reasons	Teulu yn gadael/ Family leaving; cariad/love	14
Weather	Glaw byth yn stopio/ Rain	7

In the table above a larger number complain and some 27 cite inadequate public services and facilities. But the force of such complaints is diluted because "services and facilities" is a portmanteau category which includes complaints about closed youth clubs and absence of night life, inadequate medical services including mental health and end of life provision, and a limited range of local shops. Gwynedd Council should however be warned that austerity cuts plus the centralisation of services have produced a wide-ranging discontent about the quantity and quality of local services.

But, for the largest number of respondents, the two key push factors are lack of jobs and the absence of affordable housing. Jobs and housing are of course ambiguous reasons because they can operate both as push and pull factors when young people can be pushed to leave because of the absence of local work or be pulled elsewhere by work opportunities. In the Bro push factors are the most important consideration. Some 22 respondents explicitly identify " Dim Gwaith" (no work) in the locality as a reason for leaving locally, exactly twice the number that simply cite work. The importance of push is even clearer in housing where 15 of 17 respondents cite "Dim tai fforddiadwy i brynu") no affordable housing to buy).

In sum, Blaenau is not "left behind". It is functioning socially in a way that generally meets the changing expectations of inhabitants. But it is economically threatened by an absence of local jobs and affordable housing. Lack of jobs is of course the classic reason for emigration of the young from peripheral areas; Blaenau has the extra problem of house prices increased by the competing demands of second homes and holiday lets.

03
A FOUNDATIONAL POLICY RESPONSE

"Gwarchod hanes," (Protecting history)

"Necessity and imagination, deprivation and ability, poverty and inventiveness ... go hand in hand (Vito Teti, Bread into Stones, p. 52)

The expression of imagination and inventiveness is stifled by the prevailing hierarchical and centralised system of political control and knowledge production in the four nations. The UK has a multi-level government system where centralisation of tax raising hugely empowers the Treasury in London. In 2021 devolved taxes account for just 20 % of the tax revenue raised in Wales[10] while Treasury framed City Deals and distribution of post EU regional funds enforce its narrow key performance indicators approach. The UK also suffers from a metropolitan knowledge production system with high status media and universities concentrated in London and the Southeast. The role of Welsh outlets and institutions is to follow their leaders by producing mimetic knowledges and initiatives; in higher status Welsh universities, social science and business research is caught up in the UK wide competition to produce 4-star research with international recognition.

In terms of numbers and narrative, central analysis operates through thin simplifications like GVA per capita and the day trip impressions of the London reporter turned into an op ed feature. In terms of policy, the centre operates de haut en bas through generic fixes like transport and skills improvement for peripheral regions which must compete for private investment and government largesse. The role of those on the lower levels in devolved Government and local authorities is to produce reports and operate (centrally funded) initiatives and systems within a framework of the taken for granted which they are not equipped to challenge. Against this, our survey findings challenge the condescension of the centre and its mimetic imitation at the lower levels of government: Blaenau is knocked about economically, and its high street is painfully run down but, for our respondents, it is a model of social fraternity which reflects continuous up dating and sustains aspiration threatened by an absence of affordable housing and local jobs.

No doubt the orthodox would respond that Blaenau and the Bro are not in any way representative. Indeed, they are unrepresentative; but surely local variation should be not a block but a starting point for different ways of thinking. The Bro is one of the few places in Wales where community action has been directed to economic ends so that Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog, a network of social enterprises, has created 150 jobs in a variety of small businesses from a mountain bike trail to a hotel for differently abled visitors[11]. The culture and organisation of civil society in Blaenau which mined slate is very different from that 12 miles away in the port of Porthmadog which exported that slate. But the lesson is surely that we need to understand the difference of Blaenau from Porthmadog and not repeat the centre's mistake of using thin simplifications to prejudge hinterland places about which it knows almost nothing.

At the same time, we do need general principles to guide our policy interventions. And this is where foundational thinking comes in as a way of displacing "levelling up" and the competition to emulate "successful places". Foundational thinking has been primarily concerned with the reliance systems that produce the collectively consumed material and providential services- from clean water to

health care- that underpin liveability and wellbeing. But these services are only intermediate goods whose importance comes from the fact that they enable individuals in households to live the lives they have reason to value; and households do not live in one system but in places where different reliance systems intersect, and fraternity is performed.

From this point of view, the foundational approach to place is straight forward and based on one social principle which goes beyond the provision of essential services within planetary limits. If individuals are attached to the collective life of a place, the role of public policy, in general, should be to enable them to carry on living there on the working assumption that they have the imagination, ability and inventiveness to continuously reinvent the place (provided the essential foundational services are secured). This foundational principle recognises the social importance of fraternity grounded in a place. And also insists that, in the current nature and climate emergency, this social principle is reinforced by the ecological importance of reusing our stock of buildings and infrastructure.

It will not be sensible to defend every existing settlement, given nature and climate emergency. The cost of coastal defences against rising sea levels is such that Gwynedd Council's policy for Fairbourne village is managed retreat which will sacrifice the strip of coastal settlement. Equally under the Welsh Government's Town Centres First policy, new build private housing and location of public facilities need to be controlled after a generation in which private developers and ineffectual planning have allowed sprawling edge of town developments in towns like Bangor[12]. But, if Blaenau is then the focus of new developments, the rest of the Bro's housing stock should be decarbonised and reused.

The operating principle of the foundational economy in the 21st century is *adaptive reuse*[13]. This idea is explicitly developed by the French architects Anne Lacaton and Jean Philippe Vassal in their 2000s reaction to French government programmes for demolishing post war social housing developments. Their response was "never demolish, never remove or replace, always add transfer and reuse"[14]. So, in foundational economy thinking and doing we are not revolutionaries envisioning a transformation by building to a new design on a cleared site nor are we conservators preserving a heritage site for posterity. Instead, we are radicals for whom progress will take the form of multiple transitions which move us beyond the limited vision of our earlier constructions which are both the basis from which we must start and what we should adapt and extend.

From a foundational point of view, across Wales, as in the Bro, the claims of local attachment are entirely legitimate and, in this case, reinforced by the specific way in which they are here tied up with the future of the Welsh language.

The *Tynged yr Iaith* radio talk in 1962 by Saunders Lewis[15] was a wakeup call about a "language in retreat". It set defence of the beleaguered Welsh language on a particular path of politico social reform where the task was to change governmentality and end disrespectful "othering" by claiming equal status for the Welsh language. Lewis was hostile or ambivalent towards industrialism and the mid-century Welsh economy of coal and steel; and so, his political action heroes in the radio talk were the Beasleys of Llangennech struggling to extract a rates demand in Welsh from Llanelli council. The campaigns that then followed, after the founding of Cymdeithas yr Iaith, were meaningful and important gains have been made in the political struggle for parity. But the future of the language has not been secured.

As Cymdeithas yr Iaith now recognises, it is time to move on and we could usefully do so by returning to the work of the Welsh economic historian Brinley Thomas who argued that the language was "saved" in the nineteenth century by internal migration of rural Welsh speakers onto the South Wales coalfields[16] which provided an expanded, urban industrial base for the language. Thomas's argument is flawed in detail as it underestimates the enduring importance of the east / west linguistic divide and changing patterns of migration over time[17]. But his central insight is absolutely correct and relevant today: the future of Welsh as a living language always depends on creating a sustainable economic base. This is what language campaigners and economic policy makers have failed to secure in places like Blaenau over the last 50 years and what our questionnaire respondents are telling us when they complain about housing availability.

The problem of the economic base is complex and cannot be solved by the generic self-help fixes proposed as community wealth building or asset-based community development. Community wealth building has got distracted into autarchic localism understood as counting sales invoices with local post codes when purchases account for a small proportion of the spend by public sector providers of labour-intensive services. Asset based community development rightly resists deficiency thinking but fails to recognise that communities are caught in complex systems of multi-level governance where volume results usually depend on mobilising resources and powers held at the upper levels.

From the questionnaire responses and complaints, the two things that Blaenau needs for sustainability are accessible jobs and affordable housing for the local population. The availability of jobs within commuting distance is absolutely essential, or the push of lack of employment will slowly drain the community of young adults. If policy makers have (ineffectually) pursued more jobs, they have neglected the equally threatening problem about the uncontrolled alienation of residential housing stock into assets for outsiders as second homes or holiday lets.

Addressing and solving these problems is complicated by the complexities of multi-level government operating on a heterogeneous economy. In the government system it is not easy for bottom up to connect with top down. Here community action takes place in the local authority

"Cadw ysgolion yn agored," (Keeping schools open)

area of Gwynedd under a Welsh Government based in Cardiff with limited devolved powers under the four nation UK Government in Westminster; a substantial part of tax funded public service delivery has been hived off into corporate not for profits like housing associations, further education colleges or the local NHS Wales Health Board which all enjoy considerable autonomy. It is easy to ask for government which is less directive and more enabling of alliances for change but altogether more difficult to mobilise and enlist all these actors (or even the Welsh actors) behind effective policies for a common purpose.

The other complication is that the task is not to "make the economy work" so as to generate GVA and high wages. Because in Blaenau, as in every Welsh locality, "the economy "is a simplification which covers the existence of heterogeneous, multiple economic zones which require different policy interventions. In post-industrial Wales, the leading sectors of the economy are the foundational and sheltered sectors which employ about half the workforce: the providential services of health education and care currently employ 35 % of the Welsh work force while the material services of pipe and cable utilities and food distribution employ another 14%. At the same time the tradeable and competitive export economy cannot be ignored because the small, open Welsh economy only works by drawing on demand from outside Wales. As in the Welsh food system, where local food is not a recipe for prosperity and serving more Welsh lamb in school dinners and hospital meals is irrelevant for our hill farmers because only 5 % of the red meat produced in Wales is consumed in Wales[18].

In short, when the problems of political action for economic purposes are focused in this way, it becomes clear that it will be very difficult to address them in ways which deliver volume economic results that are socio culturally sensitive and involve some degree of democratic participation. But we can do better than current approaches which deliver none of the above. Like Saunders Lewis two generations ago, we can build on our analysis to indicate a direction of travel and the starting points for a radical new economic policy which aims to empower restanza. The hope then is that new beginnings in the tradeable and foundational zones could performatively deliver enough to persuade more political actors to join a broadening alliance for change.

If we begin to think about the tradeable and export economy, it is time to end the preoccupation with inward investment. Blaenau should no doubt be grateful for Rehau plastics where 150 work producing the profiles for window frames. But inward investment is no solution because it is pouring water into a leaky bucket when firms exit as others enter. Tony Dobbins research on Anglesey shows[19] that, when outside investors exit, they typically leave behind workers with firm and sector specific skills that have no application in the local economy. If the role of the Gwynedd export economy is to claim English pounds and euros, the relevant sector is tourism, and the focus should be on the circuits of employment and spending around tourism which in its current form brings in large numbers of visitors for little benefit and at considerable cost. The irony of Blaenau is that over 100 years, the shift from slate to tourism replaces one form of extractive export economy with another. Through royalties, slate benefited the Oakley family of Plas Tan y Bwlch as the big capitalist owner of the quarry; through rents, tourism benefits a multiplicity of airbnb landlords as small capitalist owners of holiday lets.

Tourism directly brings relatively few jobs in hospitality. With benefit of tourism, the sector of "accommodation and food services" in this North Wales slate valley employs just 8.0% of the Blaenau workforce; without benefit of tourism the same sector in a South Wales coal valley employs up to 4.5 % of the workforces in Brynmawr and Nant Y Glo on the basis of the local demand for takeaways and such like in towns of a similar size to Blaenau[20]. The employment boost from tourism is limited because so much of the tourist trade has gone self-catering and very little of that spend sticks in the locality that provides the scenic back drop. A West Midlands family will bring groceries from their hometown supermarket and top up at the Blaenau coop; multi-site corporate operators typically control the local big ticket leisure attractions like Zip World; the largest family expense is holiday cottage rent which goes to an absentee landlord after airbnb or some other web-based intermediary has taken its cut.
There is enough here for a whole series of stakeholder conferences on new models of sustainable tourism, but where do we start? The designation of the slate valleys of North Wales as an UNESCO World Heritage site is culturally important because it indicates a new sensibility but materially makes no difference to extractive tourism.[21] If the aim is to empower restanza in the Bro and deal with housing problems, the double response should be for local authorities and Welsh Government to spoil the old holiday let game which was built on individuals benefiting from market failure and to license communities to join a new holiday let game built on collective benefit from participation.

Where buy to let is reducing the resident stock and new accommodation has to be built for locals, absentee rentiers and their tenants should make a substantial contribution towards the cost of housing the displaced locals which reflects the direct financial cost of new build and its ecological burden when construction has such a heavy carbon footprint. The rentier private landlord will of course pass on these costs in higher rents for holiday lets. Even with more realistic pricing of holiday lets, short stay housing will still be an asset and the demand will sustain a profitable business model. In this case the important thing is that the rentier should be local. And while there should be no discrimination against local private rentiers, social enterprise needs to raise the funding to buy and operate holiday lets as suitable houses come on to the market and to consider the business case for new holiday villages.

These export economy interventions against market failure and for local benefit from tourism are necessary but would not be easy. They would require wrenching changes in policy and institutional innovation which would be resisted by loser groups, tacitly or actively supported by Westminster government. If sorting tourism created housing problems is tricky, conflictual and requires new powers, the good news is that more can be done on jobs right away if policy makers stop pulling on the wrong levers. Most of the local Gwynedd jobs are in the foundational economy and significant gains are possible here if we recognise how automobility has changed possibilities in low density rural areas and encourage systematic public sector policies of local workforce recruitment and development.

The ICE engined car is a burden on the planet but it has opened up new possibilities of live-work disconnects which can benefit low density hinterland areas. More than 70 % of Blaenau households have one or more cars so that commuting by car is the norm; and nearly half the workforce is already travelling more than 10 kilometres to work[22]. There remain problems about workers without cars and the motoring poor who can ill afford to run a car. But we do not have to recreate the old slate valley pattern of locating one major employment site within walk to work distance of a housing settlement. The question now is about all the employment that is available in a 30-minute "drive to" radius of Blaenau which includes towns along the North Wales coastline and in Cardigan Bay. Nearly 500 workers already make a daily commute from Blaenau to the five largest commuter destinations (Bangor, Caernarfon, Pwllheli and Dolgellau).

"gyffrous byw yma a gweld be' mae pawb yn ei wneud yn newid pethau!" (excited to live here and see what everyone is doing is changing things!)

These towns offer a variety of reasonably paid employment and career progression in health, education and public administration; closer to home in Blaenau there is care work which is ill paid and will not sustain long distance commuting. The composition of costs in all these foundational service activities is biased towards labour with modest purchases and nothing leaking to capital; in NHS Wales, for example, purchases account for 17 % of costs while labour accounts for 70 % of total costs. The leverage from localising purchasing is modest especially when many of these

purchases (as with drugs or vehicles) have a long supply chain where most of the value is added outside Wales. The leverage from labour costs is considerably larger and organisations like the Betsi Cadwalader Health Board could be engines of development if they adopted policies of local recruitment and work force development, as the Hywel Dda Health Board has pioneered under the "grow your own" banner[23].

The habits of thought that prejudge and disempower Blaenau (and many other places) are long standing and deeply embedded. Writing at the time of the first Thatcher recession in 1982, the anthropologist Isabel Emmett wrote "Blaenau has been perceived not only as a dying town but irredeemably ugly, backward and in no sense a fashionable place to live "[24]. The problem with much mainstream thinking in the intervening 40 years is that it has not got beyond this "left behind" perception and cannot see the vitality and virtues of the place. By way of contrast, the foundational approach to empowering places like Blaenau is to inquire into how such places work, attend to what matters to citizens and focus on what 's controllable to deliver outcomes through adaptive reuse that empowers restanza. There is much that is not controllable but that is no excuse for not starting out on doing things differently where the first precondition is thinking constructively.

The fate of the Bro and much else depends on recognizing the first obstacle to adaptive reuse is not the Bro but the policy gaze that constructs the Bro. As Waldo Williams wrote[25],

> *Beth yw trefnu teyrnas? Crefft*
> *Sydd eto'n cropian*

His lapidary Welsh poetics do not translate easily into English prose. But, very roughly, and using 2020s concepts, we have a question and answer. What is government and governance? A craft that achieves no more than a baby crawling on all fours. Blaenau and the Bro deserve better.

Endnotes

1 Vico Teti is little known outside Italy because he publishes in Italian and his research objects are not exotic or of the moment. Only one of his many books, Stones into Bread, has been translated into English and that was published in Toronto where there is a Calabrian diaspora. Here, as in so many other fields, language defines the field of the culturally visible. Compare, for example, the international recognition of the Anglo Welsh R. S. Thomas and the local reputation of Waldo Williams' Welsh poetry.

2 D. Gaudioso (2021) "Shrinking areas as dynamic spaces of care and resilience" , EU horizon Welcoming Spaces project, https://www.welcomingspaces.eu/tag/restanza/

3 Unless otherwise indicated, all the statistics in this and subsequent sections are (directly or by simple calculation) obtained from the IWA's Understanding Welsh Places web site entry for Blaenau Ffestiniog. http://www.understandingwelshplaces.wales/en/compare/W37000076/ This IWA searchable web site presents statistics on economy, demographic makeup and local services for every Welsh place with more than 1,000 inhabitants. The classification of places as dependent and independent is unhelpful but it is hugely valuable to have the relevant official statistics presented in a searchable, place-based way in a country where 40 % of the population live in towns of less than 20.000 inhabitants.

4 We cannot say much about incomer English born in migrant attitudes from this survey. But it should not be assumed that incomer attitudes are different because in a previous survey about responses to Covid in Blaenau we did not find much difference. See L. Cunnington -Wynne et al. (2020) What Matters, https://foundationaleconomycom.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/cwmnibro-report-covid19-a4.pdf

5 Emmett, I. (1982) "Place, community and bi-lingualism in Blaenau Ffestiniog", p. 182 in A.P. Cohen, (ed) Belonging Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures, Manchester University Press. For a review of the Welsh rural community studies literature which questions the idea of community as a closed social world, see G. Day (1998) "Community of Communities", Economic and Social Review, July 1998, pp. 223-257.

6 O. Hughes (2021) " Unite campaign to unionise Gwynedd plastics factory" Daily Post, 11 February 2021. https://www.business-live.co.uk/manufacturing/unite-campaign-unionise-gwynedd-plastics-19818821

7 This may have something to do with the small number of Welsh first and family names. John Davies, who authored the Penguin Hanes Cymru/ A History of Wales, was the last of a generation of cosmopolitan Welsh historians. He was colloquially known as John Bwlch Llan after his native village in Ceredigion because this served to differentiate him from many others with the same name.

8 On national identities in the UK see, A. Henderson and R. W. Jones (2021) Englishness: the Political Force Transforming Britain", Oxford University Press.

9 The responses are secular but interestingly echo some recurrent themes in Protestant and Catholic social thought. These themes were lost from Anglican thinking after the death of Archbishop Temple but have been revived by Pope Francis in his 2020 encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, on fraternity and social friendship. https://www.humandevelopment.va/en/fratelli-tutti/enciclica.html

10 https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/tax-and-devolution

11 Building Communities Trust (2019) Our Local Economies Case Study: Social Enterprises in Blaenau Ffestiniog, http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2020-10-02-22-1-bct-cwmni-bro-ffestiniog-case.pdf

12 Foundational Economy Research Limited (2021) Small Towns, Big Issues https://gov.wales/small-towns-big-issues-independent-research-report

13 On adaptive reuse, see the introduction to the new edition of Foundational Economy Collective (2022), Foundational Economy, Manchester University Press.

14 Lacaton, A. and Vassal, J. P. (2015) Freedom of Use, Harvard

15 Saunders Lewis (1962) Tynged yr Iaith (Fate of the Language). Fpr an English translation of the text see https://morris.cymru/testun/saunders-lewis-fate-of-the-language.html

16 B. Thomas, 'The Industrial Revolution and the Welsh language revisited', in L.J. Williams and C. Baber (eds.), Papers in Welsh Economic History, Cardiff, 1984

17 See L. J. Williams (1988) "The move from the land" in T. Herbert and G. E, Jones eds. Wales 1880-1914 (Welsh History and its Sources) University of Wales Press.

18 Foundational Economy Research Limited (2021) More Grounded SMEs in Food Processing and Distribution? https://foundationaleconomycom.files.wordpress.com/2022/01/smes-in-the-welsh-food-system-final.pdf

19 Dobbins, T., Plows, A., and Lloyd -Williams, H. (2013) "Make do and mend after redundancy at Anglesey Aluminium", Work Employment and Society, vol 28, issue 4

20 IWA, Understandiing Welsh Places, http://www.understandingwelshplaces.wales/en/compare/W37000076/

21 Welsh Government (2021) "A new world heritage site for Wales", press release 28 July 2021. https://gov.wales/new-world-heritage-site-wales#:~:text=The%20slate%20landscape%20of%20north,World%20Heritage%20Site%20in%20Wales.

22 IWA, Understanding Welsh Places, http://www.understandingwelshplaces.wales/en/compare/W37000076/

23 There is no publicly available account of this innovation at Hywel Dda but youtube carries an interesting first-person account: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxi8RQqOpdg

24 Emmett, I. (1982) "Place, community and bi-lingualism in Blaenau Ffestiniog", p. 185 in A.P. Cohen, (ed) Belonging Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures, Manchester University Press.

25 W, Williams (1956), Dail Pren.(Leaves of the Tree) includes the poem " Pa beth yw dyn" from which this quotation is taken.

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