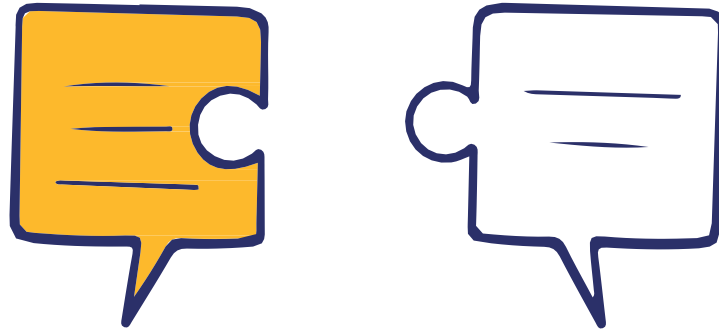




Newyddion i Bawb (News for All)

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Community Innovation Practitioner Case Study

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Summary

Newyddion i Bawb (News for All) was shaped by evidence produced directly from communities in Wales that suggests [journalism is failing them](#). Blaenau Ffestiniog – a proudly Welsh-speaking, former slate-mining community in north Wales – knows this better than most. It's a place that is often spoken about, rather than spoken with, by the media meant to serve it.

Instead of asking, “How do we save journalism?”, we grounded our research in community voice, by starting at the other end of the problem: what it is that people want today from their information ecosystems, and what do they need to make sense of the world?

Newyddion i Bawb brought together a new partnership spanning local community members, alongside [devolved Welsh Government](#), the Welsh language public broadcaster [S4C](#), [Cardiff University](#) and creative practitioners. By embedding multiple actors and stakeholders from inception, our cross-sector collaboration created the conditions for long-term change.

Drawing on the town's tradition of sesiynau caban (cabin sessions), where slate miners once educated and organised themselves, we used creative facilitation and participatory design to build a community-led model of collective sense-making.

What emerged doesn't always look like the journalism we know. Instead, it points to a new paradigm: place-based, participatory sense-making as infrastructure for democracy, social cohesion and community voice.



Old Market Hall, Blaenau Ffestiniog



Blaenau Ffestiniog. Image credit: Lilia Strojec.



Newyddion i Bawb flyers. Image credit: Lilia Strojec.

Introduction

As a Community Innovation Practitioner I spent twelve months working in Blaenau Ffestiniog to understand how we might develop more inclusive, effective and resilient information ecosystems.

Newyddion i Bawb built on the earlier [News for All](#) project in Grangetown, one of the most multi-cultural areas of Cardiff. While Blaenau Ffestiniog is a very different place – predominantly white, Welsh-speaking, and rural – the key questions of trust, voice, accountability and democratic participation are shared challenges.

Our CIP partners included:

	Community hub based in Blaenau Ffestiniog's former magistrates' court, providing a space and focal point for local arts and culture activity
	A site-specific political theatre company working with communities to create ambitious socially-engaged theatre and participatory arts
	The Welsh Government's creative industries body, supporting investment and development across Wales's creative sector
	A network working to support marginalised journalists, transform the industry, shift narratives and rebuild trust
	A design research centre at Cardiff Metropolitan University specialising in applying design thinking and methods to social, public and private sector challenges
	Welsh language public service broadcaster
	A community-led environmental and social enterprise based in Blaenau Ffestiniog, working on sustainability and place-based regeneration

Research Context

Interlinked crises of journalism and democracy have prompted [a wave of interventions](#), but almost all work from the same assumption: that there is [an information supply problem](#). But this assumption does not acknowledge how fundamental changes in technology and society have reshaped the conditions in which journalism exists.

Public service broadcasters are grappling with new patterns of consumption and shrinking budgets. Much of the local press in Wales is now owned by [one of two commercial groups](#) whose primary obligation is to shareholders, not communities - so coverage is centralised, costs are cut, and trust and accountability erode. Independent outlets have emerged to fill some of the gaps, but their limited budgets make the deep, sustained engagement needed to reverse the decline of local news challenging.

These pressures are magnified when it comes to Welsh-language journalism. Beyond [S4C](#) and [BBC Cymru Wales](#), the landscape is fragile. There are fewer and fewer outlets, a limited advertising market, an audience that is often too small to sustain commercial models. This matters because the Welsh-language information ecosystem is [not just culturally, but democratically](#), significant.

Even public service journalism is not immune: S4C and the BBC increasingly rely on platforms (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and similar) whose incentives do not align with the public interest. Indeed, UK ministers are already considering rules to [force greater prominence](#) for public service content, after warnings that trusted journalism is being sidelined by social media algorithms.

These pressures could deepen further, as AI agents – acting autonomously, summarising and filtering information on a person's behalf – become another interface through which people access information. As a result, the existing models of journalism [risk becoming redundant](#), and we could lose the relationship between communities and their own stories.





CellB - Community Hub & Arts Centre. Image credit: Lilia Strojec.

That relationship is exactly what a lineage of distinctively Welsh interventions has been protecting across recent decades. Sesiynau caban were Blaenau's own answer, while [Wales's Papurau Bro](#) – community-produced Welsh-language newsletters, including Blaenau's own [Llafar Bro](#) – have provided local news nationally since the 1970's. This is information produced *by and with* communities, not journalism delivered to them. Newyddion i Bawb continues this lineage.

Newyddion i Bawb has contemporary company and inspiration too. Omidaze Productions' [Talking Shop](#) – a creative, in-person deliberative democracy space trialled in Cardiff, Newport, Merthyr Tydfil and Blackwood – has found precisely the same appetite for face-to-face, creatively-facilitated civic participation.

The Welsh writer and academic Raymond Williams argued, in *Communications* (1962), that communication is not a cultural luxury added onto economic and social life but part of its foundation - and that when communities lose the means to make sense of their own lives together, something essential is damaged. That argument has only sharpened since.

That's why this project asked a different question to most previous interventions: not "how do we restore journalism to this community?" but "what conditions does this community need to make sense of its own life together?" That shift - from content to conditions, from supply to participation, from media to democratic infrastructure, characterises Newyddion i Bawb's distinctive approach.

Community Innovation

Newyddion i Bawb was co-created project from its inception. Two of our community partners in Blaenau Ffestiniog - Rhys Roberts from [CellB](#) and Wil Gritten from [Y Dref Werdd](#) – provided the key inspiration for our challenge statement:

“How might we use Blaenau Ffestiniog's history of innovation and knowledge sharing to inspire new forms of collective storytelling, enabling all our communities to build and express their agency and galvanise more inclusive, representative and effective journalism?”

This asset-based approach – starting from "what's right with this place?" rather than "what's wrong with it?" – aimed to celebrate Blaenau Ffestiniog's existing social infrastructure and build on what we'd already learned from News for All in Cardiff.

Sesiynau Caban / Cabin Sessions

The "history of innovation and knowledge sharing" comes directly from Blaenau Ffestiniog's sesiynau caban. In a context that was extractive in every sense, miners used these spaces to arm themselves with knowledge, to self-organise and take action for themselves and their communities.



Caban reconstruction in Llechwedd Mine. Image credit: Shirish Kulkarni.

This locally rooted model of collective sense-making inspired our research to imagine how communities could reimagine sesiynau caban to navigate an increasingly complicated and fractured world today.

To achieve this, we recruited a group of community members through our local partner networks, asking a simple question: *Do you want journalism to work better for you, your community, and Wales?*

We then developed two complementary tracks of research: three co-creation weekends to generate insight and develop ideas, and two community connection events to prototype those solutions with people beyond the core group.

Co-creation Weekends

Our three co-creation weekends spanned a Friday evening and Saturday daytime, at CellB. The format was chosen so participants could take part without needing time off work or childcare, whilst still giving us time to build trust and depth.



Co-creation conversations. Image credit: Lilia Strojec.

The weekend activities mixed creatively facilitated sessions - led by Rhiannon White, Co-Artistic Director of [Common/Wealth](#), and writer (and co-director of [Inclusive Journalism Cymru](#)) [Silvia Rose](#) - with participatory design workshops led by Professor Andy Walters and Jo Ward from [PDR](#), Cardiff Metropolitan University's design research centre.

We worked together to build a [coherent narrative arc](#) across the weekends: identifying challenges and opportunities, exploring community information needs, and culminating in paper prototypes for community-led solutions. Combining creative facilitation with design methodology enabled us to build trust before the more analytical design phases and helped us unlock deeper insights.

Activities included:

- A 'Research Rave' at 10am on a Saturday morning – dancing to a playlist of the group's favourite tunes, punctuated by disarming questions designed to spark group connection.
- Going out into the town to draw a new or unexpected view, and ask someone we didn't know, "What does Blaenau need?"
- Writing poetry from the perspective of place, "I am Blaenau..."
- Mapping Blaenau Ffestiniog's needs - both met, and unmet - and designing solutions using service design principles.



Research Rave; Participant Artwork; Design Board. Images credit: Lilia Strojec.

Dancing and writing poetry gave participants a route into feelings and instincts a straightforward conversation wouldn't reach, while drawing an unfamiliar view and questioning a stranger tested how expectations and creative impacts could be extended beyond the participant group.

S4C representatives participated throughout as collaborators and co-researchers on the same basis as community members - another deliberate choice, since institutions can only rebuild legitimacy by learning *alongside* communities rather than just hearing *about* them.

Community Connection Events

We planned community connection events inspired by sesiynau caban from the outset, but deliberately left their shape open to co-creation. Kiki, Pip and Wil – three of our community co-researchers – took responsibility for shaping and running both events, identifying key themes from the research conversations and applying them to the co-design.

Our first event ran 3.30-5.30pm in a central venue, timed to catch parents, carers and young people on the school run, and structured as a drop-in to remove barriers to participation for people who wouldn't (or couldn't) normally engage with work like this.

The second was a community-led sharing of research insights, framed through past, present and future lenses and told through conversations between community researchers, partners and guests. Both deliberately adopted a playful approach to identifying the unmet needs and opportunities of the place.



Community Connection event. Image credit: Lilia Strojec.

Cymraeg

Approximately three quarters of people in Blaenau Ffestiniog are Welsh speakers – a context we needed to reflect in our research. However, only around half our community co-researchers, and not all the project team, are fluent. To address this, our first group activity opened with a sensitive discussion on language and identity, creating space for participants to share their individual – and often difficult or conflicted – relationships with the Welsh language. That session became an example of the kind of collective sense-making space that we wanted to model.



Comment postbox at Community Connection event. Image credit: Lilia Strojec.

The deeply resonant phrase, “Ydw i’n ddigon Gymreig? - Am I Welsh enough?” came up multiple times.

By exploring something so personal, so early in the process, the session established that vulnerability and complexity were welcome in the room. One participant described it as creating "a safe space... from the beginning" that she believed would help the group "work and live together more constructively". Several others reported feeling more connected to each other after sharing their experiences with the language and this set the tone for subsequent activities.

Results & Change

Our research generated key insights with implications for trust, democracy and cohesion well beyond Blaenau Ffestiniog:

The problem is not too *little* information but too *much*

Participants told us they're not disengaged from public life, they're simply overwhelmed by the volume of news, and unsure which elements to trust - a pattern echoed in a growing body of [international research](#). The solution they suggest is better conditions for connection and deliberation, not more content.

The need is for shared processing space

Participants want opportunities and infrastructure to make sense of information collectively, to enable them to make good decisions for themselves, their families and their communities.

"The community needs to find ways of listening to one another ... [this] could be implemented on a wider scale"



Participants told us that local information processing is most effective when it happens in place and in person - in physical, trusted, community spaces. The sesiynau caban are more than a historical curiosity, they're a blueprint written in this landscape.

"What we need is to develop frameworks by which we can digest and reflect on that news together as a community [so that it becomes] empowering, inspiring and beneficial rather than harmful and isolating"

Research participants cited the [relational quality of the facilitation](#) in our work as the factor that made the most difference to them. They described feeling "heard, cared for, respected, not forced", and said that despite low initial expectations, they were surprised at how engaged they became.

The most striking finding was around civic participation. Participants said the project had made them feel [both more willing and more able](#) to take part in civic and democratic activity. This is particularly significant, as many are already deeply involved in their community. This mirrored our [findings in Grangetown](#) and suggests that connection and deliberation don't just activate the disengaged, they can also deepen the commitment of the already-committed.



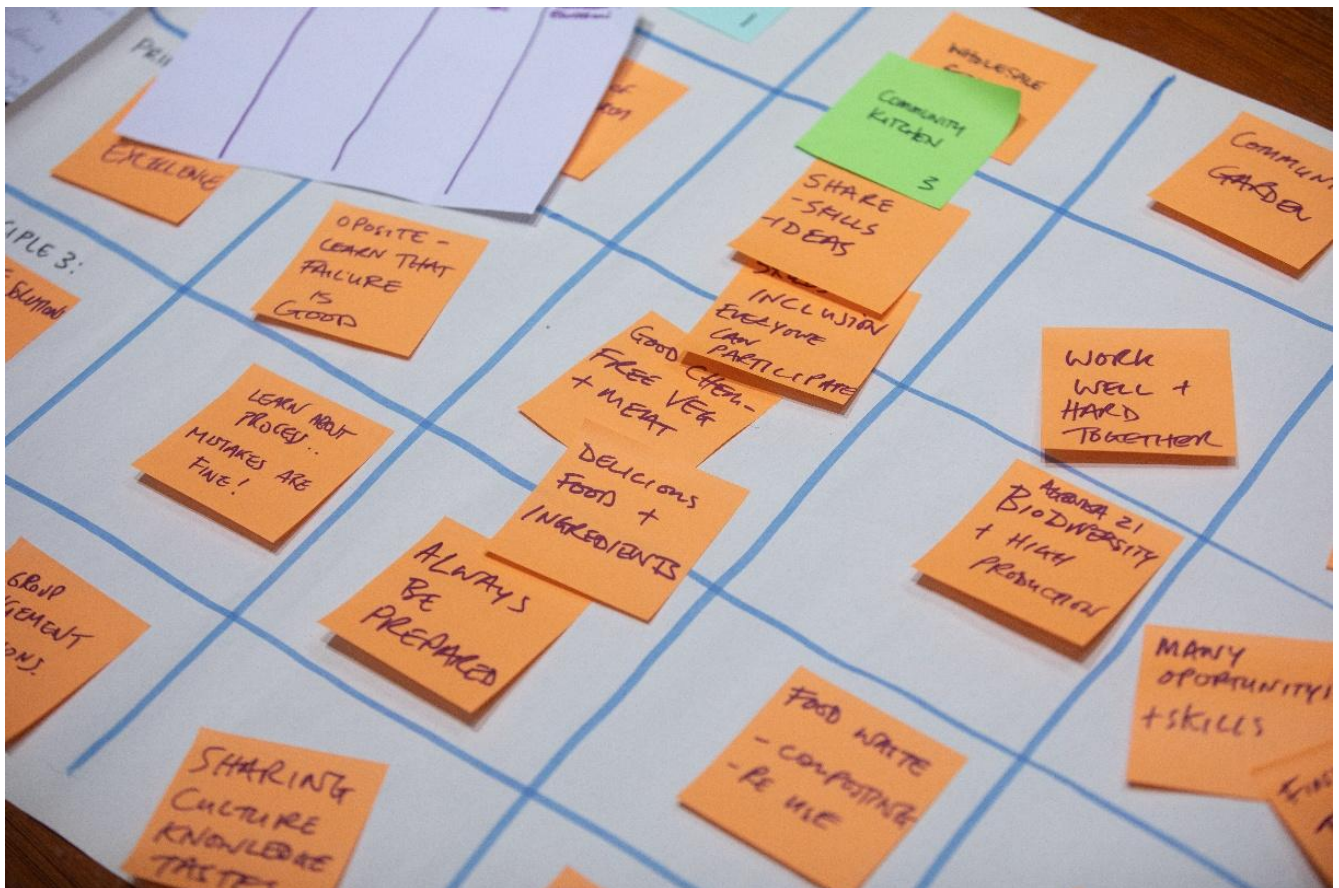
The Community Sharing event: Music and Song; Poetry.
Image credit: Lilia Strojec.

The project changed me as a researcher. Newyddion i Bawb required me to be a producer or facilitator, trusting the knowledge and expertise of partners and collaborators in a way I hadn't always done before, and the outcomes were better for it.

It also deepened my own relationship with Cymraeg and accelerated my learning journey. Spending so much time in Blaenau Ffestiniog has shown me how speaking Welsh opens up perspectives simply not available in English. As one participant put it, “mae'r Gymraeg yn ffenestr arall ar y byd” – Welsh is another window on the world.

I'm now enjoying the view through that other window, and am committed to becoming fluent.

Participants have already begun developing [concrete plans and collaborations](#) for what happens next. These include a community restaurant and hub integrating with Y Dref Werdd's community gardens, environmental education programmes and evening spaces for young people.



Design Notes. Image credit: Lilia Strojec.

These are creating both practical resources and place-based devolved infrastructure for collective sense-making now and in the future – and demonstrate the scale of what could be achieved if this work was expanded to communities across Wales and beyond.

Recommendations

Lead nationally

Welsh Government should resource community sense-making as a strategic form of democratic infrastructure. Our research suggests that when communities have space to share their stories, it builds confidence, strengthens cohesion and deepens belonging to – and responsibility for – the place they live.

Asset-based approach

Start from what a community already has, not what it lacks. Our challenge statement asked how Blaenau Ffestiniog's own history of innovation could counter disinformation and mistrust. That orientation enabled participants to recognise sesiynau caban as a living model, not a historic relic.

Build trust before you build anything else

Invest in relational, creative facilitation and co-creation skills before moving to analytical or design work. Our participants consistently cited the relational quality of the creative facilitation as what made the biggest difference to their engagement. Trust isn't a soft precursor to good research; it's what makes honest, useful research possible at all.

Design for people outside the bubble

Don't let engagement stop at the already engaged. Our participants recognised they weren't representative of the whole community and took responsibility for co-designing events to reach people beyond their immediate networks. Future projects should build this in from the start, not treat it as an afterthought.

Fund creativity as essential, not optional

Fund creative facilitation as a core devolved policy tool, not an add-on. Poetry, music and art weren't warm-up exercises in this project – they were the methodology that surfaced insights structured discussion couldn't reach. Newyddion i Bawb offers the evidence the Welsh Government's own [culture and sport priorities](#) call for.



Make space for language, identity and complexity

Name and hold linguistic and cultural complexity from the outset. Our first session – a discussion of what Welsh means to each participant – surfaced complexity that participants hadn't expected in one another, building trust that carried through everything that followed. Any bilingual or multi-lingual sense-making model should build this in as a first step.

Participant [letters](#), written as part of our final evaluation, vividly capture the depth of meaning that was created, which go well beyond journalism – to trust, confidence, community connection, pride in self and place and hope for the future. This is the possibility that work like this offers.

I would like to thank the group that made this possible.

We are still here and the world has changed so much since I was young. We put the safeguards in early on to protect ourselves and when others who were less well prepared came to us and asked for our help we had something to offer.

Our way became more and more wonderful, we changed the way our minds worked. We found depth in our story and were able to sustain ourselves with the approach we had developed.

Slowly and with our eyes open, not afraid to fail, also not afraid to not succeed immediately.

We planted the seed, we watched, we recorded, we shared, we grew and we supported. We reached for independence and to trust each other just in time. We could feed, clothe, house and nurture our families and friends and welcome visitors. We had plenty, when others did not.

We had the skills to endure and the will once the material world began to fade.

Participant Letter.

Looking Ahead

Newyddion i Bawb, and my time as a CIP, has created new knowledge, networks and ways forward for communities in Wales to make sense of their lives together.

AHRC's investment made it possible to test this in a new context and build new partnerships, including devolved government and a national broadcaster, that generated long term capability and capacity for carrying this work further across Wales and into other devolved nations and regions.

The answers that emerged from Blaenau Ffestiniog are both simple and radical:

- People need each other.
- They need more connection, not more content.
- They need ways to make sense of the world together.

This isn't journalism as it's been understood - extractive, centralised, delivered - but something closer to what sesiynau caban once offered: communities armed with knowledge and connection, building hope and taking action for themselves.

Further Information:

For more information on AHRC Creative Communities visit www.creativecommunities.uk

Contact the CIP

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