

# Local action and health improvement: the case of community food co-ops in Wales



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# Community food co-ops



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# Background

- Inequalities in Health Fund: two years in North and South East Wales
- Run by the Rural Regeneration Unit: Food Development Worker in each area
- **Key focus:** ‘to supply, from locally produced sources as far as possible, quality affordable fruit and vegetables to disadvantaged communities through the development of sustainable local food distribution networks’ in North and South East Wales’
- 75% to be in Communities First Areas



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# How they operate

- Run by volunteers - connected to a local supplier (producer or wholesaler)
- Fruit, vegetable or salad bags are ordered at £2 per bag paid in advance
- Produce delivered at community venue → volunteers bag the fruit and veg → customers pick up bags → place orders for the following week
- Locally sourced if possible



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# The Evaluation

Funded by Public Health Improvement Division  
(OCMO)

Conducted by Eva Elliott, Odette Parry and Joan Ashdowne-Lambert



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# Case Studies: purpose

- Motivations for becoming involved
- Problems faced/solutions found
- Relationship to other local activity and the wider policy context.
- Support (FDW, community/health workers)
- Reach – who are the customers/beneficiaries?
- Supply - advantages/disadvantages for local suppliers
- Perceptions of what is needed to be sustainable
- Impact: consumption, knowledge, skills, social networks



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# Approach

- Theories of change: how programme objectives and mechanisms translate on the ground.
- Literature review.
- Interviewed key stakeholders: design and set-up.
- Case study approach taken to provide a detailed description of how co-ops operate, and what they achieve, at a local level.



# Methods for Case Studies

- Interviews
  - » 125 with customers, volunteers, linked agencies, suppliers
- Observation
  - » details of co-ops in action
  - » capture contextual details of local area and venue
- Socio-economic profiles
  - » Lower level super output areas
  - » 2005 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)
  - » Neighbourhood Statistics





# The Case Studies



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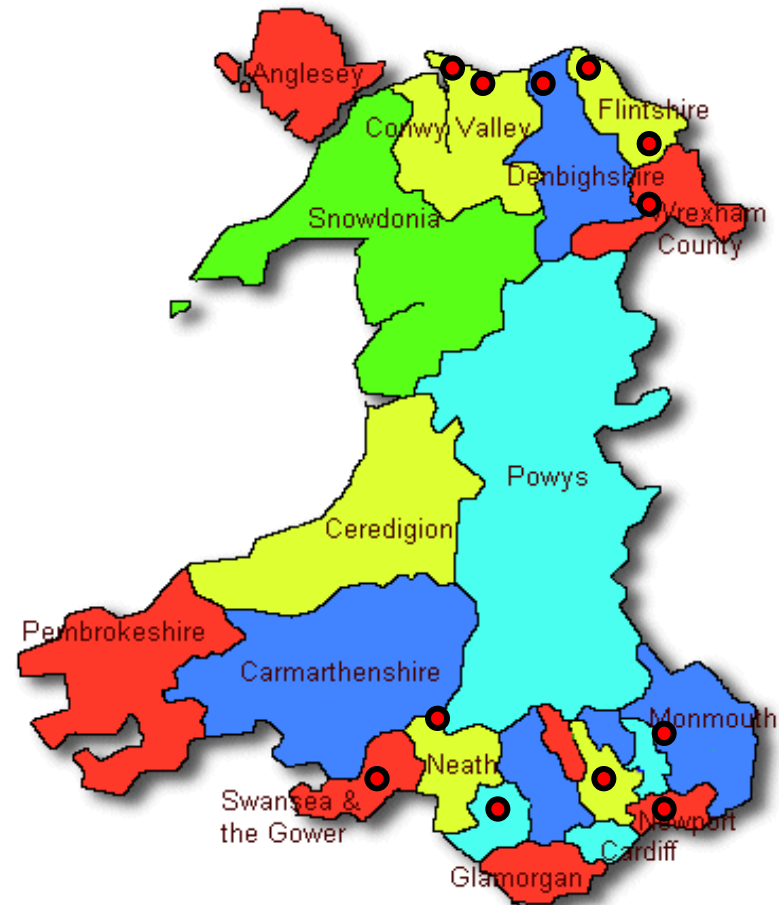


# Selection of Case Studies

- Range of geographical areas
  - » Rural (valleys village)
  - » Urban – small town
  - » Large town
  
- Stand alone/linked
  - » Strong links to area based initiatives
  - » Weak/ chance links to area based initiatives
  - » Non communities first areas



# Spatial distribution of case studies



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# Description of Case Studies

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- Neighbourhood profiles confirmed socio-economic deprivation.
- Reflected local inequality.
- None highlighted in WIMD 'geographical access to services to services' domain but observation highlighted difficulties in most areas.
- However geographical access not an issue in some areas.



# Findings

What difference did it make?



# Behaviour/attitudes

- Changes in diet (the way we eat and shop) over a short period of time difficult to capture
- Increase reported in consumption of fruit and veg but customers may have eaten it anyway.
- Customers notions of quality complex and determine success of co-op
- However small changes in family practices and child-based settings.



# Dirty Veg

The farmer used to pick the stuff the night before so it's still dripping wet because he pulls the carrots so they're still wet. On some occasions the swede, there might still be a bit of soil, and we had one customer who stopped getting the stuff because mud on the swede got onto the cauliflower so the cauli was dirty. That was the reason they used to stop having it.

Volunteer: South Wales



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# Sowing the seeds of change?

And I've had parents say 'well that person wouldn't have nothing you know...' So we've made a big improvement and if our children are going home from the club saying they want fruit then they're gonna purchase it in the house and you may get the parents starting to eat it as well - we're actually getting parents yeah. I mean I have had one mum go frantic with me saying 'where the hell do I find a mango for God's sake.'

After school Club Co-ordinator



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# Knowledge

- Existing knowledge about connections between health and fruit and veg but not what to do about it.
- Co-ops are responding to this
  - » Recipe leaflets
  - » Peer leaders
  - » Cookery classes



# How do I cook it?

(The supplier) gave us a particular type of vegetable we got, which was a cross between a cauliflower and broccoli and I thought “What the hell am I meant to do with this?” And he said “Give my dad a ring and he’ll tell you,” and he’s like “Cook it like this and it’s lovely like this.” And so then I can then pass that on to other people and it’s nice then that people come to me and say “What do I do with a courgette?”

Volunteer: North Wales



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# Well being and happiness

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- For those eating more fruit and veg – reported improvement to health
- Social aspect mentioned by everyone in some food co-ops
- For some volunteers – small but very significant changes to quality of life



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# Quality of Life

- Since my husband died I was very depressed for quite a while and I got to meet people and forced myself to do things. As soon as I've worked on the food co-op I felt useful and it's not a problem now.

Volunteer – North Wales

- I've learned how to talk to people without being embarrassed, through the co-op. I learned to cope with people better and how to approach people when they first come in to make them feel welcome ..It's built my confidence yes. I've never done anything like that before so it's a challenge.

Volunteer – North Wales



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# Changing places

- Creation of physical and social assets for local people
- Revitalisation (in some cases) of buildings otherwise unused
- In some cases co-ops a platform for the development of other local activities
- Forging new relationships between communities and health and regeneration workers.



# Development of local assets

Whereas, before they'd just pick their veg up and go, now they can't wait to get there. They don't want to leave, because some people do come in and have a cup of tea and say 'I'm just waiting to meet so and so, to me.' That tells me that outside the building they're saying, 'I'll meet you in the co-op.' So that's a good sign and it tells us we are doing the right things and they feel secure when they come there and they're enjoying our company.

Volunteer – North Wales



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# Local solutions

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Is this the right approach?

Is it blaming the most deprived communities  
for structural inequalities?



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# What community regeneration (for health) is about

- Emphasis on collective efficacy
- Not just ‘what works?’ but ‘what matters?’
- Democratic renewal/ the revitalisation of the public sphere?
- Though not tackling the sources of structural inequality could be building resilience and capability



# Regenerating health

They start there, their confidence grows, their self-esteem, grows they meet new friends and they move on, which is great because it's dynamic. The old term of regeneration comes to mind, and that's happening at a very local level, so the issues about social, economic, the educational, the environment and the physical, all those five elements in a little cameo.

Community worker: North Wales



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# A Success?

- Pilot aimed to have 26 sustainable food co-ops up and running by the end of March 2006
- By the end of March 2006 77 food co-ops were set up ...
- Today there are 99 – big celebration shortly!



# To summarise

- Community food co-ops are welcomed by volunteers, local people and suppliers
- Sowing seeds of change rather than dramatic change in consumption and attitudes at this stage
- Impact on wider aspects of health and well being important
- Community food initiatives a valuable contribution to broader efforts to tackle obesity



