



How Should Wales Project itself on the World Stage?

28 October 2019, Event Summary

On 28 October 2019, the Learned Society of Wales hosted *How Should Wales Project itself on the World Stage?* - the first event of the *Soft Power Strategies* series at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Coinciding with the development of the Welsh Government's International Strategy, our Wales and the World series aims to expand the discussion and deepen our understanding of Wales's "soft power" assets.

The first event considered perspectives on soft power, and looked to offer practical suggestions to develop Wales's international profile.

Discussants included: Eluned Morgan, AM Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language; Paul Brummell, Head of Soft Power and External Affairs Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Professor Karen Smith, Head of Department of International Relations, LSE. Imants Liegis, Latvian Ambassador to France; Rob Humphreys, British Council UK Trustee; Owen Hathway, Sports Wales; Peter Florence, Hay Festival; Susie Ventris-Field, Welsh Centre for International Affairs; and Sir Emyr Jones Parry, President of the Learned Society of Wales who acted as Rapporteur.

The principal objectives were to define 'soft power', consider Wales' soft power assets and determine how we can better use Wales' cultural, educational, sporting and charitable sectors to strengthen national and international perception of Wales.

Defining Soft Power, Realising its Challenges and Determining its Importance for Wales

Soft power, broadly speaking, is a country's ability to attract, persuade and co-opt others to get what it wants on or from the world stage. This is in contrast to using economic, military or other types of coercion. It is a means through which states can influence others, harnessing and projecting pre-existing and often, intangible resources such as an attractive culture, food, sport, democratic values, language, history and policies so to benefit the nation in some way.

Based primarily on the perceptions of other states, international organisations and external non-state actors, soft power is difficult for governments to control. Often, a state's positive international reputation takes a long time to develop but is very quickly diminished if rendered contradictory or untrue either by events, history or through social media. To be comprehensive, it relies not only on government but also on the country's non-state actors: charities, organisations, institutions as well as civil-society.

Nevertheless, when harnessed and projected effectively, soft power can prove very beneficial. Wales is not an independent state and hard power and associated foreign policy capacities are the responsibility of the British government. A coherent and effective soft power strategy would thus provide Wales an opportunity to exercise influence to benefit Wales. This may be particularly important should the UK's soft power capacities weaken post-BREXIT.

What are Wales' Potential Soft Power Assets?

A multitude of Wales' potential soft power assets were discussed. The main categories included:

a) Heritage and culture

- Sporting prowess
- Artistic excellence
- Poetry, song and dance- 'a nation of bards'
- 'Inclusivity' demonstrated through the Future Generations Act and Wales for Peace Petition- League of Nations
- Food

b) Bilingualism and the Welsh language

c) Values, Ideals and Global Responsibility

- Environmental sustainability- Wales has planted 10 million trees in Uganda and has translated UN Sustainability Act into law.
- International development- academic exchanges and improved educational infrastructure in Vietnam, Wales and Africa programme

d) Research and Innovation

- Wales is the most efficient in the UK for turning funding into high collaboration research; 70 publications involved coauthors outside of Wales
- Cyber security

Ownership, Responsibility, and Roles to Play

Wales' Soft Power strategy should be owned widely. Appropriate sourcing and allocation of funds means that the principal responsibilities still lie with officials in London and Welsh government. Nevertheless, to embed and project the strategy in a sustainable and responsible manner it is important to acknowledge the responsibility and roles played by the myriad of academic and economic institutions, NGOs, charities and individuals in and from Wales. Here, particular emphasis was placed on the arts and the potential impact of the BBC and British Council.

Points of Possible Contention

In creating Wales' soft power strategy, it is important to avoid making over-generalised, propagandised or transient claims of successes or of leadership that could potentially prove damaging to Wales' long-term international perception. For instance, broad terms like 'fairness' 'equality' or even 'sustainability' could be perceived as potentially contradictory or contentious.

Welsh Government needs to encourage and advise, while resisting the temptation to dictate everything within itself. It must set out a broad yet clear outline so to better enable and facilitate what is already being done, what still needs to be done and where support is most urgently required. To enable a sustainable soft power strategy, it must also celebrate and safeguard the same narrative within Wales.

Conclusion: What For?

A principal challenge for Welsh Government is to determine what Wales' soft power will be used for. In other words, what are Wales' interests?- Increased tourism? To attract more business? To promote cooperation? To have a greater influence in international affairs? To encourage an open minded internationally aware population?

Establishing a clear aim or aims will allow for greater clarity between government and various non-state actors as what needs to be done, approximate timelines, and what resources and funds are still required to achieve these objectives.