

Hearth & Hiraeth*

Constructing Climate Change Narratives around National Identity

Experience and learning from
the Welsh Narratives Programme



* **Hiraeth** *hiəraɪθ*: a Cymraeg (Welsh) word, that cannot be directly translated into English, for the deep bond one feels for one's homeland and its culture, and a yearning to return.

About COIN

The Climate Outreach & Information Network (COIN) is a charity that encourages people from different backgrounds to understand and take action on climate change. We have established a reputation as leading specialists on climate change communication, and we work to develop meaningful narratives about climate change that engage a wide range of people and organisations. Using our unique position as a bridge between research and practitioners, we translate academic knowledge on climate change communication and tailor it to the needs of various audiences, including NGOs, policy-makers and community groups. Through research, consultancy, training and workshops we disseminate the most effective methods of communicating about climate change.



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Contents

Executive Summary	4
National Values and Climate Change	6
The Role of Cultural Values and Narratives	6
National values - the opportunity	7
National values - the limitations	8
The Welsh Narratives Programme	9
The Programme	9
About Wales and the Welsh	9
Process and Methodology	10
Stage one - Research	11
Stage two - Welsh Values	11
Stage three - Development of Trial Narratives	11
Stage four - Discussion Groups	12
Stage five - Consolidation and Recommendations	12
Key Findings	14
National identity crosses social and attitudinal boundaries	14
Intrinsic values have a strong appeal	14
Climate change had low salience	14
Existing climate change narratives failed when tested	14
Landscape and local environment were favoured frames	15
Renewables could be accepted as part of the traditional resource economy	16
Lessons for Replication in Other Countries	17
References	19

Executive Summary

In October 2011 the Welsh Government commissioned the Climate Outreach and Information Network (COIN), working with Andrew Darnton Research and Analysis (ADR&A), to develop narratives around climate change and sustainable development that could be applied in communications to all its audiences. We believe this to be one of the largest climate change communications projects of its kind, noteworthy for being a coherent and consistent approach to climate communications based around a shared national identity.

To be effective, mass public communication of climate change needs to be inclusive and speak effectively to people's common sense of belonging. We argue that national cultural identity is an important, and often neglected, frame for mobilising a collective response to climate change including the conservative, deprived and disempowered groups that are often disregarded by conventional messaging.

For governments, which struggle to find language around climate change and a low carbon economy, the appeal to national values builds on familiar and well-established ways to rally citizens behind a common purpose. Action on climate change needs to happen at all levels and national governments need to be given a popular mandate to manage that response. This requires them to adopt climate change narratives with an overarching national interest, just as they do for law and order, military defence or an economic recession.

We recognise, however, the potential dangers involved in making appeals to national identity on an issue that requires *international* co-operation. Messages therefore need to speak to the 'intrinsic' values of belonging and empathy rather than the 'extrinsic' values of aggressive superiority or defensiveness. This report argues that national identities need not, and should not, be nationalistic - though the boundary between the two needs to be carefully defined and maintained

Every country is different and will have its own identity markers and sources of pride - especially their own unique historical circumstances. However, most of the values that people consider being a defining quality of their own national culture - for example a love of family, community, locality, language, and landscape - are actually universal. Many of the lessons of the Welsh programme can be reapplied in other contexts with a slight cultural nuance.

Primary findings from the Welsh Narratives Programme:

- It is possible to identify shared values that can speak across all groups in a large and diverse national population. What is more, the programme shows that people can have national values without being nationalists, and that these values can be based on pride and mutual support rather than competition or superiority.
- Understanding this identity also provides important insights for anticipating what messages might not work well. This was confirmed by testing that showed that some of the current Welsh government narratives around climate change were actively disliked and distrusted as they conflicted with the Welsh cultural values of modest leadership and self-reliance.
- It is possible to design new language around the 'environment' that speaks far more effectively to people's real life concerns. In Wales the deeply rooted identification with *landscape* provided a useful frame for a wider discussion of the environment and climate change impacts.
- The Welsh Narratives Programme developed an effective, flexible and cost efficient methodology for identifying shared values and testing messages against them. This could be replicated and applied for any large audience with a shared identity - including businesses and communities of shared occupation, worldview, faith or politics.

National Values and Climate Change

The Role of Cultural Values and Narratives

Most government and scientific attempts to communicate climate change are based on the assumption that public understanding is best served by providing people with scientific data. This argument is often called the ‘information deficit model’, because it sees people, in the (critical) words of Chris Rapley, the former head of the British Antarctic Survey, as “empty vessels who will respond appropriately once informed of the facts” (Weintrobe, 2012).

However, a growing body of psychological and sociological research shows that the formation of public attitudes to climate change is complex and is strongly influenced by people’s culture, worldview and social norms (COIN, 2011). In order to be accepted, and to mobilise concern, information about climate change needs to carry strong social cues – what we call *identity markers* - that clearly indicate how the issue is relevant to people’s sense of social identity and shared values.

Climate change has become a highly divisive issue (Humphrey & Scott, 2012). In Britain, political affiliation has become the largest determinant of people’s attitudes to climate change (Corner et al., 2012; Lorenzoni et al., 2007) - though gender, age, race and class are also influential - leading to the consistent finding in polls that climate scepticism is highest among conservative, middle-aged, middle-class white men (Kahan et al., 2011). Attitudinal segmentation also finds low levels of engagement among disadvantaged and disempowered groups, especially those on low incomes (Humphrey & Scott, 2012; Leiserowitz & Smith, 2010).

In a previous report COIN has argued that climate change has been rejected by many people in these groups because it does not contain identity markers that speak to their values. Furthermore, many of the markers it does contain belong to groups that they often actively distrust such as the political left and environmentalists (Corner, 2013).

Another body of research, building on the pioneering work of the social psychologist Shalom Schwartz, shows that values can be defined and measured along an axis from *intrinsic* values (self-transcending values such as community and self acceptance) to *extrinsic* values (self-enhancing values such as status or financial success) (Schwartz, 1994).

A recent review (Corner et al, 2014) of the role of values in public engagement with climate change concluded that self-transcendent values are strongly predictive of positive engagement with environmental issues and support for policies to mitigate climate change (Nilsson et al, 2004). By contrast triggering extrinsic values can undermine concern about wider social or environmental issues (Crompton, 2010).

Recently, as exemplified in the Welsh Narratives Programme, there has been increasing interest by governments in the idea that developing a narrative (or more likely, a set of distinct but complementary narratives) on climate change is the key to more successful public engagement.

The notion has strong intuitive appeal: stories are the means by which people make sense of the world, learn values, form beliefs and give shape to their lives, a conclusion endorsed by scholars from across disciplines as diverse as linguistics, psychology and literary theory (Richardson, 1990; Herman, 2013).

However, recent research confirms the dominant role of values in effective narratives. In one recent study with a large sample, the same information about climate change (and the need to mitigate it) was presented to groups with different cultural values as different narratives and as simple fact lists. The study found that the information was only more compelling in a narrative form when that narrative was 'congruent' with the cultural values of the group. As the authors concluded: *"If the story did not line up with their cultural orientation, then it might as well have been a fact list"* (Jones & Song, 2013).

Taken together, this research strongly suggests that building effective narratives on climate change requires governments to be very careful about the values embodied in those narratives: seeking values that are widely shared rather than narrowly defined and speak to intrinsic self-acceptance and belonging rather than competition and status.

National Values - the opportunity

Given that attitudes to climate change (and, to a lesser extent, the wider issues of sustainable development) have become so strongly socially defined, governments need to find new ways of talking about them that speak to wider identities that cross over these social boundaries. National identities contain the potential to do this - and, even more importantly, the potential to engage the conservative audiences that are currently so biased against climate change (Corner, 2013).

National pride is still a strong factor in people's identity. In Britain four out of five people say that they are "proud to be a British citizen" and half of people are "very proud" (Wind-Cowie & Gregory, 2011). These levels are high compared with neighbouring countries with pride being strongest around language, culture and landscape (Gimson et al., 2012).

National identity is also formed by symbols, images and socially transmitted stories. These include: flags, colours and patterns; traditional dress; national achievements; leaders and celebrities; sporting achievements and players; arts and popular entertainment; historical moments of nation building, and shared stories of unity for a common purpose or against a common enemy.

The experience of the mass mobilisation of the Second World War shows very well that people can come together through narratives of shared national values. In Britain, where the war is still a powerful national identity marker, Winston Churchill, the 'blitz spirit' and the 'home front' are frequently adopted by campaigners as symbols for action on climate change (Simms, 2001, 2005) and sometimes by governmental organisations (DEFRA, 2000).

National Values - the limitations

But there are important limitations to this approach. Action on climate change requires co-operation at both national and international levels. Language that frames climate change in terms of a national interest may undermine attempts to build public support for contributions to an international problem in which the greatest impacts may well fall elsewhere. Secondly, nationalist values can readily cross into competition, defensive self-interest, or outright aggression, which are likely to obstruct values of co-operation, empathy, or environmental concern.

Research shows that national pride is not the same as nationalism - which which can be defined as “a strong national devotion that places one's own country above all others” (Smith & Jarkko,1998). In surveys people are often keen to express their national pride around intrinsic identities: as one participant in a survey said: “The thing about British people is that we do things for each other, you know? Being British is more about the way we are than things like Buckingham Palace or Parliament” (Wind-Cowie & Gregory, 2011).

The opportunity therefore is to find the aspects of national identity that can be applied effectively to climate change and, in the language of our research, be applied as ‘identity markers’. The challenge is to select those aspects of national identity that can trigger the intrinsic values of belonging, community and care whilst avoiding those that trigger the extrinsic values of competition, intolerance and self-interest.

The Welsh Narratives Programme

The Programme

In October 2011 the Welsh Government commissioned COIN, working with ADR&A, to “develop a compelling and clear narrative about sustainable development and climate change, which will allow people to see the concepts through a positive, constructive and hopeful frame, and to motivate them to both support the Government’s action and take action themselves” (Welsh Government, 2011). The brief also required the production of a tested core vocabulary and images and, unusually, explicitly required “a dialogue around emotions and values” (Welsh Government, 2011).

The findings were presented in September 2012 and made available to the wider public in November 2013.



Framework Report

The key findings are contained in the report Sustainable Development Narratives for Wales: A Framework For Government Communications available for download from the [Welsh Government](#) or from [COIN](#).¹

A more detailed explanation of the findings and methodology can be

found in the Annex to Research Findings and Methodology available, on request, from the Welsh Government. Contact: EnvironmentalEvidence@wales.gsi.gov.uk

About Wales and the Welsh

Wales is a country within the United Kingdom with a population of just over 3 million (in North American terms it can be compared with Connecticut having a somewhat larger area but smaller population). Wales has its own government with devolved responsibility over agriculture, economic development, education, health, transport and housing. The Welsh Government has always had a strong commitment to the environment. The Welsh Future Generations Bill, currently under consideration, is the first in the world to enshrine sustainable development as the central operating principle for all government activity.

Wales has a distinct culture based around an ancient Celtic language - Cymraeg. Even though Cymraeg is spoken by only a quarter of the population, it is a source of great national pride across the country. The programme ran discussion groups in both English and Welsh and developed different vocabulary and narratives for each language.

¹ See: www.climateoutreach.org.uk/portfolio-item/sustainable-development-narratives-for-wales/

The Welsh economy was built on agriculture followed by resource extraction and processing, especially lead, coal, slate, iron and steel. In the early twentieth century South Wales was the world's the largest exporter of coal. These industries have now largely disappeared, but they have left a deep mark on both culture and landscape and created complex attitudes to fossil fuels and renewable technologies. On the one hand this heritage as an extractive resource economy makes Welsh people both defensive of fossil fuels and suspicious of businesses moving in to exploit a new resource. On the other hand, familiarity with resource extraction lends support to arguments that renewables could be a new source of growth and employment. The programme tested for, and found, all of these attitudes.

Other identity markers explored by the programme included:

- Landscape - population density and settlement size are low by British standards and most people have ready access to varied and sometimes strikingly beautiful landscapes.
- Culture - building on the language there is a long Bardic tradition especially in music and poetry.
- Sport - there is a national passion for Rugby football. In opinion polls, 90% of people in Wales express pride in their sports figures (Gimson et al., 2012).

Despite these values that bring people together, there are also plenty of other factors that push people apart. A quarter of the population are incomers (mostly from England) and do not necessarily share the national identity. There are also pockets of extreme poverty, especially in former industrial and mining areas, some of which are among the most deprived in Europe. Overall, a fifth of young people are defined as living in poverty (PHWO, 2013).

In its recruitment for the discussion groups, the programme was careful to include people from across these groups - from deprived areas, rural communities and the borders areas which have a stronger English identity.

Process and Methodology

There were five stages to the programme - initial research into narratives, identification of Welsh values, the development of trial narratives, testing in discussion groups and finally the development of recommendations.

The programme sought to take an *iterative* approach - being constantly open to new information that could inform the programme. For example, the discussion groups provided information on language and values that added depth to the previous research stage and contributed to the narratives being discussed. With more time and resources the process would also have enabled communicators and wider stakeholders to apply the narratives in their own networks and then feed this practical experience back in to enable further refinements or variations.

Stage One - Research

There were four elements to the research stage:

1. A rapid review of current research on narratives and values-based communications.
2. Analysis of the previous three years of government reports, speeches, and press releases to define the dominant narratives and language.
3. Consultation with key stakeholders throughout the Welsh Government. This included interviews with the current and previous Environment Ministers, Head of Communications, and departmental heads.
4. A survey of 133 civil society organisations.

Stage Two - Welsh Values

We sought to identify the language, images and values that defined a distinctly Welsh culture and might create identity markers. The University of Bangor in North Wales produced an internal report on Welsh values and the environment charity, Cynnal Cymru produced a self standing report drawing on social research and interviews with leading figures from Welsh life, sports and arts (Cynnal Cymru, 2012). These were reviewed during a one-day workshop.

Stage Three - Development of the Trial Narratives



Communications specialists rank the trial narratives at the 'Narrathon'

The findings of these first two stages were combined to produce a large number of short one-line narratives drawing on different identities and organised around three themes (optimistic and striving, satisfied and quietly confident, defensive and defiant). These incorporated the existing government narratives and those recommended by the consultation and values research.

We convened a ten person expert advisory group that included the Director of Marketing for the Welsh Government, national climate communications advisors, as well as academic and NGO specialists. In the course of a one-day intensive workshop (dubbed 'The Narrathon') they evaluated and then ranked these initial theme-based narratives.

On the basis of this workshop a final set of twelve full and detailed narratives were designed for further testing. These were written as coherent 'chunks' of text based around different themes, written as if to be delivered as a speech. They included existing government

narratives, narratives proposed by the expert group based on previous research and experimental narratives that had not previously been tested.

Stage Four - Discussion Groups

ADR&A worked with teams from the Universities of Cardiff and Bangor to run sixteen discussion groups around Wales. Overall the discussion groups were designed to reflect the full geographic, cultural and attitudinal variations within the country. Participants were recruited on the basis of a segmentation model previously designed by ADR&A, which identified six segments based on values, beliefs and attitudes to environmental social and economic issues. The discussion groups were distributed to reflect urban, rural and regional variations and, most importantly, three of the groups were held entirely in the Welsh language to explore specific linguistic opportunities.

In line with the overall approach of the programme, no mention was made of the objectives of the research when people were first brought together and invited to talk at length about their identity: where they came from, their life satisfaction and quality of life, and their sense of Welsh identity and belonging. Only after twenty minutes conversation were they prompted to talk in more detail about issues of environmental sustainability and climate change.

Each participant was then provided with a print out of the twelve narratives. They began by working on their own, highlighting sections of the narratives they liked with a green pen, and parts they disliked with a red pen. These marked copies provided a very detailed response - sometimes down to specific words - to the narratives. Participants then discussed the narratives as a group, drawing out further opinions.

Finally, the groups were shown a series of photographs and images, which included some taken from existing government materials on environmental policy and images that represented aspects of national identity.

Stage Five - Consolidation and Recommendations



Segment of the visual 'mega-matrix' showing the colour coding of responses. Narrative text is in rows and discussion groups in columns.

We carefully analysed the transcripts of the discussion groups to identify the key identity markers and the specific words that people used to describe themselves and their values. These were then incorporated into the narratives and recommended vocabulary.

We found that patterns and groupings were far easier to perceive in a visual format. We colour coded each group's detailed responses in a large 'mega-matrix'. Red represented a strongly expressed dislike, green represented a strong liking. Amber represented some ambivalence - either a difference of opinion in the group, or a dislike of some phrasing within the narrative.

In developing our recommendations we first rejected language that people did not respond to at all, either in conversation or marking their papers. Although safe, this was clearly not engaging. Because we were seeking messaging that could work effectively across *all* audiences we then rejected language and narratives that engaged some attitudinal groups well but were rejected by others.

The final recommendations contained principles and themes drawn from this analysis: in particular concerning the tone that the government should adopt when it spoke to people and the ways that environmental or climate change concerns could be integrated with Welsh identity.

Key Findings

National identity crosses social and attitudinal boundaries

Narratives framed around a national identity (including language that started with inclusive phrases such as “In Wales we value” and referred to “distinctly Welsh solutions”) performed consistently better in the discussion groups than narratives based around personal lifestyles or aspiration.

Intrinsic values have a strong appeal

Intrinsic messaging around family, community and shared identity consistently performed stronger in testing than extrinsic messaging around status and competitive advantage. The discussion groups were run in 2012, which was still the bottom of the recession, and so security concerns around jobs had greatest salience in all groups. Even then, language around wider quality of life scored highly in all groups, such as the identity-based phrasing *“Everyone knows that money and markets are not the only things that give people a good quality of life. In Wales we value the other kinds of wealth we possess in our relationships with our friends, family, and communities”*.

Of particular interest, identified by both the Welsh values research (Cynnal Cymru, 2012) and the discussion groups, was the distinctly Welsh concept of ‘Bodlon’. Like Hiraeth (see the cover) Bodlon is a Cymraeg word that is not easily translated into English, meaning the contentment that comes from being among one’s own people. Along with many other Cymraeg words for belonging, such as Cymrodyr (fellowship) and Cynefin (a cultural and geographic sense of place), these terms generate a distinctly Welsh vocabulary for identity and sustainability.

Climate change had low salience

Consistent with wider experience reflected in opinion polls (Pew, 2013), climate change was not a significant ‘front of mind’ concern. In the discussion groups, no-one, even those who had expressed an interest in environmental issues, mentioned climate change until they were directly prompted to do so. Even when climate change was raised directly the conversation often moved rapidly to other issues regarded as being ‘environmental’ such as waste and recycling.

Existing climate change narratives failed when tested

Within the testing process we included language and narratives that were already commonly used by politicians and in government materials. None of these had been formally tested in Wales before, and, we concluded, had become so consistently applied because they appealed to the values of the communicators and were therefore assumed to work. However, with formal testing, three of these widely used narratives were found to perform very badly with the general public:

National leadership

Politicians and business organisations commonly talk about ambition using the language of dynamic leadership, for example talking about how Wales was a ‘world leader’ or could show the way. However participants in the groups responded with widespread cynicism, doubting the reality or possibility of such grand schemes. In this regard it seemed that the political culture of bold ambition was out of sync with a wider national identity that expected modesty, realism and honesty from its leaders.

Environmental language

Other than the segments with high environmental concern, people responded badly to the environmental vocabulary that had been used by the government about ecological services and planetary boundaries. Although receptive to the concept of fairness they particularly resented moralistic language from the government that defined carbon emissions in terms of ‘fair shares’ and global contributions.

Opportunities in the low carbon age

Communicators seeking a positive antidote to the ‘doom and gloom’ of climate change often recommend promoting a positive vision of the future, built on the aspirational lifestyle appeal of new technologies and new economic opportunities. Although such language appealed to some individuals, others, especially those in lower income areas, reacted strongly against it, seeing it as unrealistic, unobtainable and unaffordable.

Landscape and local environment were favoured frames

The different groups expressed different interpretations of the environment. Many people were unenthusiastic about the language favoured by politicians about our responsibility for the “global environment”. However, people were enthusiastic about language that talked about landscape as a source of national pride: All responded well to the phrasing: *“The natural environment of Wales - our landscape, water, seas, air and everything that lives there - makes people like me passionate about Wales”*. Those in lower income areas were most concerned with their immediate surroundings and responded strongly to language that presented the environment as something that *“starts at their front doors with everyday concerns: the condition of the pavements, vandalism and crime, litter, and the quality of the air they breathe”*.

Although outside the official remit of the programme, the group discussions also revealed that the widespread antipathy and community resistance to wind farm development in many parts of rural Wales did not result from an indifference to climate change so much as attachment to a traditional landscape. This confirmed how readily a culturally defined meaning of the “environment” could overrule scientific and policy based definitions.

Renewables could be accepted as part of traditional resource economy

The programme explored ways that climate change and renewable energy sources could be presented within a culture that still had strong pride in its roots as a fossil fuel economy. The formulation which worked best framed renewables as the latest in a line of *“natural resources that built our country in the industrial revolution”* that could *“supply the energy needs of our people far into the future”*. Reflecting a strongly felt resentment towards foreign investment, this was best presented as a means to *“hold onto the billions of pounds we send out of Wales for energy, [that] we can reinvest in local jobs and opportunities”*.

People also responded well to the framing of the landscape as *“a living and working landscape - not something to be put in a museum... shaped by the hard work of people”*. This opened up the possibility that, with well considered public engagement, windfarms could become accepted as a positive development in a longer story of the Welsh landscape.

Lessons for Replication

Shared Values

The Welsh Narratives Programme shows that it is possible to identify shared values that can speak across all groups in a large and diverse national population. What is more, it shows that people can have national values without being nationalists, and that these values can be based on pride and mutual support rather than competition or superiority.

Every country is different and will have its own identity markers and sources of pride - especially their own unique historical circumstances. In Wales the culture is influenced by many centuries of resource exploitation and cultural repression by the English. Other countries, especially in continental Europe, will have more recent experience of wartime occupation and resistance. North America and Australia have values that are still informed by historical settlement and expansion. Application in other countries would need to explore their specific and distinct national culture and historical experience.

However, most of the values that people in Wales considered to be a defining quality of their own national culture - for example a love of family, community, locality, language, and landscape - are actually universal. Many of the lessons of the Welsh programme can be reapplied in other contexts with a slight cultural nuance.

Identity Markers

Identity markers exist not just in the overall narrative approach, but in the precise detail of the vocabulary, tone, and style of delivery - in Wales, for example, self-deprecating humour is an essential component of the national identity. Research needs to be alert to all of these factors and listen carefully to the group participants to find the appropriate cues.

Testing of Narratives

The most important aspect of the Welsh Programme, which is essential for replication, is that all narratives were rigorously tested across a wide and comprehensive range of audiences. COIN's observation is that government climate change communications are rarely tested and tend - as we found in Wales - to be built on the cultural values of politicians and communications professionals rather than the people they are attempting to speak with.

There is an opportunity, in a longer-term project, to evaluate the public acceptance and adoption of the narratives. The ultimate test of successful national communications is that they become repeated between people and absorbed into the national identity.

Participation

The Welsh Programme focused on developing messaging for government purposes, but ideally COIN would recommend a more participatory approach that includes a wider range of agencies (such as government departments for education, health, social services, arts and museums), cultural institutions and civil society organisations in developing and applying messaging. To have lasting impact, narratives need to appear, consistently, across all representations of a national culture.

COIN recommends that a further development of the Welsh model could include a longer-term commitment to continuing experimentation and testing, with a structure established from the outset for individual communicators to share their experience and ideas.

Application to Other Audiences

Any large social group or network will generate an internal culture with its own foundation narratives, sources of shared pride and agreed markers of identity. The approach and methodology of the Welsh Narratives Programme could therefore be equally well applied to other large definable groups - including businesses and communities of shared occupation, worldview, faith or politics.

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