

Building Better Tomorrows

Citizens' voice and citizens action originates from the mutual tradition of early socialism, that people should be involved in decisions affecting them in a way that is more meaningful than simply expressing preferences via the ballot box or attending occasional public meetings.

Timebanking Wales pays homage to the traditions of mutualism and collective action of the South Wales Valleys that gave birth to the mutual societies, educational settlement trusts, and miner's welfare institutes during the late 19th and early 20th century. These traditions recognised the importance of citizen engagement in planning projects or services, in delivery, monitoring, managing and running services. These approaches recognised the centrality of the citizen as an agent for change. It has taken us a long time to wake up to and reintroduce this tradition.

Citizens Voice, Active Citizenship and Public Services

Over the past decade there has been a growing consensus amongst policymakers and professionals that public programmes are unlikely to succeed unless they actively involve the people they are designed to benefit, whether it be to reduce crime, improve the physical environment or enhance health and well being. From the perspective of public service reform that seeks to give citizens a greater say in the way that services are run it will be critical to listen to their voice, to connect with and mobilise the collective intelligence of citizens in communities, if one seeks outcomes that promote equality and social justice.

Citizens Voice and Public Policy

The statements of the Welsh Assembly on the subject of citizenship in Making the Connections consultation document 'Delivering Beyond Boundaries' (2006), sees citizenship as a driver to provide services which are:

- More citizen focused
- More responsive to the needs of communities
- More focussed on equality and social justice

Co-production: Mutualism in Modern Form

What is new about co-production is that it actively engages users of services in the planning, design and delivery recognising their work and thanking them for it. This is the basis for a different kind of public service, where professionals do not define people entirely by their needs – which makes those continuing needs the only assets people have – but by what they *can* do. Then they find ways of putting those abilities to work. Co-production says that the reason our problems seem so intractable is that public services have become blind to the most valuable resource they possess: their own clients and the neighbourhoods around them.

"The fact that social needs continue to rise is not due to a failure to consult or conduct opinion research. It is due to a failure to ask people for their help and to use the skills they have. This is the forgotten engine for change that makes the difference between systems working and failing" New Economics Foundation.

Co-production thanks citizens for the work they do and this finally curtails if not ends the class biased system of expecting (usually poor) people to put in substantial time and effort for limited recognition. Volunteering is the culture of Lady Charlotte Guest, mutualism originated from a socialist culture that was about building better tomorrows for all. A culture advocating that better education was not just for our own children but for our neighbour's children. That better health and social care is not just for our parents and grandparents, but all pensioners. In this culture people were members of social networks for change, their modus operandi being to attract new members, increase in number, and become a sustainable force for good.

Time Banking Wales

Time Banking Wales functions as a 'think and do tank' to

- Advance knowledge, understanding and appreciation of co-production as an instrument for social change.
- Design and develop new models of co-production
- Support organisations to adopt and implement co-production as a method to advance citizenship
- Research the effectiveness of new models of co-production.
- Disseminate the results, best practice to practitioners and policy makers.
- Function as a force for systematic change and social justice.

The Challenges Ahead

Co-production proposes new relations between service providers and users, a two way conversation, citizens and agencies working constructively together. Co-production asks public sector and third sector managers to rethink structural design; that means sharing power and shared power is reduced unilateral power and few organisations do that willingly. It is apposite for service providers to remember an old Bevan quote outside the Peace and Justice Gates of Tredegar Park which reads 'the purpose of achieving power is to be able to give it away'.

This is a major task but it is entirely consistent with the Assembly's twin commitments to social justice and equality in delivery of public service and putting the citizen centre stage. Co-production can become a win win option in improving service planning and delivery, building bridges and developing communities, the key goals behind Communities First and much of the Assembly (and UK governments) wider social inclusion agenda. These changes will not be achieved overnight but the potential benefits of adopting co-productive models are immense; it was mutualism that build better tomorrows, as we all learn again to walk in the footsteps of giants.