



The role of arts, culture and the Welsh language in developing Wales's international profile

10 December 2019, Event Summary

Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind – Raymond Williams

Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

On 10 December 2019, the Learned Society of Wales hosted the second event in its *Wales and the World* series at the National Museum in Cardiff.

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

The evening's discussion addressed how Wales can better use its artistic and cultural assets to amplify its international profile.

In his opening lecture, **David Anderson** (Director General, National Museum Wales) underlined that it is people who create and share culture, not national institutions. Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams, he explained that culture is something that belongs to us all, and that Wales has a fundamentally democratic approach to its culture; this is an under-promoted aspect of Wales' national profile.

Anderson also argued that Wales' distinctive cultural methods – co-production and collaboration in particular – are an asset which interests a wide international audience, and that this creativity of approach should be captured in attempts to build Wales' international profile. The international interest in the redevelopment of St Fagans as the [National Museum of History is evidence of this](#).

However, this Welsh approach to culture is not reflected by UK narratives of culture, which have a more Anglocentric emphasis. The recent 'GREAT Britain' campaign, for example, does not feature representations of Welsh culture, such as the Eisteddfod. Furthermore, there was no consultation with devolved government, or institutions within Wales. Cultural organisations in Wales occupy a space where they have to negotiate the priorities of two governments, and there is a power imbalance.

Anderson also reflected on international partnerships, and in particular the development of the National Museum's 2018 Kizuna exhibition, which was the culmination of seven years of working with the Modern Art Museum of Japan. From the outset, the intention was to build a long-standing relationship, which has continued after the exhibition. The Wales Dome in Tokyo showcased the ongoing relationship between the museums, as well as National Theatre Wales' partnership with the New National Theatre Tokyo, and other cultural and creative partnerships.

In a subsequent panel discussion, the speakers emphasised that Wales has always been international.

Mererid Hopwood, poet and academic, reminded us that the first printed Welsh grammar was written by Dr Gruffydd Robert and was published in Milan on St David's Day 1567. Cymraeg is unique to Wales and is our unique voice in the world. But to strengthen its international profile, it needs to be taken more seriously at home. To be able to project an authentic and confident image of Wales, the concept of the nation must first be cultivated and developed within Wales. There is a role for national institutions to amplify this.

Helgard Krause of Books Council Wales agreed that the language is a great international asset and that we can learn from the way other countries showcase their languages – but better resources are needed. **Llinos Griffin Williams** of Wildflame Media added that Wales now has a great deal of TV production talent, which is projecting the nation onto international platforms. Again, though, more investment – in talent and in showcasing more diverse voices – is needed.

The distinctive Welsh approach to culture and our unique language provide opportunities for Wales to interact directly with an international audience, rather than having to fit within the parameters of UK campaigns and priorities. Greater collaboration between organisations within Wales will facilitate a stronger presence internationally. However, our campaigns and activities need to be bolder, and the offer must be excellent to stand out in an age of content-overload.