

## Aberystwyth University

### *ARFOR, out-migration and the Welsh language*

Lewis, Huw; Cunnington Wynn, Lowri

*Publication date:*  
2024

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Lewis, H., & Cunnington Wynn, L. (2024). *ARFOR, out-migration and the Welsh language: Findings from recent research on out-migration to inform the work of the ARFOR II programme*. Centre for Welsh Politics and Society.

#### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Aberystwyth Research Portal (the Institutional Repository) are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Aberystwyth Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Aberystwyth Research Portal

#### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

tel: +44 1970 62 2400  
email: [is@aber.ac.uk](mailto:is@aber.ac.uk)



Canolfan Gwleidyddiaeth a Chymdeithas Cymru  
Centre for Welsh Politics and Society

## Briefing Report

# ARFOR, out-migration and the Welsh language:

Findings from recent research on out-migration  
to inform the work of the ARFOR II programme

Prepared by Huw Lewis and Lowri Cunnington Wynn

January 2024



**ARFOR**  
CREU GWAITH - CEFNOGI'R IAITH

**wavehill**

Social and economic research  
Ymchwil cymdeithasol ac economaidd

## Contents

Summary and recommendations	3
1. Introduction	5
2. Understanding out-migration and return migration: general considerations	6
3. The attitudes of young people regarding life in rural Wales	7
4. Typologies summarising attitudes to migration	9
5. Factors that influence out-migration	11
6. Factors that influence return migration	12
7. Understanding the motives of ‘stayers’	14
8. Select bibliography	16
Appendix: Workshop programmes	17

### **Please reference this report as follows:**

Huw Lewis and Lowri Cunnington Wynn (2024) *ARFOR, out-migration and the Welsh language: findings from recent research on out-migration to inform the work of the ARFOR II programme.*

## Summary and recommendations

- The aim of this report is to summarize the main conclusions of two research workshops on the topic of migration that were held during November 2023. The workshops were organized by the Centre for Welsh for Politics and Society, Aberystwyth University and Wavehill, as part of the work program of an 18-month research tender that aims to review and evaluate the work of the ARFOR II programme.
- **Understanding and interpreting migration trends by using life course models (pp. 6-7):** There has been a tendency in academic research to use life course models to understand and interpret the migration decisions of different individuals, for example decisions to emigrate from rural areas or decisions to return at a later point. Consideration should also be given to how further use can be made of such models to support and refine policy interventions that seek to respond to out-migration. Life course models help to highlight the different stages that characterize an individual's life (childhood, young adulthood, middle age, retirement), the different life decisions faced during these periods and how decisions about where we choose to live are likely to arise at certain key junctures.
- **Attitudes of young Welsh speakers regarding life in rural Wales (pp. 7-8):** Recent research, which is discussed further in this report, has suggested that first language Welsh speakers tend to be more positive than other Welsh youngsters regarding life in a rural area and that they are more likely to want to continue living in their local area, or return there if they move away. However, this research also suggests that the majority of young Welsh speakers assume that they will need to move from their local area to find employment, education or somewhere to live, with a third of them anticipating that they will move outside Wales during the next five years.
- **Creating typologies summarising the attitudes of young people from Wales regarding migration (pp. 9-10):** It could be useful to divide young people from Wales into different categories based on their attitudes or expectations regarding migration, and these typologies should be used in order refine policy interventions that seek to respond to out-migration. Recent research in Wales offers possible typologies that could be used to support this work. Using these typologies would help highlight the different types of groups that need to be considered (e.g. stayers, leavers, returnees), their differing motivations and priorities, and the extent to which interventions should aim to prioritise particular sub-groups.
- **Factors that influence out-migration (pp. 11-12):** Academic research in Wales and internationally emphasizes that rural out-migration among young people is a phenomenon driven by a range of different, intersecting factors. Consequently, public discussion of out-migration as well as policy interventions that seek to address it should acknowledge that it is not sufficient to focus on only one or two key factors. More specifically, one should be careful not to treat out-migration as a phenomenon that's solely driven by economic considerations such as jobs, career and salary.

- **Factors influencing return migration (pp. 12-14):** As in the case of out-migration, academic research also shows that a range of different factors can influence decisions to move back to live in a rural area. Again, this research suggests that such decisions are often driven by more than just economic considerations, and that family considerations together with the general notion of 'settling down' can often be influential considerations. Furthermore, the research highlights that return migration is a consideration that becomes more prominent at certain periods in life, and that the early 30s should be treated as a particularly significant juncture.
- **The need to give due consideration to the motivations of 'stayers' (pp. 14-15):** Understanding the motivations of young people that decide to move away or the motivations of those who decide to return tends to claim most of the attention in academic research and policy discussions. However, specific consideration should also be given to the 'stayers' as part of discussions regarding the future of rural societies. As part of this, care should be taken to avoid depicting 'stayers' as a group who have either 'failed' or 'left behind' and it should be considered to what extent current policy programs in areas such as education, skills or economic development may inadvertently encourage such impressions. It should also be recognized that the decision to stay is not one that is taken only once; rather it should be viewed as a process that may repeated under different circumstances at several points during the course of an individual's life.

# ARFOR, out-migration and the Welsh language

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The aim of this report is to summarise the main conclusions arising from two research workshops on the topic of migration that were held during November 2023. The workshops were organized by the Centre for Welsh for Politics and Society, Aberystwyth University and Wavehill, as part of the work program of an 18-month research tender that aims to review and evaluate the work of the ARFOR II programme.
- 1.2 The ARFOR Program brings together the local authorities of Gwynedd, Anglesey, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire to develop programmes that aim to promote economic development across Wales' western counties, thereby boosting the prospects of the Welsh language. It was established in 2019, following an initial investment of £2 million by the Welsh Government. In October 2022 it was confirmed that the Welsh Government would provide a further £11 million in order to finance the second phase of ARFOR, which will run until March 2025.
- 1.3 The title of the first workshop was '**ARFOR, out-migration and the Welsh language**'. The aim of the event was to discuss contemporary research from Wales focusing on the topic of out-migration and to consider its relevance to the work of the ARFOR II programme. There were presentations from Dr Huw Lloyd-Williams (Wavehill), Professor Mike Woods (Aberystwyth University), Elen Bonner (Bangor University) and Dr Lowri Cunnington Wynn (Aberystwyth University).
- 1.4 The title of the second workshop was '**To stay, migrate or return? Placing the Welsh experience in a comparative context**'. The aim of this event was to broaden the discussion by considering research that has studied rural out-migration in a range of other European contexts. This resulted in presentations from Dr Caitríona Ni Laoire (University College Cork), Dr Rosie Alexander (University of the West of Scotland), Professor Tialda Haartsen (University of Groningen, Netherlands) and Dr Annett Steinfuhrer (Institute for Rural Affairs Thünen, Germany).
- 1.5 This report summarises the discussions that took place during the two workshops, focusing on the content of the research presentations delivered as well as the questions and comments that arose during the subsequent discussion periods. The report is organized on a thematic basis, and it highlights a series of key themes that arose during the workshops. The sections that follow therefore focus on the following themes:
  - Understanding out-migration and return migration: general consideration
  - The attitudes of young people regarding life in rural Wales
  - Typologies summarising attitudes to migration
  - Factors that influence out-migration
  - Factors that influence return migration
  - Understanding the motives of 'stayers'

## 2. Understanding out-migration and return migration: general consideration

2.1 During the workshops a series of general points were raised which were concerned with how different migration trends should be understood and interpreted, whether in the context of out-migration from rural areas or return migration. A number of these points were had important practical implications for policy makers.

2.2 First, in her presentation Tialda Haartsen explained that academic researchers have drawn on life course models in order to understand the migration decisions of different individuals. She explained that some of the main aspects of our lives that are captured by such models include:

- **Career path:** as they mature people will move through stages such as: school pupil; college/university student; finding a job; changing jobs; promotion; retirement.
- **Household structure:** as they mature people will move through stages such as: being a child that lives with parents; a young adult that lives alone or with friends; living with a partner; getting married; having children and raising a family; or maybe divorce.
- **Household status:** dependent on others; moving from the family home; college/university accommodation; renting; buying a house; move to a bigger house.

These are aspects of life where we will experience a range of different situations during the course of our lives and decisions about where we choose to live can arise when moving from one life situation to another.

2.3 Haartsen added that research has tended to emphasize three periods in life as being particularly significant in terms of migration trends – periods where a combination of factors can prompt the notion of moving to live in a new location to become a more prominent consideration for a number of people:

- **Young adulthood** (from late teens to early twenties): the period of leaving school, choosing a university, leaving home and establishing life-long friendships.
- **Family formation** (from late twenties to early forties): a period of finding a partner and perhaps getting married, having children and raising a family, establishing a career - a period of 'settling down'.
- **Retirement** (from late fifties to mid-seventies): a period where we stop working and consider our options for the rest of our lives.

Significantly, the practical relevance of using life course models to understand and interpret migration trends was a theme that arose on several occasions during the workshops, when considering the combination of factors that can motivate return migration (see Section 6).

2.4 Second, Annett Steinführer drew attention to important definitional issues that need to be considered when discussing return migration. She argued that we should avoid treating decisions to return to a rural area as one general category, because different levels or types of return are possible, and the significance of these different movements can vary. She presented a typology which divided examples of return migration into four different categories:

- Return to a rural area
- Return to the county or region of birth
- Return to the hometown or village
- Return to the family home

2.5 Steinführer went on to explain that similar considerations also apply when discussing decisions to stay to live and work in rural areas. Once again, we need to be careful not to treat staying as one general category as different levels or types of staying are also possible:

- Stay in a rural area
- Remaining in the county or region of birth
- Staying in the hometown or village
- Staying in the family home

2.6 Third, during their presentation Caitríona Ni Laoire and Rosie Alexander argued that we need to be careful not to discuss young people's migration trends as a clear binary division between 'staying' or 'leaving'. In a mobile age, the picture will often be more complicated. For example, those who stay after leaving school or college will not necessarily stay for the rest of their lives. Equally, those who leave – whether to go to university, find a job etc. – do not necessarily stay away forever. Furthermore, if some of this latter group happen to return in due course, it cannot be assumed that it will be permanent. In general, when developing interventions that try to respond to rural emigration it is necessary to be aware of these types of trends.

### **3 The attitudes of young people regarding life in rural Wales**

3.1 During the first workshop Mike Woods outlined some of the main findings arising from a survey of the attitudes of young people between the ages of 14 and 25 who live in rural Wales. The survey was conducted online between July and September 2021, with participants recruited through a social media campaign. A total of 1056 responses were received. A detailed outline of the results of the survey can be found in the report [Young People in Rural Wales](#) by Mike Woods and Patrick Utz (2022).

3.2 The following are among some of the main findings arising from the survey's general (aggregate) data:

- 75% of young people enjoy living in rural Wales.
- Only 22% of young people agree that employment opportunities in their local area are good and 61% are concerned about being able to find a suitable job.

- 59% of young people are concerned about being able to afford to buy a house in their local area.
- Only 26% of young people agree that public services in their local area meet their needs.
- Only 27% of young people agree that social and cultural opportunities in their local area are good.
- 81% of young people think that they will need to move away from their local area for education, training or work.
- Only 18% of young people anticipate that they will continue living in their local area over the next five years; 42% expect to move outside Wales in this period.

3.3 Given the objectives of the ARFOR programme, it is significant that a detailed analysis of survey's results suggests that language is a factor may shape young people's attitudes towards the idea of living in more rural areas of Wales.

3.4 According to the survey, first language Welsh speakers tend to be more positive than young people as a whole about life in their rural area, especially about public services and social or cultural opportunities, and they are more likely to want to continue living in their local area or to return if they move away. Young people who do not speak Welsh tend to be more dissatisfied with the social, cultural and employment opportunities available in rural Wales. Also, they are less likely to want to return to their local area if they were to move away.

3.5 The results of the survey also suggest that there is a clear difference between the opinions and expectations of first language Welsh speakers compared to fluent speakers who learned the language at school, especially in relation to social or cultural opportunities and employment opportunities in their rural area. Woods noted that this suggests that the nature of a person's attachment to the Welsh language (e.g. cultural identity or the language medium of the family) may be more significant than just the basic ability to use the language.

3.6 Although the survey's results suggests that Welsh speakers tend to be more positive about life in a rural area, it should be noted that most respondents who were first language Welsh speakers think they will need to move from their local area to find employment, education or somewhere to live, with a third of them anticipating that they will move outside of Wales during the next five years.

3.7 Another striking feature of the survey's results was the fact that young women tend to be more dissatisfied than young men with the employment opportunities or the social and cultural opportunities available in their local area, and slightly more likely to consider that they will need to move away for education, training or employment. Significantly, this finding from Mike Woods' research supported a theme that arose as part of Cairíona Ni Laoire's earlier research on out-migration and return trends in the west of Ireland during the first decade of the twenty-first century. In that case there was also evidence that the desire to move away was, on the whole, stronger among girls than boys.

## 4 Typologies summarising attitudes to migration among young people

4.1 During the first workshop, methods of dividing young people from Wales into different categories based on their attitudes or expectations regarding migration were presented and it was suggested that these typologies could be used to support policy interventions that seek to respond to emigration.

4.2 Mike Woods explained that by conducting further analysis of the results of the survey focusing on the attitudes of young people aged between 14 and 25 it was possible to divide young people in rural Wales into three different groups:

- **Likely Stayers:** This is a group who wish to continue living in their local area throughout their lives and are less likely to feel the need to move away to for education, work or to find somewhere to live. This cohort represented approximately one in ten of the young people who responded to the survey. Furthermore, compared to all survey respondents there was a disproportionate number of boys or young men in this cohort and they were approximately twice as likely to be in work rather than in education.
- **Intending leavers:** This is a group that clearly wants to leave their local area, with two out of three of them wanting to move to live in a big town or city. This cohort represented around half of the young people who responded to the survey. In comparison to all survey respondents, school or college students were overrepresented in this group, but significantly, first language Welsh speakers were underrepresented. Around a third of the group wished to leave their local area permanently, but most were prepared to consider moving back in due course, including around a third who expressed a specific desire to do so.
- **Potential stayers:** This is a group who would prefer to stay in their local area but believe they will need to move away to for education, work or to find somewhere to live. Some of this cohort predicted that they would stay in their local area in the short term, but most assumed that they would leave within the next five years. However, almost all of them hoped to be able to return to their local area later in life. More than two out of five of all respondents to the survey belonged to the 'potential stayers' group and in comparison to the sample as a whole, first language Welsh speakers and individuals who are in work were overrepresented.

4.3 In terms of policy interventions that seek to respond to emigration in Wales, Mike Woods argued that those who belong to the 'potential stayers' group are a key cohort to target. If the survey sample was relatively representative of young people in rural Wales as a whole, he explained that it can be estimated that there are around 41,000 young people in total who can be defined as 'potential stayers'. Moreover, he argued that the size of this group suggests that there is a significant cohort of young people who would be prepared to consider staying in their local area or to return in due course if appropriate conditions were created. Further discussion of the implications of this

finding can be found in the report [Young People in Rural Wales](#) by Mike Woods and Patrick Utz (2022).

- 4.4 In another presentation, Elen Bonner explained that one of the objectives of her doctoral research has been to develop a typology that could help analyse and understand the migration decisions of young Welsh speakers. This research was based on detailed interviews with 60 Welsh speakers aged 18-40 who grew up in Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd and Anglesey (15 from each county). Among those included in the sample some had decided to stay in where they were brought up (12), some had left (25) and some had decided to return after a period living elsewhere (23).
- 4.5 Elen Bonner explained that analysis of data resulting from the research interviews showed that the three groups in her sample – the stayers, the leavers and the returnees – could be divided into a series of further categories and that this helps to convey the different types of factors that can influence people's decisions to either to stay where they were brought up, to move away, or to return in due course – but also the way in which different types of considerations can be dominant to different individuals.

<b>The Stayers</b>	<b>The Leavers</b>	<b>The Returners</b>
The Rooted	The Cosmopolitan	The Fragile
The Faithful	The Citizens	The Pragmatic
The Strategic	The Unwilling	The Family Raising Returnees
Y Apathetic	The Wanderers	The Opportunists
The Frustrated	The Educationally Ambitious	The Homesick
The Uncertain	The Careerists	The In Touch
	The Lonely	
	The Transplanted	
	The Contented Migrants	
	The Influential	

- 4.6 This typology develops on an earlier version presented by [Gordon B. Cooke a Bui K. Petersen \(2019\)](#) based on research among young people who grew up on rural islands in Ireland, Newfoundland, the Faroe Islands and Shetland. Elen Bonner explained that one of her objectives when refining and modifying the typology based on her own research was to ensure that it responded better to the way in which considerations relating to the Welsh language could influence the migration decisions of young people that had grown up in Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd or Anglesey. In this regard, it was significant that the Welsh language is an element that seems important to some groups in the typology – e.g. 'The Rooted' and 'The Family Raising Returnees'. However, she emphasized that the Welsh language was not a primary consideration for everyone, even though everyone in the sample were Welsh speakers.

## **5. Factors that influence out-migration**

- 5.1 As expected, several of the workshop presentations offered an analysis of the factors that can influence either decisions to move away from rural areas or decisions to move back at a later point. This section will give an overview of discussions that focused on the factors that can motivate out-migration, before turning to discuss return migration in the next section.
- 5.2 Overall, a key conclusion emphasized by several of the contributors was that out-migration among young people is a phenomenon that is driven by a range of different factors that cut across each other. This means that we should avoid discussing out-migration, or developing policy interventions that seek to respond to it, by assuming that it is possible to focus on one or two key factors.
- 5.3 Building on this, another important conclusion evident in several contributions was the importance of not assuming that out-migration is a phenomenon that is always driven by economic considerations related to jobs, career, and salary. This was a key conclusion in the research of Elen Bonner and Lowri Cunnington Wynn – both of whom have conducted qualitative studies analysing the factors that have influenced the migration decisions of young Welsh speakers. According to Elen Bonner, economic factors will be an important consideration for some individuals, but for others wider social considerations will be more influential. Lowri Cunnington Wynn explained that the findings of her research suggest that young people's choices will depend significantly on their sense of belonging to their home area.
- 5.4 These findings were echoed in the research of Rosie Alexander, who has studied the migration decisions of young people who grew up on the islands of Orkney and Shetland in the north of Scotland. Again, it was emphasized that we should be careful not to oversimplify our understanding of out-migration by treating it as a phenomenon mainly related to jobs and career opportunities. Rosie Alexander explained that research has suggests that the link between higher education and emigration is often more significant than the link with the availability of jobs. Furthermore, she explained that her doctoral research with young people from the northern islands of Scotland supported this conclusion – i.e. that the choice of university course appeared to be a more prominent influence than employment opportunities at the point that the original decision to move away was taken. To reinforce this point, she drew attention to how many of the young interviewees in her research sample tended to use expressions such as 'moving away' and 'moving to university' interchangeably, as if synonymous with each other.
- 5.5 On a slightly different track, during her presentation Tialda Haartsen drew attention to how general social assumptions or narratives can influence young people's migration decisions as much as specific material or environmental factors, such as education opportunities, jobs or leisure facilities. She referred to how researchers in the field of migration and youth studies have developed a specific concept – the mobility imperative – to capture and express the way in which contemporary societies tend to assume that young people need to 'to move away' in order to be successful – i.e. that moving to a

larger, urban area is synonymous with 'success' and that staying in the area where one was raised reflects 'failure' or a 'lack of ambition'.

## 6. Factors that influence return migration

6.1 As in the case out-migration, a key conclusion that arose when turning to consider factors that may motivate return migration was the need to recognize that it is a process that can be influenced by a range of complex factors.

6.2 Tialda Haartsen discussed a previous research project that sought to analyse what motivates young adults to return to live in areas where they were born and brought up and she explained that a key finding was the need to recognize that there are different types of 'returnees'. This project was based on a study of the motivations of 200 young people from the Netherlands, aged 18-30, who had returned to live in their home regions. The findings highlighted that different types of considerations had been significant for different groups and that these could be divided into four general categories:

- **Social considerations:** being close to certain circles of friends or social networks.
- **Practical considerations:** taking advantage of a specific employment opportunity.
- **Family considerations:** maintaining contact with the family, and particularly parents, either in order to get help in raising children or in order to fulfil care duties.
- **Personal considerations:** relates to personal matters such as being close to a partner.

6.3 The need to avoid oversimplifying our understanding of return migration was also an argument advanced by Caitríona Ni Laoire based on her detailed research analyzing the motivations of those who returned to rural areas in the west Ireland during the first decade of the twenty-first century. She explained that this research had focused on understanding the types of personal narratives developed by these people to explain their decisions to return.

6.4 While acknowledging the variety of factors that were identified as part of this research, Caitríona Ni Laoire explained that one prominent theme in the accounts of a significant number of her interviewees was the significance of the idea of returning to the west in order to 'settle to down' – i.e. that someone has reached a point where they are ready to consider a different kind of life. Usually, this was linked to things such as being in a stable relationship, being married or having started raising a family. Building on this, many of Ni Laoire's interviewees also explained and justified their decisions to return as a matter of ensuring a closer relationship with parents and family, with considerations such as help with childcare often linked to this as well. In other cases, Ni Laoire explained that the general idea of returning to the west in order to 'settle' would be linked to things like taking advantage of the opportunity to build a dream home, often on the basis of capital saved while working somewhere else.

- 6.5 Significantly, the idea of returning to 'settle down' also arose as an important theme in Rosie Alexander's research. In this case, it was seen that some of the young people who had migrated from the islands of Orkney and Shetland in order to go to university predicted that they would be ready to consider moving back home when they were ready to 'settle down', and that this was usually linked to being in a stable relationship and having children. Rosie Alexander noted that another way of interpreting this type of comment was that the young people were suggesting that they would be prepared to consider returning once they felt they had had enough experience of life in other locations.
- 6.6 The significance of the general idea of 'settling down' as part of the combination of factors that can motivate a decision to return one's home region is underlined by the fact that research also suggests that the early 30s is a period where people are more likely to consider such a change. This was a conclusion noted by Annett Steinführer, based on her research into out-migration and return patterns in the Hartz region in the German state of Lower Saxony. Similarly, Caitríona Ni Laoire's research in Ireland demonstrated that the early thirties was a particularly significant period for considering a return to live in a rural area. Indeed, Ni Laoire explained that her research not only suggests that younger groups are less likely to be ready to consider returning, but also that those who do – e.g. those in their early twenties – are less likely to see the move back as permanent. As a result, it was suggested that this group should not be prioritized when trying to plan policy interventions that seek to respond to out-migration.
- 6.7 Overall, research demonstrating that return migration is a consideration that becomes more prominent at certain points during the course of an individual's life reminds us why it could be beneficial to use life course models (see Section 1) as a guide when trying to develop policy interventions that seek to respond to emigration.
- 6.8 As part of her presentation Caitríona Ni Laoire also addressed the extent to which economic considerations linked to employment, career or salary should be prioritized when discussing factors that may encourage return migration. Given the priorities of the ARFOR programme, it was significant that the findings of her research in Ireland questioned the degree in which such economic factors were the main drivers of decisions to move back to the west. She explained that other factors – especially those related to family life, creating a home and setting down roots – tended to be more prominent when her interviewees explained their decisions to return. She emphasized that economic factors were not irrelevant in this regard, but that they seemed to operate more as background considerations. For example, she explained that the end of the 1990s and the early part of the twenty-first century was a period of economic prosperity in Ireland – the period of the Celtic Tiger – and one of the consequences was to create a general sense of hope and opportunity. This was a context which meant that returning to the west could seem more practical to many, but the decision to do so did not have to be linked to the availability of a specific job.
- 6.9 Based on these findings, Caitríona Ni Laoire observed that it is significant that previous evaluations of the ARFOR program have highlighted the range of factors, apart from jobs, that can influence out-migration and return trends. She explained that she would

concur with this view and argued that in seeking to respond to out-migration it would be wise to avoid relying on a strategy that only focuses on enterprise and creating more and better jobs.

## **7. Giving due consideration to the motivations of 'stayers'**

- 7.1 During the second workshop Annett Steinführer outlined the objectives of the [STAYin\(g\)Rural](#) research project – an ongoing project based on collaboration between Queens University Belfast, the University of Groningen and the Thünen Institute for Rural Affairs. She explained that academic research in areas such as geography, as well as policy discussions, have tended to focus on analysing the factors that motivate decisions to migrate away from rural areas, or decisions to return at a later point. As a result, according to Steinführer, there has been a tendency to ignore those who decide to stay – this group is treated as a 'residual category' and their motives, aspirations or priorities have not received the same attention. The objective of the [STAYin\(g\)Rural](#) project is to address this by focusing on 'rural stayers' as a distinct group, thus helping to develop a better understanding of how and why people decide to stay in a rural area.
- 7.2 While discussing the research conducted by the [STAYin\(g\)Rural](#) project, Annett Steinführer identified two points which were particularly relevant given the objectives of the ARFOR programme. First, she argued that giving due consideration to 'stayers' as part of discussions about the future of rural societies is important as we need to be careful not to depict this group as having either 'failed' or been 'left behind'. Ideas like this are already deeply rooted in many contemporary societies (see 5.5 above for further discussion). However, care should be taken not to reinforce them further by giving the impression that the only priority is to prevent a 'brain drain' by attracting back the 'talented' or 'adventurous' that have moved elsewhere.
- 7.3 Secondly, Annett Steinführer explained that care should be taken not to interpret a decision to stay in a rural area as something that happens once. Instead, Steinführer argued that the decision to stay should be interpreted as something that is repeated on several occasions during the course of an individual's life, for example when moving out from the family home, when selecting a university course, when looking for work, when starting a family, when retiring etc. As a result, the decision to stay in a rural area can be informed by a range of factors at different points in our lives.
- 7.4 Annett Steinführer's emphasis on the need to give due consideration to 'stayers' as part of discussions regarding the future of rural societies was echoed in other presentations. During the first workshop Lowri Cunningham Wynn argued that more should be done to counter the assumption that stayers are a group that has been 'left behind' by framing the decision to stay as a deliberate one that reflects an attachment to a particular place or community and a desire to contribute to its future. This argument was based on the results of a survey looking at the attitudes of residents of the Bro Ffestiniog area, carried out jointly by Cwmni Bro<sup>1</sup> and the University of Manchester, alongside consideration of

---

<sup>1</sup> A network of 14 social enterprises located in the Bro Ffestiniog area. Cwmni Bro facilitates cooperation between these enterprises with parts of the private sector and public sector that is fundamental to the area's foundational economy.

the work of the Italian anthropologist, Vito Teti, who has interpreted the process of staying in a rural community based on the concept of Restanza, defined as follows:

'The idea of "Restanza" implies both the verb to stay and the noun resilience. Restanza means choosing to stay in a place in a conscious, active and proactive way by actively guarding it, being aware of the past while enhancing what remains, with an impulse towards the future where a new community is possible' ([Gaudio, 2021](#)).

Cunnington Wynn argued that viewing decisions to stay living in rural areas from the perspective of Restanza can help to highlight how such decisions will often reflect deeper considerations than just jobs or salary levels. If the sense of Restanza in an area is strong, she argued that policy interventions that seek to support rural communities should be based on objectives that capture more than just a desire to raise GVA levels per capita. More attention should also be given to the significance of factors such as access to basic services and the nature of an area's social infrastructure – factors that can be just as important as income when assessing satisfaction and quality of life in rural communities.

## 8. Select bibliography

Alexander, Rosie (2021). 'Young people, out-migration and Scottish islands: surveying the landscape' In Kathryn Burnett, Ray Burnett, a Mike Danson (eds), *Scotland and Islandness: Explorations in Community, Economy and Culture* (Oxford: Peter Lang), 143-168.

Cooke, Gordon B. and Petersen, Bui K. (2019). 'A Typology of the Employment-Education-Location Challenges Facing Rural Island Youth'. *Island Studies Journal*, 14 (1): 101-124

Cunnington Wynn, Lowri (2019). 'Beth yw'r Ots Gennyf fi am Gymru? Astudiaeth o Allfudiaeth a Dyheadau Pobl Ifanc o'r Broydd Cymraeg', *Gwerddon*, 28 (13): 43-63.

Ferguson, Sara, Haartsen, Tialda, Steinführer, Annett, and Catney, Gemma (2023). 'The role of non-resident family ties in rural staying'. *Population, Space and Place*.

Haartsen, Tialda and Thissen, Frans (2014). 'The success–failure dichotomy revisited: young adults' motives to return to their rural home region'. *Children's Geographies*, 12 (1): 87-101

Mærsk, Eva, Thuesen, Annette Aagaard and Haartsen, Tialda (2023). 'Symbolic mobility capital to fight the social stigma of staying: how young adults re-imagine narratives of 'leaving' during higher education'. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 26 (2): 153-169.

Ni Laoire, Caitriona (2007) 'The 'green, green grass of home'? Return migration to rural Ireland'. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 23 :332-344.

Ni Laoire, Caitriona (2008). "Settling back'? A biographical and life-course perspective on Ireland's recent return migration'. *Irish Geography*, 41 (2):195-210.

Woods, Mike and Utz, Patrick (2022). *Young People in Rural Wales*. Aberystwyth: Aberystwyth University.



Canolfan Gwleidyddiaeth a Chymdeithas Cymru  
Centre for Welsh Politics and Society

## ARFOR, out-migration and the Welsh language

11.00-15.30 Friday 3 November 2023  
Medrus Centre, Aberystwyth University

### Workshop programme

- 10.30-11.00 Tea and coffee
- 11:00-11:05 Welcome  
Dr Huw Lewis, Aberystwyth University
- 11:05-11:30 ARFOR and out-migration: setting the context,  
Dr Huw Lloyd-Williams, Wavehill
- 11:30-12:00 The Young People in Rural Wales Survey: key findings  
Professor Mike Woods, Aberystwyth University
- 12:00-13:00 Out-migration and the Welsh language: recent research  
  
A typology of factors influencing the migration choices of Welsh speakers  
Elen Bonner, Bangor University  
  
Out-migration and the aspirations of young people from Welsh-speaking  
areas, Dr Lowri Cunningham-Wynn, Aberystwyth University
- 13:00-13:45 Lunch
- 13:45-14:45 Group discussion: identifying findings to support the work of ARFOR 2  
Llwyddo'n Lleol  
Enterprising Communities  
ARFOR Challenge Fund
- 14:45-15:00: Concluding discussions
- 15:00-15:30 Tea and coffee



**ARFOR**  
CREU GWAITH - CEFNOGI'R IAITH

**wavehill**

Social and economic research  
Ymchwil cymdeithasol ac economaidd



Canolfan Gwleidyddiaeth a Chymdeithas Cymru  
Centre for Welsh Politics and Society

## To stay, migrate or return? Placing the Welsh experience in a comparative context

12.30-14.30 (GMT) / 13.30-.15.30 CET  
Friday 10 November  
Online workshop to be held on MS Teams

- 12.30-12.35 Welcome and introductions, Dr Elin Royles, Aberystwyth University
- 12.35-12.45 ARFOR and migration: setting the context, Dr Huw Lewis, Aberystwyth University
- 12.45-13.30 Other Celtic contexts:
- Dr Caitríona Ni Laoire, University College Cork
  - Dr Rosie Alexander, University of the West of Scotland
- 13.30-13.40 Break
- 13.40-14.25 Other European experiences:
- Professor Tialda Haartsen, Groningen University
  - Dr Annett Steinführer, Thünen Institute of Rural Studies, Braunschweig
- 14.25-14.30 Concluding remarks, Dr Elin Royles, Aberystwyth University



**ARFOR**  
CREU GWAITH - CEFNOGI'R IAITH

**wavehill**  
Social and economic research  
Ymchwil cymdeithasol ac economaidd