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## BORE DA, WALES

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**Abstract:** The article deals with longlife learning in Wales, the Welsh language and culture and the personal experience of the author from her visit to this beautiful country. Wales was put under the rule of the English already in the Early Middle Ages but it is very different from England and the English. The Welsh are known for their deep love of their home, for their love of freedom, their love of singing and poetry. Cultural nationalism connected with the Welsh language is very strong.

**Key words:** longlife learning, the Welsh language, culture, nationalism

### Introduction

Bore da – these were the first words we, participants of a study visit to Cardiff in Wales organized by CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), heard when we met at our first seminar in the morning. None of us could speak Welsh but we understood that it was a kind of greeting. It really was. Bore da means good morning in English. Another interesting moment came when all of us were to introduce ourselves. The participant from Austria said that he was very happy to be there because he had never before been to England. He was immediately corrected by Mr. Jones (a typical Welsh surname), one of the organizers of the seminar, that even now he was not in England but in Wales, which is really not the same. As a teacher of British studies I was aware of this difference but I could see that not all the other participants from different European countries were. Wales is really very different from England and the Welsh do not like being mistaken for the English.

### Longlife learning in Wales

First, it is important to explain who and why participated in this study visit which took place in Cardiff in November 2011. The ten participants were representatives of trade unions in their countries. The main purpose of our study visit was to observe and learn from the experience of Welsh trade unionists in the field of longlife learning. Why the Welsh trade unions? It is a generally known fact that the trade unions movement started in England during the industrial revolution (the 1760s – 1840s) that impoverished a lot of people and they started “to combine“ themselves in order to protect their rights. One would expect that even today the English trade unions are the strongest in the world, but we could see that in many aspects it is not the case any more. Nowadays, the whole world experiences economic, political and financial crisis. The countries of the European Union try to find out the best solutions to this problem. And that is also why representatives of trade unions in these countries co-operate and try to come with some suggestions how to improve this situation. In many countries there are a lot of unemployed people, mainly the unemployment of the young generation is appalling (in many countries including Slovakia it is more than 20%). Longlife learning is one of the keys how these people could find better chances to get a proper job. Currently, there is a labour government in Wales and we were fascinated when we learnt how closely this government co-operates with the Welsh Trade Unions Congress (WTUC) in the field of education. WTUC established so called WULF (Welsh Unions Learning Fund), which is subsidised by the Welsh government with 1,5 mil. pounds a year. As the money comes from

public sources, everybody, not only trade unionists, are entitled to take part in lifelong learning programme. Trade union learning representatives who work in various enterprises where the trade unions are allowed and acknowledged, and in most of them they are, organize this learning programme. The only condition to get the money – as much as 90,000 pounds, is to prepare a good project. This project can cover whatever field – e.g. working with computers, learning the Excel programme, studying foreign languages, etc. Very popular is also learning the Welsh language. This programme is also aimed at workers who due to different reasons did not have enough chances to properly finish their basic education and cannot sufficiently read and write. We visited the national call centre of Tesco in Cardiff where we discussed not only with trade unions learning representatives but also with several participants of these programmes. All of them were very satisfied with their further schooling because they felt that in case of losing their present job they would have better chances to find a new one.

Programmes of lifelong learning exist in various forms in other countries as well, but in none of them, not even in England, there is such a co-operation between trade unions and government. We also had a chance to visit the Welsh Senned (Senate) building and discuss the problems of education in general with the Deputy Minister for Skills for the Welsh Government.

In the last two days of our visit we took part in the national conference of Union learning representatives where we informed the participants about our countries educational system and lifelong learning programmes. There we could see how proud the Welsh are about being Welsh. One of the speakers was Jamie Baulch. He is one of the silver medal olympic games winners (British team) from Atlanta in the USA in 1996 (heats 400m). Altogether he won 11 medals from olympic games, world and European championships. He wrote a little book about his life and career. It is written in a very simple style and language and is intended for those who are trying to improve their skills in reading. He told us his life story. He was born to a young unmarried English girl and a black Jamaican student and then, when he was only three-months old, he was adopted by a Welsh family. Although his background is very interesting, he stressed several times that he had always been and is Welsh and he is very proud of it. His Welsh family gave him everything he needed, love, brothers and sisters, and education. That is why he wants to support young people and also those who did not have a very good start into their lives.

### *Traditional culture at present*

In our free time we had a chance to visit some of the most important historical sights in Cardiff. One of them was Cardiff Castle. Its oldest part was built by the Normans in the 11th century and the castle is situated in the very centre of the city. The visit to it was very interesting because we could learn about the development of the country and its most important historical events and persons.

Another very interesting place where you can learn about the history and development of the country, but also about traditional crafts and culture, is the National Museum. Very interesting was also a visit to St. Fagan's Museum which is the best known traditional museum in Wales. It lies on the side of Fagan's Castle in Cardiff and is now an open air museum. The castle was donated to the people of Wales by Earl of Plymouth.

Forty traditional old buildings characterize different periods of Welsh history. The most often visited parts of the museum are three circular buildings which were built following the plans of a Celtic village. The archeological remains in Gwybedd Flintshire show how a house of Iron-Age people was built. There is also a section of traditional folk costumes. Besides the exhibition of these typical costumes a visitor can admire the mediaeval times

there. The most attractive part of the museum is an agricultural farm where real farmers offer you a real picture of farming and visitors can see there also many kinds of domestic animals as well as skilled craftsmen who present their work in the same way as it was done centuries ago.

Another important characteristic feature of the Welsh life and culture is their festivals. The most important of them is the National Eisteddfod which is the oldest celebration of traditional Welsh culture. For the first time it was held in the 12th century. Every year the visitors can enjoy various performances of poetry, theatre, dance, music, choral singing, visual arts and eclectic culture. The festival takes place in a different part of the country every year so that the traditional culture can penetrate into each corner of Wales.

At present, the people coming from various parts of social life create a team named The Druids Order. These people are famous Welsh musicians, artists, representatives of religious and political societies and they regulate the festival programmes. In order to maintain the ancient traditions all the speeches, songs, ballads and other performances are conducted in Welsh. In the last decades there have occurred some suggestions to run the festival also in English, but the Welsh authorities are unwilling to accept these proposals because their effort is to keep this bard competition as the highest event of the Welsh traditional culture. The presentation of the bards should be and should remain in Welsh. Thus this outstanding festival is a great opportunity mainly for young people to learn, use and support the Welsh language.

### The Welsh language

The Welsh language, called Cymraeg, is regarded to be one of the oldest languages in Europe. Its origin can be found in the branch of Indo-European and Celtic languages and it was brought to the British Isles by Celtic invaders between the 8th – 5th centuries BC. Many people associate Welsh with Wales but many historical sources say that this language was spoken not only in Wales but also in many other parts of Britain – e.g. in northern England and Scotland. The word Welsh is of Germanic origin. It means a foreigner because when Anglo-Saxons arrived in the 5th century they pushed the original people to the north and to the west and called their country Waellas – the country of foreigners. The Celtic language spoken in Ireland and Scotland was called Goidelic (named after the Celtic tribe – Goidels). In Wales and other parts of Britain Brythonic was used (named after another Celtic tribe – the Brythons). (History and Status of the Welsh language, 2011, Veselý, 1985, MacDowall, 1991)

During the period of the Roman invasion (43 AD – 409) the Brythonic language resisted to the influence of Latin, although many Latin words became a part of the language.

When the Anglo-Saxons arrived, the Celts of south-west Britain and Cambria (today Wales) were isolated one from another. Thus, the Welsh language developed from the Brythonic language that was spoken in Wales, Cornwall, Brittany and Cambria.

The Welsh language keeps changing as any other language in the world. Some authors, e.g. Jones claim that one can regard Welsh as an English dialect, which would be a mistake, because an original Welsh has a completely different vocabulary. He adds that one can be led to the wrong conclusion that Welsh is just an English dialect because some Welsh speakers use many English words when speaking in Welsh, but this is not right. He summarizes that the mixture of Welsh and English is sometimes called Wenglish, consequently, thanks to the great influence of the English language on its Welsh counterpart, one can hardly find a person who can speak in pure original Welsh. Luckily, one can hear the pure equivalent of Welsh in the Welsh colony in Patagonia, Argentina. (Jones In: History and Status of the Welsh language, 2011)

The 1991 census states that there were 508,000 people able to speak Welsh. The last census results from 2001 indicate a positive step forward for Welsh as the number of its speakers was higher than the previous results. There were 582,368 Welsh speakers. Different parts of the country have a different percentage of users. More people can speak Welsh in the western part of the country than in the East.

The last decades have brought about a lot of positive changes in fostering the Welsh language. Welsh schools started to teach Welsh as a compulsory subject and there is a slight increase in the number of students who use Welsh as the main medium of study and at present the highest number of Welsh speakers is among children who even often teach their parents to speak Welsh. It is mainly the case in mixed marriages where one parent is English and the other one Welsh.

In 1982 a Welsh television channel was established. The national Welsh Radio Cymru presents their broadcasting in the national language, hundreds of books, periodicals and regional newspapers are published in Welsh. In 1993 The Welsh Language Act was passed. It can be regarded as a crucial saving point in the history of the Welsh language because it made the Welsh language equal with the English language in the public life and established the Welsh Language Board in order to protect, promote and preserve one of the oldest European languages.

## Conclusion

The Welsh people are very friendly, hard working and closely associated with their country and language. Nowhere else in Britain traditional crafts, customs and the Celtic mother tongue are defended and promoted as much as in Wales. This country has always maintained its historical independence, mystical character and individuality.

The uniqueness and identity of Wales became a problem in the last decades of the 20th century. That is why certain political and cultural groups developed a mass movement. The main objective was the separation of the Welsh identity from the British. The national awareness in the field of politics, traditional culture, language and literature has strengthened. Without any doubt – the Welsh are different from the English and Wales is really not England. Da boch chi, Wales. (Good bye, Wales.)

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