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## Mapping the Growth of the Welsh Food Bank Landscape 1998-2015

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# **Mapping the Growth of the Welsh Food Bank Landscape 1998-2015**

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## **Introduction**

Food banks have become an increasingly important area of social policy discourse and an increasingly significant area of debate within UK food security literature especially in regards to health and well-being. This has been facilitated through a rising acknowledgement within the academic community (Riches, 1992 & 1997; Lambie-Mumford and Dowler, 2014), civil and political society such as the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, and colourfully detailed within popular media discourse. With the predominance of austerity-targeted benefit reductions and benefit sanctions, coupled with the growth of a zero-hour contract neoliberal marketplace many are trapped in a 'low pay - no pay' circular economy. Those on a low income from both the non-working and the lower paid families have faced, and are still coping with tough times (Lambie-Mumford and Dowler, 2015).

The growth of food poverty in the UK and the methods by which people seek to source food in times of crisis, has led to the growth of an emergency food sector based on referral and embodied in the form of food poverty alleviation services known as 'food banks'. Drawing on a voluntary charitable sector delivering public sector services termed politically as The Big Society; food banks are currently organised through two different mechanisms; the national charitable organisation, the Trussell Trust and a range of charitable public and voluntary sector networks identified as 'independent' food banks (independent of the Trussell Trust).

The Trussell Trust have frequently published the rising statistics surrounding numbers of food bank users which increasingly over time has obviated their activity and spread, their quantification of the needs for such services have to date been the only information figures available for the media, civil society, academia and politicians. The Trust is involved closely in geographically plotting the locations of their food banks across the country. From this current independent study, however, it is estimated that the independent sector of food banks may

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outnumber those of the Trussell Trust. Due to a lack of resourcing of gathering information and detailed knowledge as to their locations, quantitative evidence on independent banks is not generally featured in media reporting, or available for debate within the Houses of Parliament. This study to date is the first addressing the true existence of the growth of the emergency food banking sector in Wales. There is currently no national body collating the geographical locations of independent food banks or information on how they deliver crisis food services. In this respect academic debate and media interest is based on a scant evidence base other than the data gathered by the charitable trust for its own purposes. Information on efficiency and equitability as well as on the experiences of food poor and the specifics of service delivery is yet to become available despite the growth and spread of such 'banks'.

This working paper seeks to clarify the true picture of the food bank resource within Wales by locating every food bank, associated with both the Trussell Trust and the Independent Sector, throughout Wales. This has emphasised the representing of how the food bank landscape has changed over time (January 1998 - July 2015). The location of all food banks are plotted using spatio-temporal methods with a geographical information system ascribed with the dates which they first opened. Further detail will be available on the nature of the users, service delivery volunteers and user experiences will form the body of the research thesis this paper is based upon expected to be completed early in 2017.

The process consisted of a desk study and telephone based research aimed at identifying the locations of all known food banks (and their providers) in Wales. Trussell Trust Foodbank locations were accessed through their collective website and postcode locations entered into a database created for use in ArcMap 10.2.2 (ESRI, 1999-2014).

Independent food bank location were obtained through generic Wales focussed web searches using geographical locations as markers. Detailed searches were conducted using each Local Authority lists across Wales as a base search criteria. In addition, a number of Trussell Trust Foodbanks participated in a questionnaire utilising their local knowledge of the existence and location of independent food banks.

A database of food banks - names of community groups and churches, for each geographical location was drawn up which then allowed for an in-depth search for food banks in the locality. Postcodes for each independent food bank were then taken from their associated web pages and added to the main database. This database has been fragmented to represent the opening

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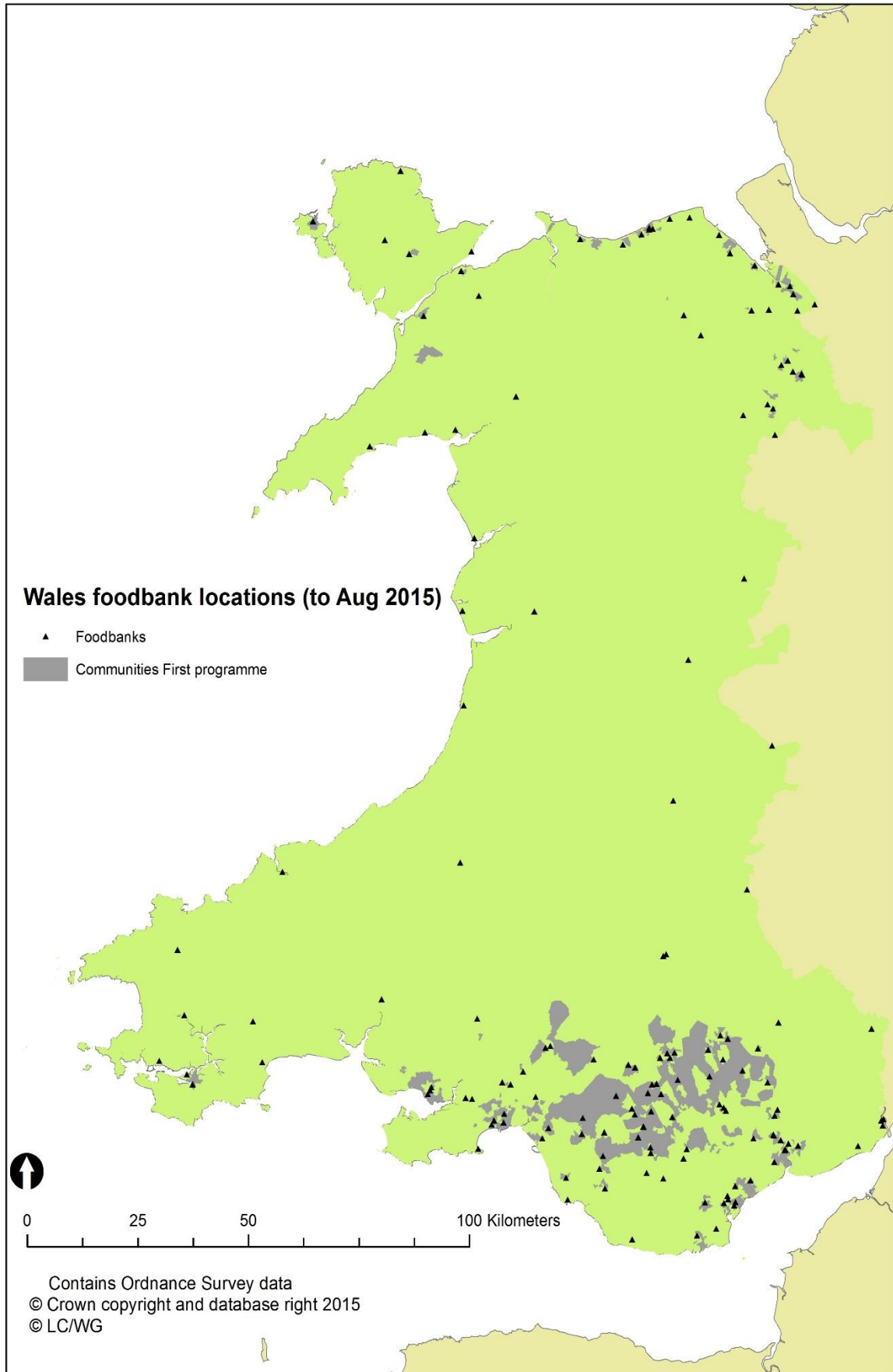
month and year of food banks between 1998 and 2015, selected using biannual intervals as a time series.

## **Findings**

The first food bank was opened in Newport, South Wales in January 1998 and was of a very small scale - street homeless, those with no recourse to public/private funds. Following this, no change occurred until June 2005 with the opening of Prestatyn food bank, again mainly dealing with homeless individuals and very much on a small-scale.

The Trussell Trust, founded in 1997, launched its network of UK food banks in 2004. The first of which in Wales was opened in Ebbw Vale in October 2008. Between October 2008 and December 2011, the Trussell Trust opened thirteen food banks and an additional twenty Satellite Distribution Centres all of which were centred in the South Wales region. The first six months of 2012 saw the network spread to North Wales with the opening of the Vale of Clywd/Denbighshire and Flintshire Foodbanks, followed by openings in Wrexham and Caernarfon by the end of the year. Between the beginning of 2013 and July 2015, the Trussell Trust have opened a further fourteen food banks, forty-five Satellite Distribution Centres and, five mobile food banks across Wales and are now represented by one or more food banks in each of Wales' Local Authorities. Mobile food banks have since closed. The case of rural food banks is particularly pertinent given the Geography of Wales. Scarcity of all year public transport and its cost in many more remote areas. An aspect which warrants much further study.

The independent sector seem to show a similar spread, as they too are represented in almost every Local Authority. Since the opening of the first food bank in Wales in 1998, the ten year period through to 2008 included the opening of just three more independent food banks, bringing the total number of food banks (independent and Trussell Trust) to five. By mid-2010, and coinciding with the end of the Labour Government, food bank numbers of both Trussell Trust (including Satellite) and independent stood at 16 (breakdown: 6 independent; 7 Trussell Trust and 3 Trussell Trust Satellites).

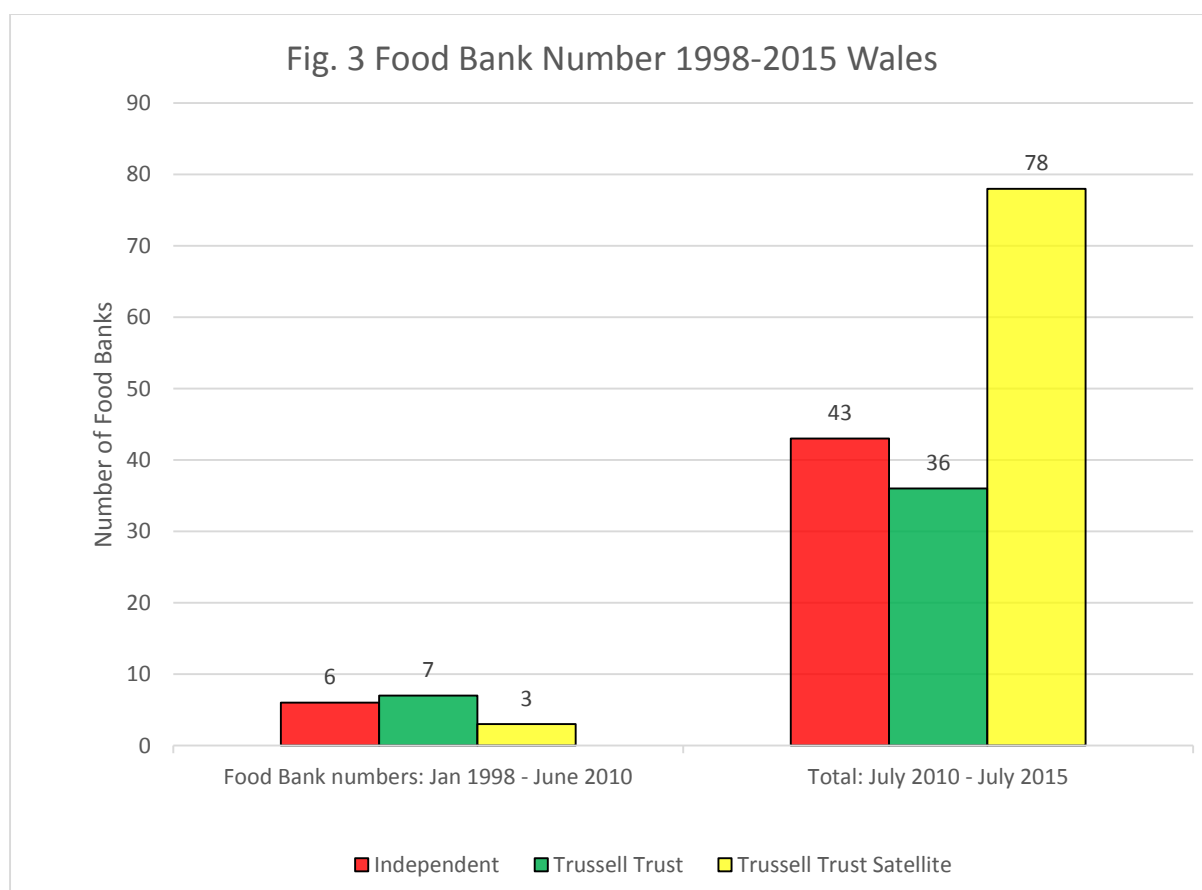


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Taking the five year period July 2010 - July 2015 food bank numbers increased rapidly from:

- 7 Trussell Trust Foodbanks (January 1998 – June 2010), increased to 36 during the period July 2010 – July 2015, a 414% increase.
- 3 Trussell Trust Satellite Foodbanks (January 1998 – June 2010), increased to 78 during the period July 2010 – July 2015, a significant 2,500% increase.
- 6 independent food banks during the period January 1998 – June 2010, increased to 43 during the period July 2010 – July 2015, a 616% increase

The same information is shown below in Fig. 3 graphically emphasise the increase with numbers of banks against time.



The longitudinal spread of the independent sector saw five food banks opening in 2011, ten food banks opening in both 2012 and 2013, with five additional independent food banks opening in 2014.

At the time of data gathering (July 2015) there were 157 food banks spread throughout Wales. The breakdown is as follows:

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- 43 Independent food banks
- 36 Trussell Trust Foodbanks
- 78 Satellite Trussell Trust Foodbanks

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Changes which have occurred throughout the timescale of the food bank landscape in Wales has seen three major food bank trends. Firstly, the closure of five mobile food banks in Flintshire plus the closure of two Trussell Trust Satellite food banks has reduced the overall Satellite number to 73. Secondly, the closure of one independent food bank associated with a local community action organisation in South West Wales has reduced the number of independents to 42. The third trend could be described as the most interesting as there have been two satellite banks that were originally associated with the Trussell Trust that have decided that they would like to change status and to become established independent food banks in their own right, bringing the number of independent food banks back up to 43. Further research is ongoing and will report on the rationale behind these changes.

The food banks counted and shown on the maps are those which have been identified as part of an extensive time laden research process incorporating local knowledge and networking across the voluntary and public sectors. However, it should be made clear that this may yet be an incomplete map, as some independent food banks have a very small, if at all any web presence and are only identifiable if they play a clear role within a localised community area. An example of such a bank could be a group that works to support refugees and asylum seekers, as they may also have some form of food parcel provision, yet there is no need to publicise this widely. Yet the voluntary capacity that is used to deliver such aid and support should not be underestimated or undervalued despite the difficulty of describing its organisation or locational base.

To conclude the research upon which this paper is based strongly suggests that the significant rise in reported food banks (of all types) described may in reality be substantially under-reported. This subsequently raises new questions regarding the true scale of the growing reality of the need for emergency food crisis services in Wales and in many other areas of the Countries of Britain along with the most responsible and sustainable means of delivering such aid.



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