

***What are the participatory experiences and potential barriers for young people living in a rural area of West Wales?***

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*Yr Athrofa: Education and Humanities*

**DECLARATION FORM**



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU  
**Y Drindod Dewi Sant**  
UNIVERSITY OF WALES  
**Trinity Saint David**

**Name of the Programme of Study: MA Youth Work and Social Education ETS  
Endorsed**

**Name of Student (Capital Letters): KAY MATHIAS**

**DECLARATION**

**I certify that the whole of this work is the result of my individual effort, and that all sources have been acknowledged.**

**Signed .....Kay Mathias..... (Student)**

**Date .....01/10/2023.....**

**DECLARATION**

**I am satisfied that this work is the result of the Student's effort.**

**Signed .....Darren O'Conner..... (Lecturer)**

**Date .....02/10/2023.....**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research project will look at the participatory experiences and potential barriers for young people living in a rural area of West Wales. Whilst working alongside young people, the paper will explore their perception of participatory experiences and identify barriers that may prevent them accessing those experiences within their rural location.

### **Aims**

The aim of this project is to gain a better understanding of how young people perceive participation through their own lived experiences. An exploration of existing studies has shown how rural living can affect young people and the way they experience participation. Highlighting potential barriers, studies have demonstrated how these can prevent young people from having the same participatory experiences as other young people. This study will work alongside a group of young people as they explore their local area and how it shapes their participatory experiences.

### **Methods**

Using a mixed method approach, the author will draw on quantitative data and qualitative data to identify common themes and potential barriers. Working side by side with young people to explore the data from surveys, interviews and discussions and analyse what it means to them.

### **Results**

Quantitative and qualitative data will be collated and analysed to find themes and consider what outcomes there are from the research.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion will demonstrate the value that young people bring when they are included in the participatory research and offer their perspective of how this has shaped the study and future studies.

## **1. INTRODUCTION 1000**

Participation amongst young people within the community is important for a multitude of factors including physical health and well-being, feeling part of a community and a wider support system for improving social skills. However, in rural areas it can be significantly more difficult for young people to engage in the community due to various barriers. The purpose of this study is to consider how young people living in a rural area of West Wales perceive their participatory experiences, exploring any potential barriers they may identify and how this can limit their ability to participate effectively (National Occupational Standards, 2008:p 64). Including young people's voice and opinions in decision making processes regarding their own communities is not only morally appropriate but can be viewed as a tactical and strategic step in working towards a society that must continue to advance and evolve rather than becoming more static. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) mandates that young people be consulted about issues that may impact them and suggests doing so by creating youth-oriented organisations like youth councils.

The Welsh Government (2010) defines participation for young people as a "right to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing actions that may affect them". Having had a career linked to engaging with children and young people over a span of 30 years, the researcher has had the opportunity to explore the relationship between a young person and different key adults in their lives. The researcher identified that the core value of youth work was to encourage participation in order for young people to develop social commitment, whilst giving them the opportunity to think critically and creatively with their responses to their wider environment (Code

of Occupational Ethics YSW, 2012). The researcher, explored a range of literature centred around participation, has identified that participation means different things to different people, including young people.

In 2010, Welsh Government completed a study ‘Children and Young People’s Participation in Wales’, identifying the benefits of participation through reviewed literature and visits that observed children and young people and included discussions with staff and other relevant adults (Welsh Government, 2010). The benefits outlined for children and young people was the enjoyment of decision making, and also an improvement in relationships, behaviour and learning new skills. Interestingly, the report found there were fewer benefits identified for parents and the wider community, prompting an acknowledgement that more work was needed to ensure a wider understanding of participation that filtered through to these groups (Welsh Government, 2010). This is something that resonated with the researcher, particularly as someone who lives in a rural location and was unclear whether young people, parents and the wider community understood the meaning of participation. This raised the question, what does participation look like in a rural location such as the researcher’s own locality and are there barriers that prevent young people from being part of the process as a whole?

The National Occupational Standards (2008) identify participation and active involvement as a main value of youth work, which promotes and invites social commitment in order for young people to be able to be critical about their own lives and environments.

“The level and nature of participation of children and young people can vary from ‘taking part’ or ‘being present at, to knowing that children’s and young people’s actions and views are taken into account and acted on”  
(Department of Health, 2001, cited in Boylan, 2009)

The researcher considered this was part of the problem, how could we extend the participatory experiences of children and young people if there is no clear understanding of how to do that?

Participation has had political and social connotations for a number of years, with two broad ideological approaches (Boylan, 2009). The consumer/managerial approach where people’s participation meant improvement of services and goods through feedback, showing that there is a choice and an opportunity to complain if it is not right, and the democratic approach which considers that the power of people can increase if it comes from self-advocacy and experience. (Boylan, 2009). Models such as Hart’s ladder of participation (Hart, 1992) and Shier’s (2001) pathway of participation were identified as means to consider the young person within the process. However Heath et al (2009:70) as cited in Bradford and Cullen (2012:p.19) argued that if a group of young people are specifically chosen, then their views throughout the active research process might be seen as the opinion of all young people. It is with that in mind that the researcher considered the importance of being specific about the area of study and through using mixed methods of data collection, a range of views and opinions. would be captured. Studies that draw on data from different areas of Wales (Royal Town Planning Institute, 2022; Woods et al 2021) found that the definition of rural meant different things in different areas due to the social and geographical nature of Wales. This, again, supported the researcher’s intention to have used a pre-defined area, decided upon by a search of postcodes in



order that the data would be area specific. Woods et al (2021) identified areas of deep rural wales as areas where villages, hamlets and loan houses in ‘sparse’ parts of Wales having a travel time of 17 minutes for services.

Access to young people and time constraints, all presented as limitations to the study but it is from this point the researcher formulated the aims and objectives of the study

- Identify how the terms participation, rural and barriers are used in the context of young people’s own lived experiences.
- Evaluate critically previous studies that have explored young people’s participation and experiences of sharing their voice in a rural community.
- Explore previous methodology used to gain a clear view of young people’s thoughts and feelings and identify key methods that would best support this study.
- Formulate recommendations based on participatory research with a group of young people, that draws on the 5 pillars of youth work.

Through literature specific to research practices (Cullen and Bradford, 2012; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), the researcher identified that in order for this study to answer the research question it was important that young people were actively involved in the process.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introduction

In order to ascertain how young people living in a rural area identify what participation means to them, the researcher has reviewed how past research studies have approached rural participation and the barriers that could potentially arise.

The researcher has critically analysed literature to explore how a young person's participatory experience can be impacted by barriers resulting from the rurality of their area. Through exploring youth work policy, the researcher intends to analyse existing studies in order to consider the methodological approach to the participatory research that will form the basis for empirical data collection. In order to understand the themes arising from this research project, it is important to identify literature that can be critically analysed based on certain criteria. The purpose of the literature review was to identify show gaps or bias in existing studies, based on a youth work perspective. (Creswell, 2013:p.229)

In order to ensure the literature search drew on relevant articles, books, government publications, journals and specific websites, a search criteria table was created (Table 1) to find core concepts and key literature relevant to the study. Three key terms were identified from the research question, and the use of variations of the key words were used during the search.

<b>Participation</b>	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Rural</b>
Participatory experiences	Barrier	Rural
Participation	Barriers to access	Rurality
Participatory activities	Barriers to engagement	Rural Wales Rural living

Table 1

As the search for literature was across multiple databases, , the use of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied when conducting the search in order to ensure that returned data was relevant, reliable and within the researchers set time frame. The eligibility requirements are implemented broadly at first to ensure that pertinent research is included and that no study is eliminated without careful consideration however as data was returned the researcher removed all studies which did not match all sections of the criteria. Meline (2006) identifies the importance of carefully selecting criteria as the returned literature must be key to the focus of the study yet still provide a reasonable number of eligible studies as lacking resources can fail to allow the researcher to gain a broader understanding of the topic.

The researcher set a time frame of 5 years (2018-2023) for research materials, looking at peer-reviewed articles and literature within that time scale. and based it mainly on results from Wales, but where relevant some studies from wider UK. The search provided some useful documents but precluded important youth work policy, current and historic. A wider search was made through linking the key works and extending the search timescale to search for key documents that would have helped shape the more recent literature. The researcher recognises that Covid-19 has had an impact on young people and that the true extent of slowly coming to light. Woods et al (2021:p.62) recognised that the rural Wales' biggest impact was the budget reductions following Covid-19 which impacted on funding for public services. However, rurality has had its long-standing issues since before covid-19 as identified by the Welsh Rural Observatory (2013).

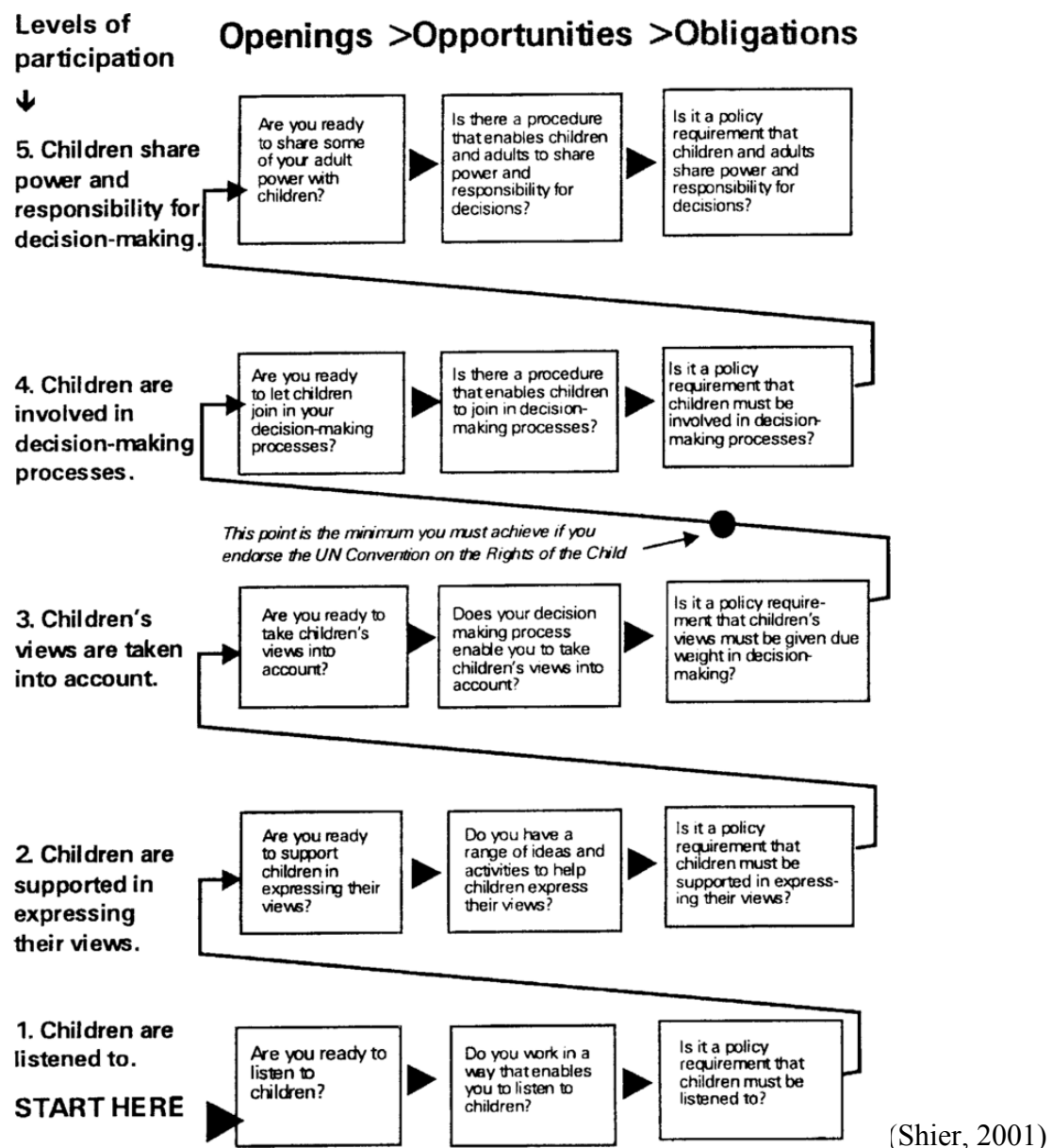
Using the critical appraisal skills programme tool (CASP 2023). the researcher was able to identify key themes that will be critically explored and elaborated on within the context of the study. The researcher used the youth work principles when reviewing the literature through a youth work perspective.

## **2.2. Theme 1**

### **Participatory experiences/Participation**

From reading the literature, the Welsh Government (2010) definition of participation which refers to rights, decision making, planning and reviewing actions that would impact on young people resonated with other studies. Welsh Government (2012) agreed with this definition extending it to the lives of others and their environments. Many studies (Brady, 2020); Shier, 2001; Welsh Government, 2010) cited the rights of the child to have a say in decisions that affect them to ensure a better reflection of the priorities of children and young people (UN, 1989). Brady (2020) noted that by involving children and young people in decision making, it better reflects their concerns and priorities. The researcher acknowledged that this paper was a healthcare study, however the principles within it about participation and its importance for young people can be applied to this study. The theory of participation had been written about in numerous literature pieces. Boylan and Dalrymple (2009) discuss how participation is a key aspect of children's advocacy, and that it has become prevalent in policy and practice in the UK. Participation is mentioned in many reports (Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), 2022, NOS, 2008, Welsh Government, 2010) with Welsh Government in 2018 produced the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards which outlined the rights of the child to participate and what

would be done to achieve this. Boylan and Dalrymple (2009) interestingly noted that if children were able to be ‘self-determined’ then the need for participation to be right would not be necessary. Hart (1992) used his theory of participation to develop a greater of understanding, stating that “it is important that all young people to have the opportunity to learn to participate in programmes which directly affect their lives.” Shier (2001) considered participation as a pathway, thus allowing children and young people to be part of the process of decision making and recognising that they have a voice.



Brady (2020) further recognises that participation can be affected by the level of involvement and how meaningful it is. Brough (2020:p.28) reflects on how the term has become “increasingly ahistorical and imprecise”, also identifying that through studying digital media and youth, participation is most successful when there is value placed on the interest of young people, their relationships, identities and through encouraging their civil and political engagement. As Smith (2011) notes, “It is not that research has ignored children, because there is a huge body of research on children”.

It is suggested that the level of participation could be affected by the interpretation of a service provider’s role in comparison to that of a youth worker (Batsleer and Davies.2010:p.1). The scope of this review addresses whether this is actually reflected at ground level in the experiences young people have in rural communities and how these overlooked young people are being engaged (Welsh Government, 2010.p.53) .Youth work’s success is embedded in the participation of young people as partners with shared responsibility, providing opportunities to work within a decision-making structure that is relatable to their own environment and how they live within it. NYA (2021:p.5) identifies an urgent need in their ‘Overlooked’ report to invest in the skills of people that are working alongside young people in rural areas.

## 2.3. Theme 2

### **Rurality**

Rurality has different meanings when it is applied to different localities. Rural communities can be defined by the population within that area (i.e. a population of less than 10,000) but can also be considered in terms of its geographical location, how much distance there is to a larger town or the number of services within an area. (Statistics for Wales, 2008). With 9 Local Authority areas classed as rural, the researcher is mindful that there will be a mix of rural and urban areas within these local authorities (Welsh Government, 2008). Through the researchers own experience of living in different areas of Wales, rurality has a different things to the people of different areas. NYA (2021:p.4) recognises the disparity between areas and post-covid many rural areas have been overlooked, with little or no provision for young people in their England based study. As different definitions of rurality were required when considering “rural people”, “rural land” and “rural activities”, the researcher considered the importance of working from the young person’s perspective of their own rural location to understand what rurality means to them. The researcher agreed with the NYA (2021:p.4) report that young people are overlooked, and that is reflected in current data in Wales.

It has been recognised that there are long standing barriers with rural Wales. Welsh Government (2021.p.54) recognised that learners in rural areas often struggled to access provision. This was further supported by Woods et al (2021.p.37) who also recognised that people in rural area were impacted by budget pressures brought on by Local Authority cuts. In 2013 the Welsh Rural Observatory, carried out a Rural

Services Study which back then identified public transport in rural areas as being inconsistent. With many barriers identified when living in a rural area of Wales, the researcher recognised that there needed to be more of a voice for young people, the next generation of policy makers in Wales.

The researcher acknowledged that the report by Woods et al (2021) and Welsh Rural Observatory (2013) carried similar themes and findings despite the eight year gap between the two studies. This confirmed that rural issues are still prevalent in Wales and that this study was still current and in need of further exploration.



## **2.4. Theme 3**

### **Barriers**

While there are barriers to young people accessing activities and opportunities that are important to them, as explored by the ‘Supporting Young People in Rural Areas’ report (Youth Futures Foundation (YFF), 2023). The report recognised that the suggested solution of youth programmes had potential, but more exploration was needed to see how these would work effectively in rural areas. (YFF, 2023). The researcher recognised this as further evidence that this study needed to be address via a young person’s perspective. Interim Youth Board (2021:p24) explained that barriers can often be unseen but will affect disadvantaged young people from accessing youth services. (RTPI, 2021) recognised that financial and accessibility barriers can affect potential changes, with the Welsh Government (2020) considers in their Rural Education Action plan that barriers can be overcome if everyone is expected to experience the same high standards. The Centre for Youth Impact (2022:p.4) found in their study that key barriers for young people’s engagement were similar to those outlined by other studies (financial, digital, post-covid 19) but importantly they recognised that young people were lacking in confidence, skills and the means to participate easily, thus presenting a challenge in reaching them.

The researcher acknowledged that while there was an appetite to look at rural living and the barriers it has created for participatory experiences, there did not appear to be many studies that actually drew on the young people’s own perspectives. The researcher considered whether these barriers actually prevent the engagement of people who live in rural areas (Pelletier et al, 2020). With the values as set out by NOS (2008) the researcher recognised that this study is an opportunity to work in partnership with young people in order to support them in their own development

from a social, educational and personal perspective. (Nos, 2008:p.5). A larger scale study carried out by Woods et al (2021) for Aberystwyth University with a target audience of 1000 14-25 year olds living in rural Wales. The scale of the study was well thought out, with an online questionnaire that drew on quantitative and qualitative data, with a focus on young people and rural Wales, sub groups were targeted through youth work provision with prepared questions. The responses were from across Wales and as the study progressed they recognised the need to adjust their methods of data collection to ensure under-represented groups were also included. Woods et al (2021) identified mixed responses from young people with concerns for the ability to afford housing, jobs availability, services in the area. Positives from the report were that 75% young people appreciated where they lived, while 57% thought that they would consider returning to their local area if they had relocated for work or study (Woods et al 2021). Whilst the researcher identified with their aims and methods as a way of collating data, it still did not give a more bespoke response to smaller pockets of rural Wales where the term rural just by its geographical nature can be interpreted in many ways. The researcher envisioned involving the young people in the process of collecting the data, giving them that ownership and their rurality its own identity.

RTPI (2022) mentioned the 15 minute neighbourhood concept (Moreno, 2016) where communities would have accessible services within a short walk or cycle. The ‘Living locally in Wales’ study (RTPI, 2022), cited Moreno’s view that our “acceptance of dysfunction in the places we live and work has now reached a peak, following the pandemic” and that a change is needed for our well-being and the climate. The researcher accepted that this was indeed a problem, but from the perspective of the study, also identified this with how it already affects a rural area’s

potential to retain its young people, particularly in line with the statistics presented by Woods et al (2021). Further to this, the researcher considered whether the age range of participants would mean they would focus on certain concerns and therefore so this was avoided applied age appropriate inclusion and exclusion criteria for the different data methods chosen.

Whilst the researcher identified with their aims and methods as a way of collating data, it still did not give a more bespoke response to smaller pockets of Wales where the term rural just by its geographical nature be interpreted in many ways. This again confirmed that young people needed to be part of a process affected them. Banks (1999) suggested that from a youth work perspective, offering more training and skills to young people could present a way of addressing the potential root of social exclusion that young people might face living in a rural area. The researcher felt that this aligned with the need for the study, as by supporting the young people to participate in research they could adapt their skills and play a valuable part in the community (Banks, 1999). Woods et al (2021) identified that young people from rural Wales have historically migrated to other areas and once again there is renewed concern surrounding this issue.

In terms of the objectives of this study, the literature showed that while there was some recent research (Woods et al, 2021; RTPI, 2022; NYA, 2021) which explored participation, rural living and barriers faced by young people, the researcher considered the benefits to further involve young people in this process. Through this upskilling, there is an opportunity for young people to engage with their communities, for their communities, in order to understand the process and where they fit in to

create what is important for them. (NOS, 2008; Youth work in Wales Review Group, 2018).

A report published by Kay, Tisdall and Bell (2006) discussed that children were the least likely to be included in participation and recognised that children's participation was on the political agenda again, at that time, the researcher acknowledged that the discussion around participation had been on the agenda around for a long time and still needed to be addressed at the time of this study.

### **3. METHODOLOGY REVIEW**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

In order to answer the research question, this study used methods in line with the researchers own ontological view which were also best suited to ensure a broad and balanced view with young people at the heart of it. The researcher's ontological view considered that reality is constantly debated, negotiated and interpreted. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018:p.3) stated that this can be achieved by considering three broad categories – experience, reasoning and research. The researcher's epistemology stance agreed that knowledge should be examined and explored, to identify the best tools suited to the problem in order to solve it. The researcher adopted a mixed methods pragmatic approach to the research question so it was answered and the true feelings of the young people about their locality would be reflected. Mixed methods research (MMR) is not just about data collection but “concerns philosophical bases of research, paradigms which guide research and assumptions which inform the design and conduct of research.” (Cohen, 2000:p.31).

Active research was used with the young people, so they explored their thoughts and feelings and could identify what was important to them. This form of self-reflective enquiry in social situations as described by Carr and Kemmis (1986:p.162), encouraged participants to “improve the rationality and justice of their own practices.” Through the use of this pragmatic approach, it allowed the researcher and the young people to use the best suited method to gather the data in order to answer the research question. Tucker, 2012 (p.32) debated that the methodology used should be “fit for purpose – at a philosophical and a practical level.” This supported the researchers own ontological view, particularly that this multi-purpose approach allowed the

qualitative and quantitative data to build a picture together, whilst working alongside young people.

The review of current literature highlighted that some studies centred around young people's participation in rural areas, only a few included young people as part of the research (Woods et al 2022; Welsh Government, 2010), where others preferred to ask professionals and stakeholders (RTPI, 2022). Groundwater-Smith et al (2015:p 70) considered that with the numerous ways children and young people (CYP) participated within the research process, the relevance and interest was important as it needed to mean something to them. The researcher's objective was to gain a better understanding of young people's opportunity to be involved in participatory experiences in a rural area. The researcher felt it would be important to encourage young people to look at how socio-economic factors in their local area impact on their everyday lives, allowing them to explore the social settings, events and services available to them to understand the shapes and patterns of how they exist and are run (Smith, 1994:p.109).

The participation of CYP in research has at times be construed as a contentious issue. Kellett (2005) put forward the argument that it was ethically responsible for CYP to be actively involved in research, while McCarry (2012) asked us to consider being more flexible when involving young people in research so it was suitably empowering and collaborative. Whilst the researcher agreed with Kellett (2005) that it is ethically responsible to involve CYP in research so we can glean their perspective and include them in decision making, McCarry's view of flexibility also resonated as in order for

CYP to understand the process they were involved in, it needed to be something that they felt able to collaborate on.

From a Youth Work perspective, it was vital to respect young people's views and opinions as part of the participatory process, to ensure they had the opportunity to design, create and establish services that would be relevant to them. (Youth Work in Wales Review Group, 2018). Shier (2006) acknowledged the work of Hart (1992), likening the participation ladder and his pathways to participation as a means to explore different perspectives of participation. It is these theories that underpin the rise of participation and its importance in this study. The research is centred in a rural area of West Wales that lies in Pembrokeshire County.

Data facts 2021 - 2022:

- The population of Pembrokeshire increased by just 0.8% between 2011 and 2021
- In 2021, there were 0.5 people per football sized-pitch piece of land, resulting in this area being the fourth-least densely populated area out of 22 local authorities across Wales

(ONS, 2022)

- 68,766 registered members of statutory youth work sector provision – increase of 110% from previous year.
- Total income for youth work provision across Wales £42.7 million, increase of 11% from previous year

(Welsh Government, 2022)

The researcher through this study, wanted young people to consider if there was a link between participation, rurality and barriers. With this in mind, the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative data to inform the study:

- Quantitative Data: an anonymous survey with only the first 5 letters and digits of a postcode to ensure participants are living in the 'rural location' as identified was circulated to a wider audience via an activity provider and a local youth worker.
- Qualitative Data: This was used to capture the essence of feelings, meanings and experiences of individuals and groups, qualitative (Choak, C, 2012:p.90). Qualitative Data will be collected as follows:

- A discussion session where data will be collected through mind mapping and general data collection with a group of young people in a local youth provision activity using a tally system for results.
- Individual interviews carried out by an active research group of young people.
- Observation of a youth provision activity organising an event, demonstrating how young people participate.

### **Ethics:**

In order to complete the study, the researcher completed the Ethical Approval form to ensure compliance with ethical issues and approval. When completing the Ethical Approval Form (see Appendices) the researcher made the process straightforward in order to be as transparent as possible with the participants. The following ethical issues were addressed in the consent form:

#### *Voluntary Participation:*

As the research is voluntary, the consent form was clear that participants may leave the study at any time and the data they had provided up to that point would be destroyed. The researcher also reiterated this verbally with the participants.

#### *Informed Consent:*

To ensure that potential participants were happy to take part, consent needed to be obtained and full information shared with them. The consent form and participant information sheet had the information relevant for the focus group participants. The survey participants received an outline about the study and what their information will be used for, this highlighted that no identifiable information would be requested in the survey. This was also reiterated verbally to ensure informed consent. The



participants were aware that they could leave the study at any time, as this was a voluntary relationship.

*Anonymity:*

All identifying data was kept confidential and nothing was released to the general public. An identifier code was used for the Participatory Group on any documentation for the researcher's purpose but no other personal data would be collected or shared with others. The participants could not be identified from the code, it was simply a P (for participant) and a number 01, 02 and so forth.

*Confidentiality:*

All data was stored in a secure, locked area of the researcher's laptop with no shared or public access. All consent forms to be scanned and password protected with names and signatures blacked out. No other personal data to be collected as it was not relevant to the study and reduced the risks of breaches. No personal data was requested as part of the survey. The only information needed were the first two letters of their postcode and the three digits that followed. This only gave the researcher an area and not a specific set of addresses. This was highlighted in the surveys.

*Potential for Harm:*

The researcher considered the potential for harm in four ways:

1. Physical harm – to ensure that no physical harm came to the participants, the researcher completed a risk assessment that reflected risks and mitigated for this. The risk assessment did not need to be amended as no new risks were identified.

2. Psychological harm – as the surveys and questions did not need participants to share sensitive information, the researcher felt the risk of anything triggering was low. However, a contract was set up with the participants who were encouraged to consider what route they would take if they felt triggered at any time during the study. They were to come to me but during the study there were no instances.
3. Social harm – in order avoid social harm, the participants were involved in the process and ensured they did not put themselves in a situation which might have embarrassed them or subjected them to ridicule.
4. Legal harm – the participants worked ethically as described and did not address sensitive information. The contract ensured that the participants and the researcher understood their roles and responsibilities.

The fear of ‘participant risk’ (Nic Crowe, 2012) was minimal as the researcher reviewed all risks and followed the ethical process.

*Results Communication:*

The participants were able to request a summary of the results following the completion of the dissertation.

(Bhandari, 2022)

By having clear ethical guidelines in place, it made the participant selection process clear. All information, consent forms, questions were provided bi-lingually.

### **Methods of Data Collection:**

Due to full time work commitments and the age range of the participants needed, the researcher acknowledged that with time restraints due to schooling, working within a school would be an advantage. However, as the school did not respond to contact from the researcher, an out of school activity provider was identified and agreed that they would take part. The positives of this were:

- It allowed the researcher an opportunity to distribute the surveys within the club and explain that no identifiable data was to be collected.
- A small focus group of age appropriate young people was selected from three volunteers at the club and consent forms were obtained from their parents. A volunteer identified another potential participant and consent was obtained from their parent. The process was explained fully at that initial meeting.
- An opportunity to observe the decision-making process of participation within school activities arose and the researcher was able to take some notes and use this as part of qualitative data.

The researcher had originally planned to invite 100 young people to participate in the survey and a maximum of 5 participants but with no contact from the school, the sample group ended up being smaller with 30 survey participants from the activity provider and 25 survey participants from the youth worker after inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied for both participant groups. This form of clustered sampling might be seen as being open to inaccuracies, where people from the same area might have the same shaped opinions, however the researcher considered the

qualitative sampling within the survey as an opportunity for young people to explore their own perceptions (Clark and Bell, 2012:p.125).

<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>
<b>For Questionnaires</b>	<b>For Questionnaires</b>
Live within the designated rural area Aged between 11– 18	Live outside of the designated rural area Aged 19-25
<b>For Participatory Group</b>	<b>For Participatory Group</b>
Aged between 16 – 18 Willing to participate in 1-1 interviews Able to gain consent	Aged between 16 - 18 Unwilling to participate in 1-1 interviews Unable to gain consent

(Table 2 )

Participants were aged between 16 and 18 for the participatory group as part of the research would involve interviews. Mizen (1999) as cited in Banks (1999) acknowledged that young people recognised that age gave them contradictory positions when considered within policy, however the researcher felt an older age group would be able to work alongside peers or younger year groups effectively.

**Limitations:**

The researcher initially planned to work alongside the school but found identifying a key member of staff to liaise with difficult and after a period of no response, decided to not pursue this line and consider a different route. Understanding the nature of education and work-loads from the researcher's previous career in education meant that there was a deeper understanding behind the constraints of the teachers, and felt that having to adapt plans at short notice was all part of the process. The researcher contacted a local activity provider and was able to work alongside them. Whilst this meant a reduction in the sample size, the researcher contacted a local youth worker who was prepared to disseminate the surveys to a small group of young people, this increased the sample size and gave a wider perspective. This was all done within the realms of informed consent in order to protect the participants within the ethical process. Holdsworth (1994:p.44) explained that a key characteristic of accountability for the service users and the public was the need to explain and disseminate information between people.

As the researcher has lived within the community for many years, from personal experience, it is a community that will always support. This also raised the question of bias, Choak (2012:p.105) as cited in Bradford and Cullen (2012) explained that "acknowledging the author's position and their relationship to data is particularly important in qualitative research", the researcher worked from a person-centred perspective, using the internal reference of the participants to inform the study. The researcher also anticipated that there would be a shared perspective in some things but also wanted to explore the participants own experiences in order to give the study validity and to demonstrate trustworthiness. This was something that was highlighted

to the participants throughout the study. The researcher carried out self-reflection through journaling to ensure they were grounded in the process from the perspective of the participants. Young (1999) as cited in Banks (1999) identified reflection as part of the moral enquiry, as our own experiences of actions and motives were explored as well as those of others.

Time was another limitation when trying to get the group together – a session was held with all four members initially to discuss the project, a contract was created and full information was disseminated with roles and responsibilities discussed. This allowed for us to build a trust-based relationship from the start. Working with the participants in the here and now gave the researcher an opportunity to begin the study from their perspective without making assumptions of where they could be coming from (Ingram & Harris (2001) p.18). The three key questions of the interview were discussed and reviewed to ensure full understanding. It was decided that one participation would be interviewed by the researcher there and due to timing, the others would be interviewed independently. The researcher was able to demonstrate some of the skills needed for interviewing and offered an opportunity for questions and reflection. The contract acted as guide for how to treat each other and also the young people they interviewed. The researcher identified that by going through this process together and considering the importance of their role, it would allow them to reach their full potential whilst understanding their place and influence in society and how this could be adapted to other aspects of their lives. (NOS), 2008).

## **Surveys**

The researcher devised a survey to better understand the activities and opportunities that are available for young people in the local area. The reason behind the study was shared with the young people to clarify what was being asked of them. The researcher understood their ethical responsibility when working with young people in order to avoid research data that was inaccurate and did not truly reflect the life interpretation of the young people (Clarke and Bell, 2012:p. 131). Questions asked were

- information about the type of activities young people participated in school.
- information about the type of activities they would like to participate in their local area.
- whether they felt they have a voice.
- would they like to have more opportunities to use their voice.
- what were the barriers to participation.

These questions would give quantitative and qualitative responses for analysis.

## **Observation:**

The researcher observed a session where young people were part of the participation process, the researcher was able to see some of the process already in place in order to inform their work with the participatory group. As an observer, the researcher was able to take notes of the session, these were about the process and the interaction.

## **Interviews**

The researcher selected a semi-structured 1-1 interview format, which allowed freedom to explore the three questions that were posed. The researcher used the questions with the participatory group in order to promote discussion and better understanding. The participatory group then took the questions out to their peers and asked them for their opinion. Choak (1999:p.98) as cited in Bradford and Cullen (1999) reiterated that it was crucial to clarify the purpose of the interview and what was expected of participants. Cues and body language reactions were modelled by the researcher, with the type of questioning skills and discussion cues, and body language also discussed with the participatory group. The researcher supported them to identify what person-centred skills would suit them as an interviewer. Effective listening skills were used to demonstrate value to their responses (Sapin, 2013:p.258).

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach was used in order to analyse the data gathered. Using the headings below, the researcher summarised key points from data through identifying, interpreting and analysing the themes and patterns below using the thematic analysis. (Byrne, 2022). The researcher considered the following phases to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) -

1. Familiarisation - understand the data collected through re-reading
2. Generating initial codes - Highlight sections of text using codes to describe the content.
3. Searching for themes - To identify any patterns, review codes and consider the themes.



4. Reviewing themes - Check the accuracy of the themes to ensure the data has been represented and is useful.
5. Defining and naming themes - Check the accuracy of the themes to ensure the data has been represented and is useful.
6. Write up - Write up final analysis of data.

Interviews were selected as a source of data collection as numerous studies have identified that a researcher is able to generate richer data by having face to face interactions, this is due to the opportunity to build rapport with an interviewee and gain trust to gather more in depth, honest and detailed responses (Horsfall, M et al. 2021)

## 4. RESULTS

### **Presentation of Data:**

The aim of this study explored the young people's participatory experiences and potential barriers in a rural area of West Wales. The researcher's aim was to use a mixed method's approach to gain a wider perspective. The quantitative data has been analysed and displayed in pie chart form with an overview of the statistics (maybe graphs for last one?). The qualitative data resulting from the work carried out with the participatory group was collected from interviews, minutes from the participatory group meeting, notes from the one to one sessions with the participatory group members and observation notes.

### *Surveys*

The use of a survey is a useful tool that is widely used for the collection of data, allowing the researcher to decide on the type of questionnaire and its usefulness (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Whilst the time taken to plan and execute a survey may be lengthy, the collation of data and subsequent data analysis may be quicker. The researcher created a survey that comprised of seven questions, three of which could be analysed as quantitative data and four questions that required text answers. After the initial introduction to the project, participants were asked to identify the first two letters and 3 digits of their postcode, thus allowing the researcher to identify those who lived in the prescribed area of study. From this, the researcher identified 55 participants that resided in the local area that were within the search

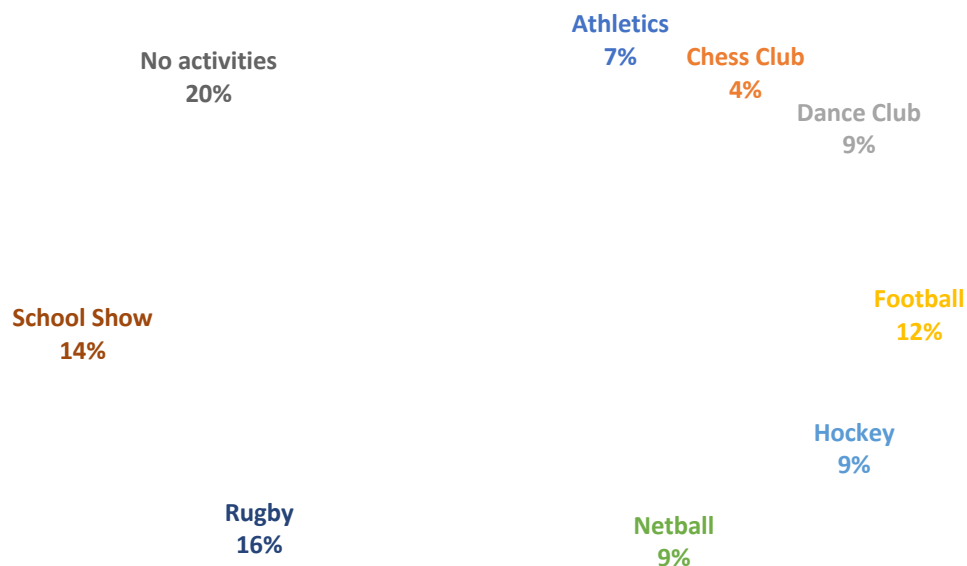
area. The quotes accompanying the graphs taken from some of the data from question 4.

*Question 1:*

Which of these activities do you take part in in school?

A broad spectrum of activities known to be available through the school were provided and participants were asked to select the ones that were appropriate to them.

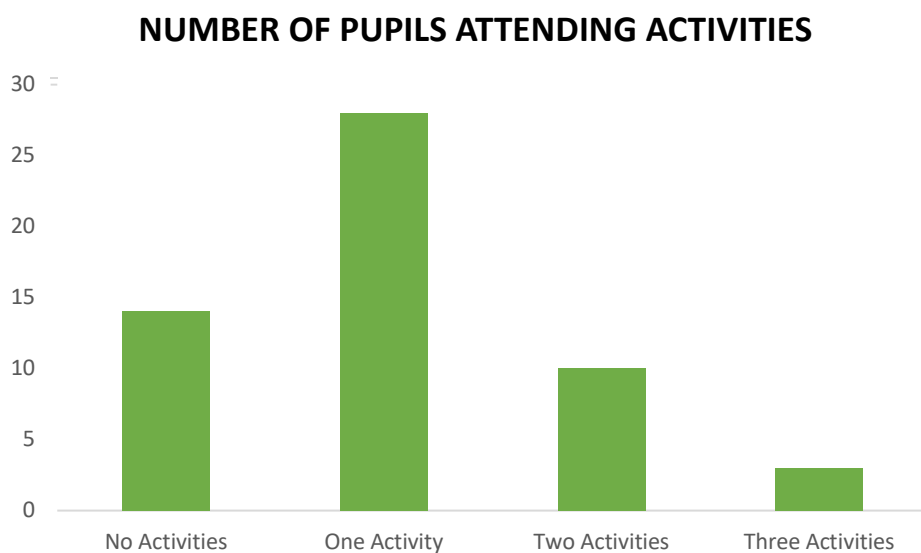
### PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL BASED ACTIVITIES



(Graph 1)

From the survey, rugby along with the school show were the highest scoring activities at 16%. The school show results also included the participants that took part in the Eisteddfod (school and at county level). Football and netball also proved popular, scoring 11% and 10% respectively. Sport related clubs are the most popular, with hockey (8%), dance club (8%) and athletics (7%) proving popular. Chess club had

4% of the participants attending. With 20% of participants not attending clubs, this was the highest scoring category. Graph 2 depicts a more in-depth analysis of the range of activities chosen by the pupils out of the 55 surveyed.



(Graph 2)

From the graph there are 28 pupils that take only one activity, these were as follows:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Athletics	3
Chess Club	2
Dance	2
Football	4
Hockey	3
Netball	6
Rugby	7
School Show	1

(Table 3)

Subsequent tables identifying what activities the other participants attended.

Combination of Activities	Number of Participants
Football and Rugby	1
Dance Club and School Show	1
Chess Club and School Show	1
Hockey and School Show	3
Football and School Show	3
Athletics and Football	1
Football, Rugby and School Show	3

(Table 4)

“I am unable to attend after school clubs as I need to catch the bus home, if I stay I have no way of getting home. I sometimes wish I could stay.”

Anonymous (2023)

“Some of my friends can’t stay for clubs because they can’t get home. I am lucky because I can walk home. I wish it was easier for my friends.”

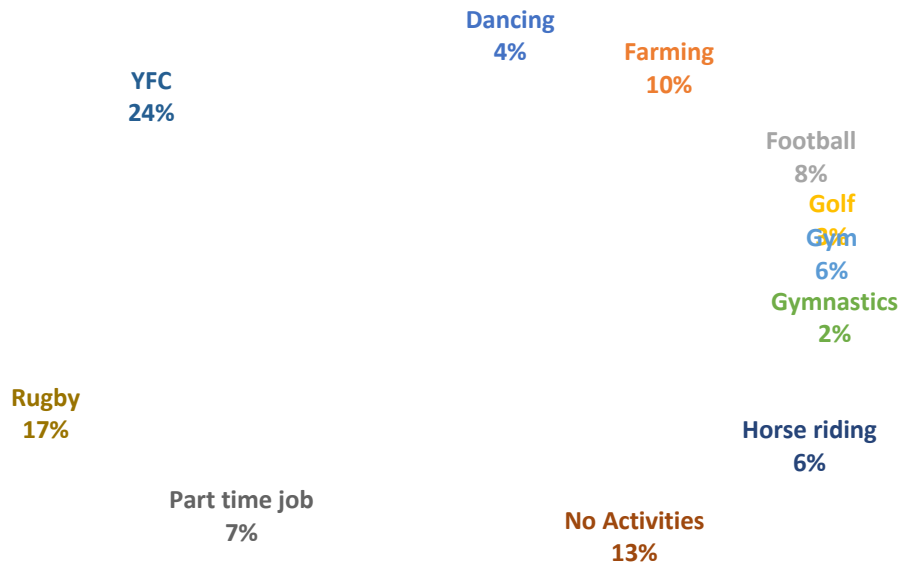
Anonymous (2023)

*Question 2:*

What activities do you take part in outside of school hours?

A range of out-of-school activities were provided for the participants to select from.

## PARTICIPATION IN LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES



(Graph 3)

The highest scoring non-school based activity was the YFC, with 24% of participants. This was followed by rugby (15%), farming (9%), football (8%) and having a part time job (7%). Horse riding, hockey and going to the gym (5%) came next, followed by gymnastics (4%) and golf (3%). No participation was lower here, with 12% of the participants.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
YFC	1
Gym	1

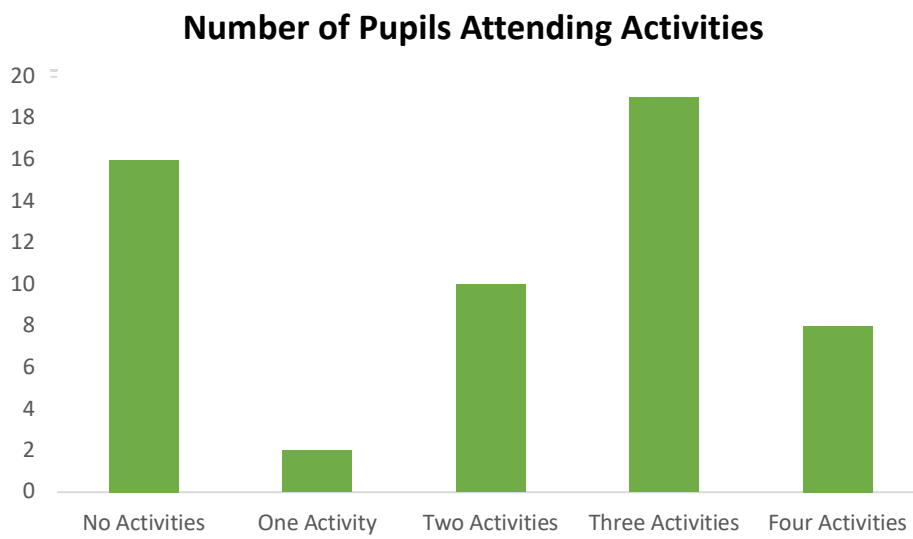
(Table 5)

Subsequent tables identify the types of activities the other participants attended.

<b>Combination of Activities</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Rugby and Young Farmers Club	3
Golf and Young Farmers Club	2
Football and Gym	1
Football and Gymnastics	1
Farming and YFC	1
Farming and Dance Club	1
Golf and Gym	1
Golf, Rugby and YFC	1
Farming, Rugby and YFC	2
Gym, Rugby and YFC	3
Part-time Job, Rugby and YFC	1
Part-time Job, Farming and YFC	1
Dance, Gym and YFC	1
Horse Riding, Rugby, YFC	1
Dance, Horse Riding YFC	1
Football Rugby, YFC	2
Farm, Football, Horse Riding	1
Farm, Football, Gym	1

Farm, Horse Riding, Part-time Work	1
Farm, Gym, YFC	1
Farm, Part-time work, Rugby, YFC	5
Farm, Gym, Rugby, YFC	2
Dance, Farm, Part-time Work, YFC	1

(Table 6)



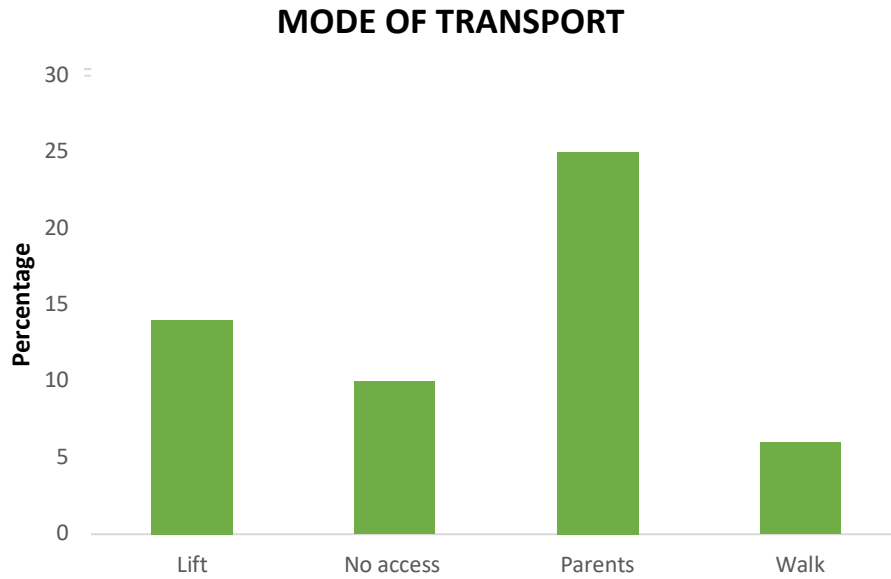
(Graph 4)

Question 3:

How do you access the extra-curricular activities?

This was a text answer with space to write in their mode of transport.





(Graph 5)

Travelling with the parents had the highest percentage here with 42%, followed by 24% of participants having a lift with someone else and 11% walked to the activities. 18% were unable to access the activity.

“As my family work late, it means often I miss out on some of the earlier activities.”

Anonymous (2023)

## Qualitative data

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach was used in order to analyse the data gathered from the interviews. With a large amount of scripted data, the researcher found key themes and sub themes within the text and was able to use coding to draw out the main aspects of the data (Byrne, 2022)

### Themes, Sub-themes and Examples of Codes

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of Codes
Participation	Voice of Young people	- Pupils voice is recognised more often - Not all pupils have an opportunity to use their voice
	Choice of activities	- Choice of activities don't suit everyone - Not sure what is on -
Barriers	Rurality	- Hard to access activities due to location -
	Time	- Unable to stay after school - times are unsuitable for access
	Transport	- Lack of transport - Times of transport - No transport, no car at home - Parents work, can't transport -
	Distance	- Need to travel for activities - Limits people's access to activities out of the area.
	Cost	- Expense to travel to places - Fuel costs - Cost of activities
Solutions	Place to meet	- A youth centre - A hub for everybody - somewhere that is run by volunteers - community based
	Activities	- different activities - accessible activities - more involvement with deciding on what is needed
	Transport	- Community Transport - Fflecsi Bus - Potential within the community

(Table 7)

Themes:

Participation:

Participation gives young people an opportunity to share their voice and become part of a system (quote). Some young people considered their ‘voice’ as having someone to listen to them and an opportunity to participate in provided activities.

“I feel that I have a voice in school because there is good support given to us as pupils. There are activities at lunchtime at the school which we have a choice whether we go to them or not.”

Anonymous (2023)

Others felt there was a shift in the dynamics of young people and their opportunities to become more involved in issues that they feel are relevant to them.

“Certainly more recently there has been more emphasis on pupils' opinions in the school and I had the opportunity to attend a climate change conference for teachers and pupils in order to voice an opinion on how we can present the climate crisis to the curriculum in a way that would interest for young people.”

Anonymous (2023)

Concerns were raised that some groups of young people were not being included in the democratic process.

“We have committees for different things but you have to get voted on to those, they are not very big so if you don't get on you don't feel like you are part of sharing ideas.”

Anonymous (2023)

While others were unsure how to use their voice,

“I sometimes think I want to have my say about things but I'm not sure where I can do this.”

Anonymous (2023)

Some considered their role and felt listened to and things that were said were acted upon.

“In my local club, we have a chance to be part of making plans about what we do. Everyone gets a chance to say something and we can then decide what is the best idea to go with.”

Anonymous (2023)

Limitations to participation were viewed as lack of activities suitable to them,

“For me, I feel I have limited opportunity, often there are an abundance of sports activities in the area however as someone who is not as interested in sport the choices are lacking but there is no one raising this as an issue and asking us what we would like.”

Anonymous (2023)

“I hear people talking about things they do after school and don’t even know where they go to do these things. I should ask but I don’t like to really. It would be good to know where to find things like that out.”

Anonymous (2023)

### *Barriers*

Barriers are something that prevents one person doing something they want for different reasons. The participants four main barriers when asked about what stopped them participating – rurality, time, transport and distance. These themes were reoccurring in the data from the surveys with many interlinked in some participants comments

“The main issues which I experience living in a rural area and participating in activities is being able to travel to those activities.”

Anonymous (2023)

“My Mum doesn’t drive so if I find it difficult to get to places. Sometimes I can get a lift, but not very often so I can’t attend things that are on every week”

Anonymous (2023)

“As my family work late, it means often I miss out on some of the earlier activities. I also think that cost can make a difference – as I am part of a large family, it can become quite expensive for all of us to participate in extra stuff outside of school and with fuel costs”

Anonymous (2023)

“It’s hard to take part in activities when you live in an area that’s far out from other places. We don’t even get a bus where we live so if someone can’t take me, I can’t go.”

Anonymous (2023)

“I live on a farm and my parents are busy so I don’t get the chance to go to activities after school. I help out on the farm so I don’t mind too much”

Anonymous (2023)

When participants were asked if they felt that they were able to have a say in the activities that were available to them, 26 participants in the local activity provider said yes, with 4 saying they didn’t know. From the groups that worked with the youth worker, 19 said yes. with 2 saying no and 3 saying they didn’t know.

### **Group members interviews:**

The three questions were disseminated before the interview and pre-populated. Notes were taken during interview to capture further thoughts, opinions and ideas. The key themes that were identified from the interviews and further discussion were – lack of voice, limitations due to the rurality of the area and lack of resources/services/investment and the need for a space where young people can gather.

### **Question 1:**

The Welsh Government defines participation for young people as “my right to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing an action that may affect me. Having a voice, having a choice”.

Keeping that definition in mind, do you think that in your everyday life experiences, you have the opportunity to participate in this way?

All four participants recognised that this was something that schools were exploring but not quick enough. One participant identified that they weren't able to give their true opinion.

“More opening on this in the school over the next year. There wasn't much before that and I still don't believe we are allowed to give our true opinion to the wider community.”

(P 02)

One of the participants identified that the school were encouraging them to become more involved,

“In school, we are now encouraged to take responsibility for planning some activities around certain areas of the curriculum, but we haven’t had a lot of guidance in doing his. Maybe they trust that we can do it for ourselves.”

(P 01)

All four participants welcomed the Welsh Youth Parliament and identified how this could be extended,

“I believe that young people can have more of a say in the political world locally. The Welsh Youth Parliament already exists but if more opportunities like that existed on a smaller scale then young people would certainly feel that their voices were heard by their local parliamentary members and they would be able to see a visible difference in their areas.”

(P 04)

“The Welsh Youth Parliament is now doing more but there is a need for more, there is space for some 20 pupils from Wales which is a very small percentage to reinforce the opinion of all the young people of Wales. Some pupils in the school, such as those who are not on committees/parliament, are not allowed to voice their opinion as much as those who are in the parliament.”

(P 03)

Two of the four participants felt that at a local activity club they had more opportunity to be part of the decision-making process.

“When I read that definition, it does make me think about our local YFC club. We are encouraged to work together and plan as a group for lots of things, like trips or when speakers come in. Everyone is encouraged to have a say. Young people manage the discussions and the adults that put the group on don’t get involved unless we get too much.”

(P 03)

“I suppose we do get the opportunity to have a say at our local YFC. We are able to discuss the things that we would like to do in the club or a trip someone wants to organise. It does give us the chance to think about what is involved when we have to sort everything out.”

(P02)

Question 2:

What are the barriers that might stop young people (aged 11 – 18) from being able to have these participatory experiences living in a rural area?

All four participants identified that the location and rurality of their local area did impact on their participatory experiences.

“The lack of services is an obstacle for the young population of the countryside, whether that be buildings, sports materials etc. or public transport which means they cannot travel to reach whatever activities are being held. “

(P 04)

“There may not be enough variety of experiences for everyone in the countryside either and this may be a result of a lack of investment or a lack of population and interest.”

(P 01)

“If we need to go anywhere, we generally have to rely on someone to take us. They have cut buses and there is nothing available in the evening. There are a lot of people that don’t have parents that can take them places and they have to miss out.”

(P 03)

“I love living where I do but it is frustrating that we are so restricted in the choices of what we can do. There seem to be a lot of activities but they are out of our reach here unless you are sporty, most people have to travel to do something different.”

(P 02)

One participant considered that the lack of services made young people feel like they need to move away for education or jobs.

“We are all coming to the point where we need to start thinking about our futures, I would be sad to leave this locality but there doesn’t seem to be the opportunities here so I will probably have to move somewhere else.”

(P 01)



Question 3:

How could we address these barriers as a rural community?

Three of the four participants suggested a space for young people, somewhere central that everyone could access, with one suggesting that the question be put to the community for their ideas. They all recognised that the issue around accessibility would need to be looked at.

“I believe that a youth center can help overcome this barrier to some extent. It gives young people a space to relax and enjoy their interests without worrying what other people think.”

(P 04)

“I think we need some sort of community hub, an accessible place where we can go can go and study, have a coffee and a chat. Maybe someone there if we need support. A place that could also be used by the community for different things.”

(P 01)

“We definitely need a space to be able to go and chill out – like a youth centre but more of a community thing. Not somewhere small, somewhere that could be used for other things too.”

(P 02)

“I think this could be put to the community of our area and see what activities the majority feel that they are missing out on and then create the activity from there. I also think that bringing the cost down of these activities would help make them more accessible for all. Perhaps looking for individuals willing to run the activity on a voluntary basis. “

(P 03)

All four identified the need for services to be in place and that this would take investment.

“It would be good if there were easier ways to get about to meet rather than having to rely on lifts. In addition, if there is money that can be invested in the youth centers, perhaps it would help to bring in experts to carry out a greater variety of activities that are of interest to the youth.”

(P 01)

The Participatory Group interviewed their peers, with the same three questions.

Consent was gained and the participants ensured they understood the process. They used the skills we had previously discussed such as active listening. It was agreed that they would take a few notes after the interviews and would use the words that their peers used.

**Question 1: (As above)**

Two young people felt that their experiences of participation were acceptable with the other one feeling they still wanted to have a say but not be part of a large group. The other participant. The other participant felt that with their involvement with an outside group mean they had lots of participatory experiences.

“I always thought that participating was just taking part in things but when you look at that definition you can sort of see that the teachers are trying to get us to think about what is important. We have been doing more of that in school since we joined sixth form”

(P 05)

“I don’t feel we all get a chance to share our opinions, if you are a member of a particular committee then you have more of a choice. I’m not so keen speaking out in front of people, but that doesn’t mean I don’t want to have a say in things”

(P 07)

“I feel that as we get older it is important to be able to speak out about things that affects us, participating in a way that can influence our locality, how money is spent, what is important too us can only be a good thing. I think we get more of a chance to that now than we did before.

(P 08)

“I feel that I have a lot of opportunity to make decisions and be involved in planning when I’m at Club as we are all involved. I know it’s not for everybody but I feel I have grown in confidence and am happy to share my opinions and have a say in things”

(P 06)

**Question 2: (As above)**

All four participants identified barriers such as transport and also the location of some activities that were in another area and the disparity between people who have got cars and those who haven’t. Two of the participants spoke about the rural area, one mentioned lack of services in the locality.

“I think things transport impact on this area a lot. We have hardly any bus services and it seems to be getting less. I’m always relying on my family for a lift but they are out on the farm and it’s a nuisance if I keep asking.

(P 07)

“Lack of transport is frustrating if you haven’t got a lift or access to a car at home it means that you can’t go anywhere. I think this would stop people from being able to part in activities. I feel that while it’s lovely where we live, but it feels like we have to out of the area to something different”

(P 05)

“I don’t think we have many services in our area and that feels like a barrier, there’s lots of sporting activities but very little else if you’re not very sporty. With no transport options other than a lift you’re sort of stuck especially as it’s so rural where we live.”

(P 08)

“I think the biggest barrier is transport and locality, it’s pretty rural around here and with some activities taking place out of the area, it would be very restrictive for young people. I know I can get a lift but not everyone has that luxury”

(P 06)

**Question 3: (As above)**

Three of the participants mentioned a youth centre or something similar. One mentioned a bus service that was more reliable and reflected the communities needs, and two considered that their space could be for others.

“I would really like to see a youth centre or some sort of place we could meet in the heart of the village. There isn’t really anywhere to go after school, or even lunchtime. It would need to be something that would suit different ages so there was something for everyone”

(P 06)

“What we could do with here is a space that is open regularly, that we could meet up in to chill out. It could be for other people too, at different times of the day.”

(P 05)

“I think we could do with some sort of transport that is just for this area so people could use it at different times, like a mini bus but it was busy all day taking people out and about. Young people could access it in the evenings to attend activities and other things they want to do.

(P 07)

‘Something like a youth centre would be good here, something that opened regularly that we could drop in and have a drink or catch up with friends. It could be somewhere to go and study and relax.

(P 08)

**Observation Results:**

**Group:** Thirty 11-19 year old participants

**Reason:** Discussion to put a plan in place for an upcoming entertainment event.

The researcher considered the 5 pillars of Youth Work in Wales when observing the participatory experiences the young people were involved in:

EDUCATIVE	EXPRESSIVE	PARTICIPATIVE
Worked in a large group, in their local communities. Discussed the different skills that they could each bring. Young people identified their own set of skills and felt comfortable volunteering	Discussed what was needed in order for the event to run smoothly, identified challenges and thought creatively about solving them. Participants weren't afraid to offer to try new things, others celebrated them for trying.	The whole process of the discussion was participative. The slightly older participants were encouraging the younger ones to choose how they wanted to participate.

INCLUSIVE	EMPOWERING
The activity presented as very inclusive, there is a bi-lingual element to the club and it was ensured that participants could speak in the language of choice	The young people were empowered to have their say and choose things that suited them, rather than being told what they were expected to do. The

## **DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018:p.34) summarise a pragmatic approach as research which “focuses on framing and answering the research question or problem which is eclectic in its designs, methods of data collection and analysis.” The researcher used a mixed methods approach and considered that while quantitative data might not answer the research question, it would support the qualitative data as it provided some statistical data that was area specific. This section of the study discusses the results set out in the previous section. The researcher was a novice to a study of this magnitude and felt that some of the results reflected this, however, the outcomes from the qualitative data provided some rich and interesting data which will be explored here.

The purpose of this study was to explore young people’s participatory experiences and potential barriers in a rural area of West Wales. The researcher has lived in the same rural area for a number of years but wanted to analyse the experiences that are out there for young people and whether their level of participation reflected the ethos and policy of youth work. Policy makers outline participatory experiences as allowing young people to become partners, share responsibilities, through inviting social commitment and encouraging them to look at the world around them and the difference they can make (NOS, 2008; YWWRG, 2018). The researcher found that from the study there were different interpretations of participation from participants,

“I feel that I have a voice in school because there is good support given to us as pupils. There are activities at lunchtime at the school which we have a choice whether we go to them or not.”

This participant could be referring to the fact that they are able to go and speak to a member of staff if they need support but also acknowledges that they can take part in

activities as a matter of choice. By starting to consider what participation means is how youth work policy can grow and can be built upon. Ingram and Harris (2001:p.18) identify that “youth work starts where young people are, not from where we would like them to be.”

The researcher considered the number of participants took part in school-based activities (28 out of the 55 attended one activity, 10 took part in two activities and 3 took part in three activities). The participation levels for out of school activities was looked at (2 out of 55 took part in one activity, 19 in two activities and 8 in three activities) there appeared to be a lot of participation in out of school activities. This is where data without any explanation can give an unclear perception. The researcher worked with an activity provider called the Young Farmers Club and some of this data can be better understood by looking at some of the activity categories. 24% of participants attended the YFC, 10% of them identified farming as an activity, with 7% that worked part-time work. When looking at the cluster of categories, the researcher identified 7 participants that have farming, part-time work and YFC as their activities and this could be explained by the possibility that they worked on the family farm. The researcher acknowledged that they had not considered the potential that in order to understand the nature of the activities, the survey needed to be better planned to reflect the potential data was collected. The researcher understood after reviewing the results that the design of the survey could have been better. Clark and Bell, (2012:p.125) considered that recruiting participants from the same location might not provide less valid data than exploring a wider area.

Through using the results of how the participants accessed the activities and the qualitative data from the question ‘What stops you (barriers) from participating (taking part) in activities in your area?’, themes around access and transport emerged. While 25 participants travelled with parents, 10 participants had no access to activities. This was reiterated in the comments from the qualitative data,

“I want to attend activities but where I live there is no transport and my Mum works and doesn’t get back in time.”

Anonymous (2023)

Studies identified in the Literature review recognised that barriers to participation stopped people from being to get involved, with many barriers unseen, putting young people at a disadvantage when it came to accessing services (Pelletier et al, 2020; Interim Youth Board, 2021). The researcher recognised that transport was a reoccurring theme from the qualitative data, with a number of participants referring to it, “not being able to travel to those activities”; “My Mum doesn’t drive so if I find it difficult to get to places” and “quite expensive for all of us to participate in extra stuff outside of school and with fuel costs.” (Anonymous 2023).

The participatory group identified similar issues, using terms such as “unfair”, “restrictive” and “lack of services” (P 01, P 03), linking these with issues for participation. P 04 (2023) acknowledged lack of services and no public transport in the countryside as a barrier to participation in a rural area. Woods et al (2022) identified similar findings in their study with regards to barriers young people and expressed concern that rural areas would not be able to retain the young people that live there according to their statistics. P 01 (2023) also identified that as young people they were coming to an age where they needed to consider their own futures and queried the opportunities available to them locally. Welsh Government (2018) in



their 'Rural Education Plan' discussed the importance of a place and talked of their ambition to develop healthier and secure communities with better local jobs. The researcher was unable to find an update on this report, however other reports have recommended a similar focus. Woods et al (2022:p.61) concluded that there was evidence that a number of young people wished to remain in Wales, but could only do so if there was substantial investment in areas such as transport and local jobs by ensuring rural areas were prioritised.

Members of the Participatory Group were already familiar with Welsh Youth Parliament and had some clear views on how their voice could make a difference,

“The Welsh Youth Parliament already exists but if more opportunities like that existed on a smaller scale then young people would certainly feel that their voices were heard by their local parliamentary members and they would be able to see a visible difference in their areas”

(P 04, 2023)

With a move forward to engage actively with young people, the researcher identified that further clarity around the terms participation, barriers and rurality. P 02 (2023) identified that school were becoming more open about participation and the voice of the student, recognising that there wasn't much in place before. P 06 (2023) considered previously that participation was about taking part, but having considered the Welsh Government's definition (2010) they were able to identify activities that they had been involved in which were participatory. However, concern was expressed that potentially they couldn't give their true opinion. Recognising the importance of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and how it can offer a helpful framework to ensure disempowered groups, such as young people are supported to share their voice (Cahill, 2007 as cited in Cullen and Bradford (2012).

Amongst the participants, a strong theme that came through was the need for a space for young people (P 06, 2023; P 08, 2023) where they could have “a space to relax and enjoy their interests without worrying what other people think.” (P 04, 2023). Described by one participant as “a community hub, an accessible place where we can go and study, have a coffee and a chat.” (P 01, 2023).

The researcher observed the group as they planned an activity and displayed the results within the 5 pillars of the principles of youth work. They demonstrated that they were drawing on the initial Welsh Government (2010) quote as they made decisions and used their voices to participate about aspects of the arrangements they wanted to do. The researcher likened it to Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation where the new members were consulted and informed with child initiated, shared decisions with the older members. This is where the theory of participation showcases its strengths.

By analysing the responses from the participants and drawing out their themes, the researcher likened it to a patchwork quilt, different patterns, colours and styles that fitted together to create something bigger. During the last discussion session the researcher had with one of the Participatory Group members, we discussed their idea for a ‘meeting place’. The researcher was surprised when the participant identified a vacant storage unit ‘with potential’, explained their vision for the space – “study books like a book exchange, comfy places to sit, someone to talk to for wellbeing, a community hub” and provided the name of the owner ‘just in case’. Upon reflection, the researcher identified that there had been a learning curve for the participants as well as the researcher, in that they were now putting a plan in place. Referring back to

the 5 pillars of youth work, the researcher felt that they had had the opportunity to draw on those skills and apply them to the challenges they faced.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This intention of this study was to find out what were the participatory experiences and possible barriers for young people living in an area of rural West Wales. Based on the use of a mixed methods approach using qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher worked alongside a group of participants to explore the main themes that arose from the survey, interviews and discussions. Throughout the study the researcher has kept the young people at the heart of the study.

The results show that there are common themes affecting young people in rural areas which impact on their participatory experiences. Participation in itself has different meanings, but working from a youth work perspective, the researcher focused on the five pillars of youth work when working with the participants. Drawing from the Welsh Government (2010) definition at the start of the dissertation question, the researcher reflects that the Participatory Group were encouraged to “use their right to be involved in making decisions”, they participated in the “planning and reviewing an action that may affect them” through thinking about the way they would use the interviews to access key information they needed. Ultimately, the researcher saw the evidence of the Participatory Group using their voice and thinking about the choices that they to consider in the decisions they make (Welsh Government, 2010). This was evident in their suggestions about the space for young people. Barriers that the participants felt were relevant to them were key themes as identified by other rural studies (Welsh Government, 2012; Woods et al (2022).

Based on the data collected it can be concluded that young people in this rural area identify barriers as lack of services, transport which is vital in a rural community,

time, location of activities and rurality of the area, and also cost. While these are barriers have historically been identified over the years, what was interesting from this study was the realisation by the young people that if they wanted change, they would need to make it happen themselves. Rather than consider changes to infrastructure, the young people identified a need for a space where young people could go to relax/study/meet friends/support each other. They also recognised that their voice was important and that more avenues were needed for them to channel this.

Taking the approach of working alongside the Participatory Group gave the study an extra dimension. Upon reflection, the researcher deemed the survey to be too prescriptive, not giving the survey participants enough of an opportunity to develop a greater understanding what participation means from a youth work perspective. However, by having the qualitative running alongside and developing a trust-based relationship with the young people, it provided a much richer avenue to explore.

**6. REFERENCES**

**7. APPENDICES**

## **7.1. Appendices 1 Ethics Form**

*The Ethics Form is pasted in here*



## 7.2. Appendices 2 xxx

