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Outdoor learning across the community:
The development of progression and ecosystem models to enhance engagement

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the ideas, findings, analysis, results and conclusions presented in this thesis are entirely my own work and have not been the subject of submission in any other academic institution. I also confirm that the research and papers used have been properly referenced.

Abstract

Despite increasing awareness and acknowledgement of the benefits of outdoor learning (OL) in the UK, access to progressive OL opportunities remains inequitable. Provision reflects a disaggregated model of delivery that suffers from a lack of coherence, leading experiences to be largely unconnected and dependent on participants' interests and motivations to develop any sense of progression.

The majority of research into OL access to date focuses on the challenges of delivering OL in school settings. The lack of other perspectives represents a significant gap in the literature that this thesis seeks to address. Through a case study of the District of Copeland in Cumbria, England, the research explores how OL is interpreted and the degree to which it is accessed by different populations. The research takes multiple perspectives that explore the role of values and context and, through an original application of Access Theory to the field of outdoor learning, provides new insights into how people gain, maintain and control access to the benefits that can be accrued through OL. The research concludes that a participant perspective focusing on individualised autonomy is important when considering the various mechanisms that affect access across the life course.

A new progression model based on the development of participant autonomy and an associated delivery strategy based on the concept of an ecosystem is proposed. An OL ecosystem design process is developed through the research and tested to translate the model into practice. Through developing purposeful ecosystems that involve all the key stakeholders in the delivery of OL the models have significant implications for practice as they suggest a more coherent approach that can increase access to OL and its associated benefits.

Acknowledgements

"It takes a community to write a PhD."

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Glossary of key acronyms

AALA	Adventure Activities Licensing Authority
AHOEC	Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres
BAPA	British Activity Providers Association
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland)
CLOtC	Council for Learning Outside the Classroom
D of E	Duke of Edinburgh's Award
Defra	Department for environment, forestry and rural affairs
DfE	Department for Education
EOC	English Outdoor Council (now just Outdoor Council)
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
IOL	Institute for Outdoor Learning
JMA	John Muir Award
JMT	John Muir Trust
LA	Local Authority
LOtC	Learning Outside the Classroom
LINE	Learning in the Natural Environment
MENE	Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment
NC	National Curriculum
NCS	National Citizen Service
NGB	National Governing Body
NE	Natural England
OAA	Outdoor and Adventurous Activities
OAC	Outdoor Activity Centre
OE	Outdoor education
OEAP	Outdoor Education Advisers Panel
OEC	Outdoor Education Centre
OL	Outdoor learning
OR	Outdoor recreation
ToC	Theory of Change
TOP	The Outdoor Partnership
TOPC	The Outdoor Partnership (Cumbria)

Part 1: Background and context

1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the background to the thesis. After an introduction to the context for the project I discuss my role as a practitioner researcher and the potential impact of my values and goals on the research and its dissemination. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the project

Awareness of the potential for outdoor learning (OL) to contribute to meeting societal challenges is growing in the UK, yet remains unrealised. In its 25-year plan for the environment the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) drew on a wide range of evidence to set out a basic entitlement to the social, economic and environmental benefits associated with time spent in the natural world, stating that the unequal distribution of access to green spaces relating to poverty and ethnicity are injustices that need to be addressed (Defra, 2018). The plan recognises the benefits of time spent outdoors through access to green spaces and through formal, non-formal and informal education routes that incorporate OL approaches, such as Forest School, care farming, social prescribing and community nature projects. Subsequent Government support for OL in England is evident (most recently through Defra funding for the Nature Friendly Schools project (Nature Friendly Schools, 2021), but it remains focused on demonstration projects rather than policy change. The benefits of OL are left to be realised through provider engagement and consumer choice rather than offered as an entitlement. The ability to enact that choice is therefore critical.

OL is a term with multiple interpretations. In the UK the Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL) provides one definition, describing OL as 'an umbrella term for actively inclusive facilitated approaches that predominantly use activities and experiences in the outdoors which lead to learning, increased health and wellbeing and environmental awareness' (IOL, 2021a). The wide range of combinations that this definition allows for highlights the breadth of the field and the numerous ways that the societal goals might be met, but also suggests difficulties. Referred to by Fiennes *et al.* (2015, p. 11) as 'an overlapping patchwork of interests that differ in what is offered, to whom and where', the values and objectives of different organisations and individuals operating in a market driven economy can lead to self-interest

and a lack of coherence across the field, leading to potentially missed opportunities to engage with more people. At policy level, 'speaking with one voice' to government is a goal of IOL and also a key driver behind ongoing efforts to unite a number of sector-representative bodies (including IOL) into one organisation (UK Outdoors, 2021). At practice level, there is potential for a more coherent field to positively influence children's, young people's and families' (CYPF) access to OL, linking progressive experiences across childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

The notion of progression through multiple experiences is common in OL discourse (for example, Outdoor Citizens, no date; EOC, 2015) but has yet to be translated into a practical model. Previous work, led by Natural England and IOL (Hunt, 2018), has sought to develop a progression model that can be applied to encourage wider participation, especially amongst more marginalised or 'hard to reach' groups, but it has received only limited exposure through publication (Robinson, 2018) or conference presentations (Loynes, 2019) and has yet to be developed to a point where it can be applied to practice. This loss of momentum may reflect changing research and funding priorities as key people change roles, but may also result from a lack of recognition, both within the sector and in wider society, of the need for a model in the first place. One goal of this research project therefore is to further develop the progression model so that it is relevant and applicable to all aspects of the outdoor learning sector, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Access to the natural environment for both recreational and educational purposes is inequitable and provides the essential motivation underpinning this PhD. Data from the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey run by Natural England from 2009-2019, for example, shows that there are significant differences in the numbers of adults and children regularly spending time outside between those living in the most deprived and the most affluent areas of the country. Overall, 25% of children spend time outside less than once a month and those from black, Asian and other minority ethnic (BAME[1]) backgrounds even less so (Natural England, 2020b). The MENE data shows that the majority of children's natural environment experiences are close to home, in green spaces within towns and cities, especially those of BAME and low socio-economic backgrounds with

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[1] The term BAME is used in this thesis as it is in the cited reports and articles. The author recognises that alternative terminology is more appropriate if specific information about a particular ethnic group is available.

reduced capacity to travel (Natural England, 2020b). Young people growing up in poorer areas are less likely to visit natural areas and significant numbers of children (13% of under 16s and 5% of those aged 16-24) never visit the natural environment or spend any of their leisure time outdoors at all (ibid). In the formal education sector a marked socioeconomic gradient is noted by the Sutton Trust (2014) with regard to extra-curricular school visits, leading to extensive inequality of access. The Social Mobility Commission (2019) noted that access to these opportunities was driven by household income and also varied depending on school attended, ethnicity, gender and location. Provision of and access to school residentials follows a similar narrative (Menzies, Bowen-Viner and Shaw, 2017). Without an understanding of the factors that influence these varying levels of access there is a danger that a focus on the provision of OL merely reinforces existing structures of privilege that promote inequitable access rather than addressing them (Meerts-Brandsma, Lackey and Warner, 2020).

The recent review of England's National Parks (the *Landscapes Review*, commonly referred to as the 'Glover Review') reinforces the role of privilege and draws attention to schools' role in addressing it. It found that National Parks were 'an exclusive, mainly white, mainly middle-class club, with rules only members understand and much too little done to encourage first time visitors' (Defra, 2019, p. 15). Glover made 27 proposals for reform of England's National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty that incorporated governance, management and purpose, including one for 'a night under the stars in a national landscape for every child'. Whilst a laudable goal and seemingly representing an acknowledgement of the value of time spent outdoors, the Review is less concrete regarding how this goal will be achieved. Schools are identified as key partners, but OL provision in schools is inequitable in its own right as opportunities decline for OL as students get older (Waite, 2010). Dillon and Dickie (2012) were clear that access to opportunities for learning beyond the classroom was predominantly dependent on where children went to school and who taught them, despite overwhelming support from teachers for outdoor learning, and Taylor (2010, p. 1017) highlighted 'regional and structural variations in the support and provision of opportunities for such activities by local authorities' as important factors in determining access.

Curriculum reform in Scotland has seen OL achieve a more prominent position in the Curriculum for Excellence as a valid approach, supported at policy level (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010), while the new Curriculum for Wales is clear that 'experiencing the

wonder of the natural world can contribute to learners' spiritual development and well-being, and can help to cultivate in them a sense of place and sense of belonging' (Hwb, 2020b). Such support is yet to be provided in England, and how much OL is taking place in schools (and beyond) is consequently very much open to question. There are, therefore, significant challenges facing organisations, practitioners and participants in realising aspirations for increased and more equitable provision. The aim of this PhD is to contribute to those goals by exploring and developing new thinking that will enable wider engagement from multiple stakeholders to enable greater access to the benefits accruing from OL.

The project was sponsored by the IOL, a UK-wide professional body representing the interests of people and organisations working in the outdoor learning sector. IOL are based in Cumbria and the project drew on funding from the European Regional Development Fund to support organisations in that area. The county has a rich heritage of outdoor learning and recreation with a high number of providers and visitors, largely focused in the Lake District National Park (LDNP), but also a resident population that lives beyond the LDNP boundaries. Isolated rural communities and post-industrial towns have led to a 'county of contrasts' (Cumbria Community Foundation, 2017) where affluence and privilege often exist in close proximity to poverty and disadvantage. As a focus for the project, Cumbria provides a rich environment through which to examine current beliefs about OL's role in society and how its benefits could be accessed by a wider population.

1.2   My role as practitioner-researcher

Breunig (2019, p.8) believes that it is vital before commencing any discussion about social justice 'to be aware of one's own self-location and the "gut" reactions that may be experienced as a result, trying to avoid judgment and being aware of one's reactions and experiences'. It is only right, then, that I begin by setting out my own. At the heart of the thesis lie values – my own, those of practitioners, teachers, youth leaders, policy makers, and children, young people and families – and a belief in social justice. My own personal journey is important to acknowledge from the outset.

I am a white, middleclass, middle-aged, British male. I am educated to a high level and qualified to teach, lead and coach in a number of indoor and outdoor settings, all attributes that provide me with a degree of privilege that has facilitated, and continues to facilitate, my

engagement with the outdoors for both recreation and employment, and which therefore may blind me to other perspectives. These identities are a few amongst many, of course - I am also, amongst other things, a son, brother, husband, teacher, school governor and outdoor enthusiast. The experiences that contribute to these identities have led to certain perspectives and views and acknowledging them helps to both frame the approach I take to the study and to be more aware of potential bias and judgements that I may be predisposed to. My situatedness and relationship to the subject illuminate my approach to the research (Breunig, 2019). I am, for example, a pragmatic person who is used to problem solving and finding solutions 'in the field', where I bring together multiple approaches and strategies to achieve a goal.

The formative childhood experiences I had influenced my social and professional lives. With this experience has come the realisation that being white, middle class and male has impacted not only on my own experiences and career in the outdoors but also the people whom I have worked with. I bring my values to my work and they are reflected in my philosophy and my approach to teaching, the opportunities I try to create and how I manage them. My relationships with participants, colleagues, accompanying staff, head teachers and parents are all driven by my values, so it is fundamental that I understand and acknowledge what they are. It is also an essential start point for understanding the perspectives of others for whom I acknowledge greater privilege (Nixon, 2019).

Hodgkinson (1983, cited in Zakus, Malloy and Edwards, 2007) suggests that there are four levels of valuing that are progressively more complex and philosophically justifiable – preference, consensus, consequence and principle. For example, examining my own values surrounding outdoor learning, it is possible to identify aspects of all four levels. I enjoy being outside myself and with others, especially in the mountains or on a canoe journey, and I also enjoy seeing people develop and grow and so spend my spare time in the outdoors or helping others voluntarily (preference). As an active member of the outdoor learning practitioner community, I have accumulated through experience a number of values and beliefs that support my practice (consensus); my research activity has led me to value certain practices, for example, using goal setting to individualise the outdoor education centre residential experience (consequence) (see Harvey, 2011). The highest, or perhaps deepest, level of value is associated with principle, which is where I need to declare an interest, a conscious bias: I believe in the value of the outdoors for increasing personal, social and

environmental understanding that can lead to improved wellbeing. I believe that the benefits of the outdoors should be accessible to everyone, but that access is inequitable as not everyone has the same 'bundle of powers' available to them (Ribot and Peluso, 2003).

The prominence of values in many outdoor practitioners' identities are common (Towers and Loynes, 2018) and arguably I am no different. My approach to this study is therefore that of an informed outsider in that the aspect of OL that I am investigating is outside my field of experience yet informed by my experience to date in the sense that I am a career practitioner in the field of OL. As with leadership and management, a core principle of research is self-awareness, so while I acknowledge the experience that I have and will consciously draw on it to inform my research and thinking I will also need to guard against the danger of unconscious bias (Merriam *et al.*, 2001).

1.3   The theory-practice interface

The goal of the PhD is to impact on practice such that it promotes equitable access to OL experiences. In order to meet this goal, I explore multiple perspectives of the field of OL through three complementary research studies that incorporate the voices of the people who provide, facilitate and participate in OL (OL's 'stakeholders'). I have identified myself as a 'practitioner-researcher' rather than an 'academic' as it sits more comfortably with how I perceive myself and my roots, and throughout the PhD I have engaged with practitioners through conference workshops and presentations, seeking and listening to their views. To be loyal to that identity has implications for this thesis, in that I believe it must be accessible to all interested parties. In other words, the language that I use needs to be clear and understandable to my audience, and the content needs to be relatable and useable. The study is grounded in practice and is intended to inform practice, so I have a dual role to play as researcher and interpreter. Publication of the results, in accessible journals and through conference presentations is an essential next step to meeting this goal (Merriam, 1988).

The values I hold have the potential to influence both the direction of the research and the language I use to describe it. While I can attempt to account for these biases in my writing, it is perhaps incumbent on the reader to acknowledge them also, assured that any exclusion of alternative points of view is unintentional and subsequent critique welcomed.

1.4 Thesis outline

The research will be an original contribution to knowledge. It aims to:

- Understand and analyse how outdoor learning is interpreted by different populations;
- Understand the current 'landscape' of outdoor learning provision and the factors affecting access;
- Identify the current level of provision in the case study area and the challenges and opportunities that exist associated with increasing participation levels;
- Develop a workable progression model that can be applied in local contexts beyond the case study area;
- Inform a set of recommendations to IOL regarding their future products, services and processes in the context of providing an inclusive and progressive set of relevant experiences for all young people.

Part 1 explores the background and context of OL as it applies to this thesis (**Chapter 1**). **Chapter 2** explores the concept of OL and its definition. **Chapter 3** examines the context of OL in terms of the critical agendas associated with the socio-economic and political landscape in which it is situated.

In **Part 2**, I focus on the provision of OL. **Chapter 4** examines the provision of OL through formal, non-formal and informal education routes and assesses current levels of engagement and participation. **Chapter 5** explores the concept of progression in OL as a means to access the benefits of OL regularly and developmentally over time, leading to an assessment of current thinking in the field. **Chapter 6** introduces Access Theory as the theoretical framework through which I examine the flow of benefits associated with OL. **Chapter 7** focuses on the factors affecting access to OL as described in the literature. **Chapter 8** looks at the factors more broadly through the lens of Access Theory.

Part 3 details the case study that contributes the empirical research element of the thesis. **Chapter 9** sets out the research design and the key research questions. I account for my pragmatic philosophy and the case study approach. Ethics and the impact of Covid-19 are described, and the three research studies are set out. **Chapter 10** introduces the case study area of the Cumbrian district of Copeland. **Chapters 11, 12 and 13** describes the results and

analysis of the three surveys, creating a rich description of the research area and key insights into the factors affecting access to OL.

Part 4 draws on the insights from the research studies to develop the progression model and explore how it can be put into practice. In **Chapter 14** I propose a goal of autonomous participation in OL as a unifying purpose for OL provision that enables opportunities to be linked up depending on individual needs through the genuine freedom to choose whether to participate or not. The Autonomy-Progression Model (APM) is proposed as a way of visualising the connected approach of multiple providers. **Chapter 15** then explores and proposes an 'ecosystem' model to deliver the APM. OL ecosystem design criteria are developed and a case study example of linked provision in Copeland is used to illustrate them.

Chapter 16 presents the thesis conclusions. The use of Access Theory represents a new approach to understanding the barriers and enablers to influencing the provision of OL, and the APM and associated delivery ecosystem constitute new knowledge in the field of OL. Limitations, implications for practice, recommendations for the IOL and future research opportunities are all discussed.

Figure 1.1 provides an overarching concept map of the thesis.
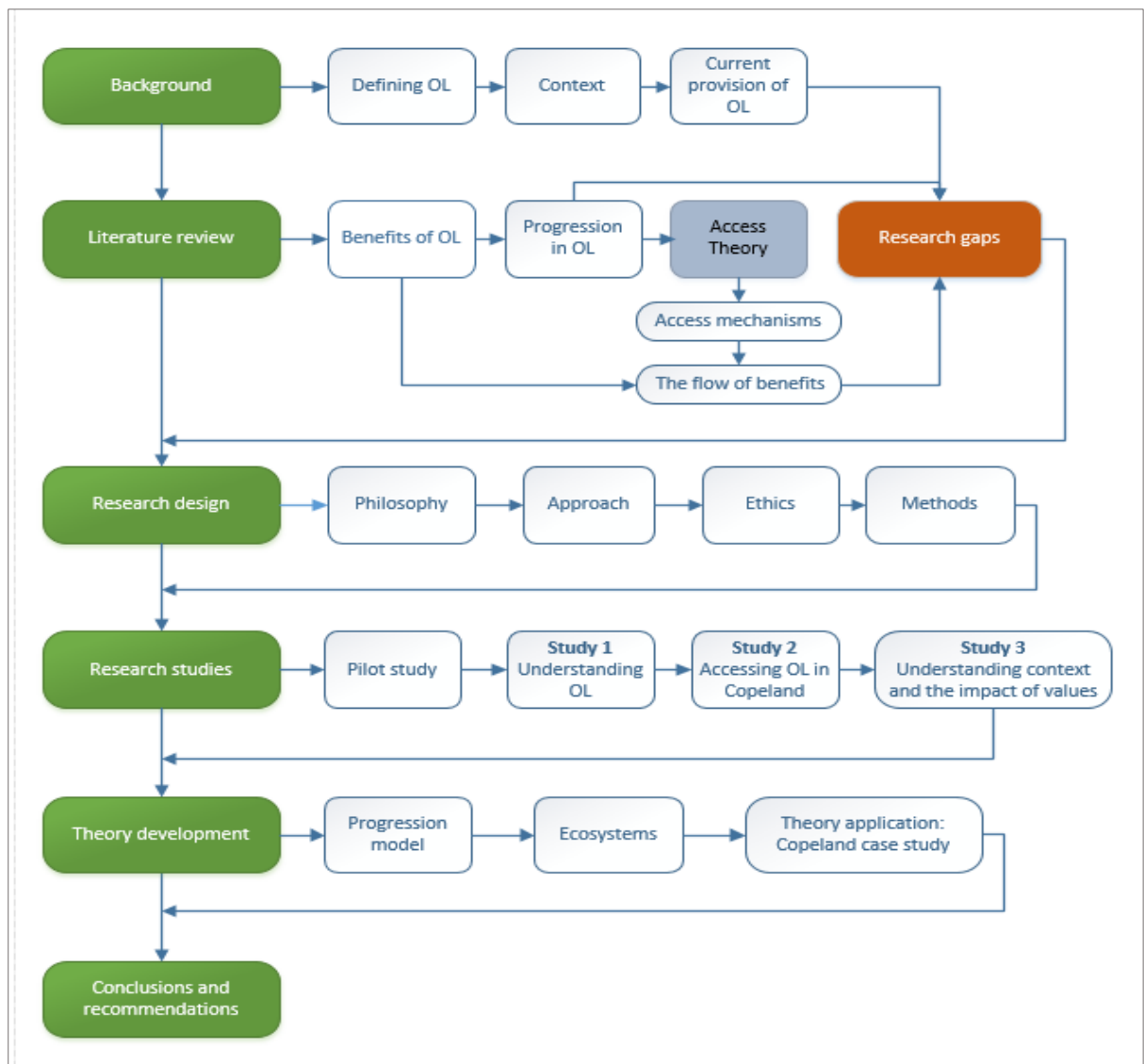
Figure 1.1.   Thesis concept map

2 Understanding 'outdoor learning'

2.1 Introduction

This project sets out to understand and explore the reach of OL. To do that it is necessary to be clear about what we mean by the term outdoor learning, what it looks like in practice, and the societal factors that are influencing that provision. Understanding these factors is necessary to appreciate the barriers and enablers that exist for potential participants.

This chapter introduces the concept of Outdoor Learning. I clarify different interpretations of how 'outdoor' and 'learning' can be construed, and how concepts of nature and the environment are accommodated. The picture is completed with OL's relationship with recreation and educational settings and the role of the facilitator, all of which lead to a working definition.

2.2 The terminology of outdoor learning

Although the term 'outdoor learning' was in limited use in the 1990's, it was perhaps the setting up (and naming) of firstly the Association for Outdoor Learning (AfOL) and then its successor, the IOL, in 2001 that firmly established its place in the lexicon of the outdoors. AfOL and IOL grew out of the National Association for Outdoor Education, the shifting emphasis from 'education' to 'learning' reflecting a cultural shift at the time that Biesta (2009, p. 36) refers to as the 'learnification' of education, a process that saw a rise in time spent by adults in formal and non-formal learning settings, teaching becoming redefined as facilitating learning, and learners positioned as the consumers of education. A growing emphasis on 'lifelong learning' rather than 'adult education' coincided with new constructivist and socio-cultural theories of learning supporting the idea that knowledge and understanding are actively constructed, often in cooperation with fellow learners (Biesta, 2009). Primary schools and Early Years settings were delivering a wider range of activities in the outdoors than the traditional high cost, high adventure activities associated with traditional notions of outdoor education (such as climbing, canoeing, etc.), a key example being the development of Forest School in the UK in the 1990s (Knight, 2009). The terminology change to *outdoor learning* was thus a conscious – and political - attempt to reflect the opportunities presented by non-school providers as well as schools using a wider range of activities and to have more relevance to this increased range of providers (Ogilvie,

2013; Allison, 2016). While considerably more inclusive, the result has been the overlapping patchwork of interests described earlier. Although this has obvious significance for a research project such as this in terms of boundaries, it is more than an academic debate as advocates for OL seeking funding and support at policy level need to be able to define and describe what they are talking about.

For the purposes of this thesis I use a definition of OL that represents the IOL's view of the concept, where learning is regarded as both process and outcome (Anderson, Harvey and Crosbie, 2021).

> 'Outdoor Learning is an umbrella term for actively inclusive facilitated approaches that predominantly use activities and experiences in the outdoors which lead to learning, increased health and wellbeing and environmental awareness' (IOL, 2021a)

At the same time, I acknowledge that other, more specific, approaches may be the foci of practitioners, for example, outdoor education (Barnes and Sharp, 2004; Gilbertson *et al.*, 2006), adventure education (Berry and Hodgson, 2011; Prouty, Panicucci and Collinson, 2007), environmental education (Cooper, 1998; Palmer,1998) and experiential education (Beard and Wilson, 2006; Jeffs and Ord, 2018; Roberts, 2012; Quay and Seaman, 2013). 'Outdoor learning' means different things to different people at different times and, as outdoor, environmental and adventure education are all still developing their own practice and literature, these distinctions are likely to continue. This is not so much an issue in communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) where the various stakeholders agree their own parameters, but it can become more problematic when different groups attempt to communicate with each other or interested parties outside the field. The 'umbrella' definition serves this communication purpose but perhaps misses what I would term the *soul* of OL. Donaldson and Donaldson (1956, quoted in Quay, 2016, p. 46) defined the then developing field of Outdoor Education (OE) in North America as 'education in, about and for the outdoors', a definition that (for this author, at least) translates well to the language of outdoor learning. OL as *learning* in, about and for the outdoors begins to capture some of the essence of the field, but it is Colin Mortlock's approach to adventure education that perhaps brings the relationships into a clearer focus.

Mortlock (1984, p. 18) suggested a framework through which to address the challenges of sustainability, health and wellbeing, proposing that modern man (sic) should 'try and develop, to the best of his ability, an awareness of, respect for, and love of self, balanced against an awareness of, respect for, and love of others balanced against an awareness of, respect for, and love of the environment.' I agree with Cooper (1998) that these three aspects are inseparable, and while the objective definition of OL is necessary, I hold the view that the subjective aspects are equally important. The perceptions and consequent actions of people must therefore be acknowledged in both research and practice (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Two further definitions of note relate to understandings of 'the natural environment' and 'the outdoors'. In line with the broad definition of OL I have adopted for this thesis, I take a similar approach to these terms. I take *natural* environments to include

> …the seemingly natural features and processes that people ordinarily can perceive without the use of specialized instruments or sensory aids. This is the nature of trees and forests, other kinds of vegetation, animals and their creations, wind, sunlight, clouds and rain, changes in the landscape with the seasons, the flow of water in rivers and streams, tidal and wave action at shore-lines, and so on. (Hartig *et al.*, 2010, p. 130)

Use of the term 'seemingly natural' is important, as it acknowledges the interplay of nature and culture in the creation of most, if not all, British landscapes. These environments include the urban green spaces, such as parks and gardens (Hartig *et al.*, 2010), that have some degree of vegetation cover (Mensah *et al.*, 2016) and that are designed for human use, as well as the majority of lowland and upland areas. To these can also be added the manufactured nature reserves and trails occupying the former 'brownfield' sites of quarries, collieries and railway lines.

From a common-sense perspective, the 'outdoors' is what separates OL from indoor learning, and can be simply understood as either an area outside buildings or being in the open air. At a simplistic level OL involves activities and experiences outside that lead to learning. However, due to the way that activities and technology have developed it is now necessary to acknowledge the place of indoor environments in the concept of OL as well. School based OL, for example, will link classroom based learning with outdoor activity, meaning that it is difficult to draw hard boundaries about what is and is not OL. For this

thesis 'outdoors' is taken to mean the natural environment as described above plus use of indoor environments where such use is part of the OL process.

The discussion is not just one of semantics, as the 'where' of OL in terms of the physical environment plays a central role in various approaches to, and justifications for, the inclusion of OL in formal education (Quay and Seaman, 2016). Improved engagement with the natural environment, and the concept of nature connectedness that is gaining traction in both academic and public spheres (Lumber, Richardson and Sheffield, 2017; Richardson *et al.*, 2019, 2020), for example, is being increasingly cited as a potential outcome of OL and is reflected in the Nature Friendly Schools programme which aims to 'give thousands of children from some of the most deprived areas in England the opportunity to get closer to nature benefitting their learning, health and wellbeing, and care and concern for the environment' (Nature Friendly Schools, 2021). Approaches that address the urgency of climate change and environmental degradation are difficult to refute, yet there is a chance, perhaps, that 'nature connectedness' becomes the dominant justification for funding OL programmes to the exclusion of other purposes. The broader conception of OL as being multi-purposed is an important underpinning value of this thesis.

In the UK provision of OL is referred to variously as an industry, a sector, a movement or a field, the different terms sometimes being used interchangeably but each holding different meanings and reflecting different values (Harvey, in press). Whilst acknowledging the use of other terms, in this thesis I use *field* and *sector*. The *field* of OL describes the wider concept of OL, encompassing the full range of related approaches. Crucially, 'fields do not presume homogeneity or consensus, only a common space within which questions are raised, answers are sought, and the overall enquiry is engaged' (Roberts, 2012, p. 7). The term *sector*, with its origins in Government employment policy developed as an alternative in the field to the term 'industry' (Ogilvie, 2013) and has subsequently been adopted by the IOL when describing the specific aspect of the field of OL relating to facilitated practice, either paid or voluntary.

2.3 OL and recreation

OL as represented by the IOL relates to facilitated practice. The outdoor professional's role, whether paid or voluntary, is to facilitate learning, a stance supported by Dewey (1997) and Hattie and Yates (2014). In the Early Years from 0-5, when play forms a significant motivation for engaging with the outdoors (Natural England, 2019), learning can be accentuated by facilitation. Forest School, according to Knight (2009) for example, uses a play- based pedagogy but relies on facilitation to promote learning. There is still, however, a grey area around what constitutes facilitation. Does the facilitator have to be a 'professional', or can they be a parent setting out with specific outcomes in mind? A potential goal of facilitated OL is the autonomy and agency of the learner (Heron, 1999; Loynes, 2019), so while the degree of knowledge and skill possessed by the parent-as-facilitator may be less, the role of parents and families as facilitators in the outdoors should not be ignored.

The relationship of (unfacilitated) recreation to OL is worthy of a closer look, however, as it is the reason many CYPF access the outdoors beyond school (Natural England, 2019a). Outdoor recreation (OR) in the UK is regarded as distinct from OL and is generally regarded as activity undertaken voluntarily for relaxation or pleasure (Capel and Whitehead, 2013); OR 'refers to any physical activity taking place in the natural environment' (Butler and Comley, 2014, p. 4), and a wide range of outdoor activities traditionally used in facilitated outdoor learning contexts are also undertaken for recreation (e.g. walking, climbing, high ropes courses, mountain biking and paddle sports). The coaching, guiding or facilitating of these experiences forms a significant part of the outdoor recreation economy (Butler and Comley, 2014), and many practitioners work in both recreational and facilitated settings, often introducing participants to lifelong participation. Other outdoor activities used in more informal contexts, such as gardening and nature watching, are also significant recreational pastimes which can be facilitated with the help of community volunteers, coaches and guides. There is, therefore, a clear link between OL and OR which will be explored further in this thesis.

2.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have introduced and defined 'outdoor learning' as it will be used in this study, a definition that foregrounds the role of the facilitator and incorporates multiple approaches. I have clarified what I mean by the commonly used terms 'natural environment' and 'outdoors' and raised the issue of the blurred line that exists between OL and OR.

For the IOL, whose stated mission is 'to increase participation in outdoor learning in the UK' (IOL, 2021b), being able to communicate ideas effectively would appear to be critical, yet this is far from straightforward. The definition favoured by IOL, while inclusive and acknowledging multiple interpretations from within the sector, highlights the difficulties inherent in communicating a concept that only originated - from a group of professionals - relatively recently. Given the level of debate within the sector, this raises a question of how other people from outside the sector, the commissioners and users of OL, see it, and this will be explored through this study.

The IOL's broad scope of representation has influenced their own definition and illustrates the confused landscape of provision found by Fiennes *et al*. (2015), a landscape that nonetheless has a growing body of evidence to support the potential benefits that can accrue through participation (see **Chapter 6**). The next chapter explores this landscape.

3 Critical agendas

3.1 Introduction

As the previous chapter shows, OL encompasses a variety of approaches and activities, and as such it is a service that is chosen at some level of society to meet a particular need. Individuals may choose to engage to meet specific goals, adults responsible for children and young people may choose to engage to meet identified group needs, and policy makers may choose to support and legislate for provision to enable greater access. In order to explore the potential for OL, providers therefore need to appreciate both the complex landscape within which the field of OL sits and the various challenges that participants may be facing. This thesis contributes to that understanding.

The field of OL has evolved over time as relationships between political, social, economic and cultural norms change to influence provision (Allison, 2016). It is also dependent on the human relationships between participants, providers and policy makers on the one hand, and between humans and the natural environment in which OL is situated on the other, relationships that have changed as new challenges and priorities become apparent (see Ogilvie (2013), for a comprehensive historical overview). The broader societal context in which OL sits can be characterised by a number of critical challenges at intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal and global/environmental levels that must be met in order to thrive (Hannon, 2017). The scale of these challenges highlights the complexity of the current era in terms of the constant change and uncertainty that people face (Beames and Brown, 2016), and serve as a helpful framework to appreciate the social, political and economic agendas influencing access to and provision of OL in England.

3.2 Intrapersonal considerations

Hannon (2017) regards intrapersonal challenge as being about 'personal meaning, purpose, identity and inner peace', the key goals being to 'attain a secure sense of self, with identified sources of personal nourishment and renewal' and to 'learn responsibility for personal health, fitness and wellbeing'. A similar perspective is taken by Eigenschenk *et al.* (2019) who, in their review of the benefits of outdoor sports on society, describe intrapersonal development as being about

> ...the physical, mental, cognitive, emotional, social, behavioral, and spiritual aspects of self... It includes personal skills and improved motor skills, an increased emotional intelligence, personal responsibility, mindfulness and an enhanced spiritual, sensory, and aesthetic awareness. (Eigenschenk *et al.*, 2019, p. 9)

Both descriptions bear close similarities with the notion of physical literacy, 'the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life' (IPLA, 2021), and reflect a growing concern for levels of physical and mental health associated with low activity levels and sedentary lifestyles (Sport England, 2019). Physical health, and more specifically tackling inactivity and obesity, is a key Government agenda (Department of Health and Social Care, 2020) which has led to the establishment of 43 locality-based partnerships across England aimed at increasing activity levels.

Alongside the physical health challenges, current narratives support a view that mental health issues are becoming increasingly commonplace. The public perception is that the constant drive for better academic results is leading to increased pressure on young people and a rise in mental health issues (Weale, 2018), and research with young people themselves supports this view (YMCA, 2016, 2019). Mental health issues are estimated to be affecting 1 in 8 children at any one time (NHS Digital, 2018), bearing on confidence, academic performance and future prospects (Smith, 2019) and costing the economy £77bn annually (National Mental Health Development Unit, no date). Humphrey (2018, p. 8) suggests caution when it comes to accepting the 'youth in crisis' narrative as there is little actual evidence that shows a marked increase in mental health issues. However, he does go on to suggest that the reduction in mental health services and the increasing need do constitute a crisis, a crisis that is not helped by a school system that is having a 'demonstrably negative effect' on the very children whose mental health they are charged with protecting. There is also a growing body of research evidencing a gradual increase in mental health issues throughout the Covid-19 lockdowns (Mental Health Foundation, 2020) but it remains to be seen what the long-term effects will be.

Tying together the aspects of physical and mental health is the idea of wellbeing. Wellbeing can be described as feeling good and functioning well (Aked *et al.*, 2008; Keyes and Annas, 2009; Maynard and Stuart, 2018) and includes hedonic components (feelings that include life satisfaction and emotional responses) and eudaimonic components

(psychological aspects that include relationships, purpose in life, personal development and notions of self-acceptance). At a policy level, the UK Government's commitment to wellbeing as a key strategy is evident through the establishment of its What Works Wellbeing Centre, part of the 'What Works' network which aims to improve public services through practice-based evidence. They suggest that wellbeing encompasses 'the environmental factors that affect us, and the experiences we have throughout our lives' (What Works Wellbeing, 2021). Further, as well as factors related to health, education and the economy, 'wellbeing also crucially recognises the aspects of our lives that we determine ourselves: through our own capabilities as individuals; how we feel about ourselves; the quality of the relationships that we have with other people; and our sense of purpose.' (What Works Wellbeing, 2021) Individual wellbeing therefore requires actions that are personally achievable (Aked *et al.*, 2008) across the life course. OL's contribution to wellbeing is discussed in **Chapter 6**.

3.3   Interpersonal considerations

Human beings rarely exist in total isolation, and the need for people of all ages to be able to form effective relationships over their life course is recognised as essential for happiness and health (Ryff, 1989; Mineo, 2017). Aked *et al.* (2008, p. 5) identified connection with others through developing broad and strong social networks as one of the 'five ways to wellbeing', finding that relationships were 'critical for promoting wellbeing and for acting as a buffer against mental ill-health.' The quality of relationships and the capacity to build and manage them (known as social capital and explored in **Chapter 8**), however, is seen by some as under threat from technology, often through the use of social media. In the press, children's use of social media is problematised (The Guardian, 2019) and is linked to self- harming, depression and suicide (Young, 2019). However, the evidence that screen time in particular leads directly to obesity, mental health problems and educational failure is contested (Viner, Davey and Firth, 2019), and positive influences have also been identified such as increased social connection, help with homework, and enabling teenagers to develop their identities (Zamperoni, 2018). Young people themselves identify loneliness and isolation as resulting from increased internet and social media use as apps 'increasingly replace the need to leave the house or even the bedroom' (YMCA, 2019, p. 6). The impact of the recent and dramatic shift to online socialising, work and teaching driven by the Covid-19 pandemic has been associated with both positive and negative effects (CIPD,

2020; Saladino, Algeri and Auriemma, 2020) although has yet to be full evaluated. With an increasingly ageing population (ONS, 2020) there is a growing need for strong relationships that enable the intergenerational transfer of experience and the development of 'support structures of friendship and connection' to address issues of loneliness and social isolation (Hannon, 2017, p. 98).

Alongside interpersonal relationships, there is also growing understanding of the significance of positive relationships with the natural environment. The emphasis on nature connectedness is linked to reduced opportunities for meaningful engagement with nature due to increasing urbanisation and modern lifestyles (Twohig-Bennett and Jones, 2018), a disconnection that is being associated with both physical and mental health problems (Pretty *et al.*, 2009; Lovell, Depledge and Maxwell, 2018). An increasing body of evidence supports the positive benefits of nature connectedness for health and wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviour (Capaldi, Dopko and Zelenski, 2014; Lumber, Richardson and Sheffield, 2017; Hughes, Richardson and Lumber, 2018; Richardson *et al.*, 2019; Martin *et al.*, 2020; Richardson *et al.*, 2020) and is forming the basis of a number of UK Government funded programmes through the Children and Nature programme (UK Government, 2019). At the same time, there are growing calls for humans to change how they interact with nature, moving from seeing nature as just a resource to a relationship that regards it as agentic and as a co-teacher (Jickling *et al.*, 2018). The role of schools and the formal education system in achieving such a transformation is increasingly regarded as critical (ibid), suggesting a strong justification for a curriculum and workforce that prioritises positive relationships with nature.

3.4   Societal considerations

The societal level can be seen as a place where individual contexts and government policies interact. Malone and Waite (2016) identify a number of key policy agendas related to OL - health and wellbeing, academic performance, employability, citizenship and environmental connection - all of which can be described as interrelated societal goals, although they are often approached separately (YMCA, 2016, 2019; Smith, 2019).

Academic performance, employability and wellbeing are closely linked. For young people in England and Wales the focus on attainment, through Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) in the final year of primary school and GCSE exams in secondary schools, has been linked to a dramatic increase in mental health issues for children and young people (YMCA, 2016, 2019; Young Minds, 2017; Weale, 2018). Academic success is often regarded as central to subsequent employment, but disadvantage related to class, gender, ethnicity and disability impacts on access to higher education and well-paid employment (Marmot, 2010; Social Mobility Commission, 2019; Hutchinson, Reader and Akhal, 2020). Pressure to meet attainment targets and exam grades is also creating poor mental health amongst teachers, leading to high attrition rates and recruitment issues as teachers leave the profession early (Weale, 2016; Cowburn and Blow, 2017).

The transition to employment is a cause for concern for young people and employers alike. Young people are concerned about the lack of apprenticeship and job opportunities (YMCA, 2016, 2019), while the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) consistently report that school leavers are underprepared for the world of work and have demanded changes in the UK education system to better meet their needs (CBI, 2012; 2019). These concerns have driven a resurgence in Government interest in 'character' education (Birdwell, Scott and Reynolds, 2015; DfE, 2019a), a strategy very much in line with that of the CBI who regard character as one of three pillars (along with knowledge and skills) that interconnect to prepare young people for the world of work, defining it as the 'individual traits and strengths that enable someone to flourish at all stages of their lives', enabling 'young people to deal with set-backs at work, reflect on personal strengths and areas for improvement during performance reviews, and show an inclusive and compassionate outlook on themselves and others' (CBI, 2019, p. 11). The latest schools' inspection guidance for England now asks inspectors to assess the development of pupil's character leading Smith (2019) to position formal and non-formal OL as being ideally situated to make a contribution. Leather (2018) supports this view but is critical of the government stance that links character directly with a political goal of societal involvement, or, in other words, citizenship.

Like character, citizenship is another contested term (see Mills and Waite, 2017), and has social and political interpretations. Since the launch of then-UK Prime Minister David Cameron's Big Society in 2010 which promoted citizens' obligations to their communities, emphasis has focused on replacing government delivered social services with the community

or third sector (Espiet-Kilty, 2016). In terms of OL, it is the establishment and development of the National Citizen Service programme (NCS, 2021) that has made the most direct link between policy and practice, but government agendas are indirectly supported through voluntary schemes that feature a version of citizenship as a core value, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's (D of E) Award Scheme (Campbell *et al.*, 2009) and through organisations such as the Scouts (Mills, 2013) and Guides (Davey and Harwood, 2002).

A more direct approach to citizenship by the OL sector has recently been developed as the Outdoor Citizens Campaign (IOL, 2018a). Launched in 2018 by the Outdoor Council, an umbrella body representing organisations providing outdoor education and recreation, the campaign is designed to promote the opportunities for a progression of outdoor interventions for all children in the UK born from 2017 onwards, with a declared goal of ensuring that a childhood 'packed with adventure, nature and the outdoors' becomes an entitlement through progressive opportunities for experience in the outdoors, with schools forming a particular focus. Three initial goals were identified: the development of an outdoor learning progression model; the development of an outdoor learning primary schools offer, to be tested through a funded project from 2018 onwards; and a commitment from the Outdoor Council to build capacity and help the sector develop its offer and delivery. Thus far, and in part because of the constraints imposed on the sector by Covid-19, progress has been slow, although the current work to bring several representative OL bodies together as one organisation offers the potential to rekindle the campaign as a unifying movement. While the campaign can be critiqued as being promoted by the sector to serve its own interests, there is arguably now a body of evidence that supports its intention.

The focus on a progression model is key as it involves linking the various experiences, the delivery of which will require at least some level of expertise in the form of facilitation and coaching. Local engagement through activities and educational experiences can lead to the development of a sense of place, in turn leading to stronger community ties, enhanced appreciation of their local environment and a commitment to act as an informed and caring citizen (Nicol and Sangster, 2019). Previous progression models (for example, Keighley, 1998) have suggested that there is a role for citizens in protecting the environment, and more recently Natural Resources Wales have developed a model focused entirely on nature connection and a goal of 'influencing society as an active, responsible and ethical citizen'

(Natural Resources Wales, 2021). Progression is a key underpinning concept within this thesis and I will return to it in **Chapter 5.**

3.5   Global/environmental considerations

The Outdoor Citizens campaign makes explicit reference to the importance of nature connectedness for physical and mental wellbeing, and as a means to help address 'the challenges facing the natural world' (Outdoor Citizens, no date). With concerns about climate change and biodiversity loss currently at the forefront of the public narrative, recognition that action needs to be taken has occurred at a global level, manifested through the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Agenda 2030 and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals. In the UK, the Government's 25 year plan for the environment (Defra, 2018) includes a focus on developing 'nature connection' as a way to encourage pro-environmental behaviours.

Much of the current emphasis on nature connectedness is with the long-term goal of translating respect and love for the environment into 'pro-environmental behaviour' that 'consciously seeks to minimize the negative impact of one's actions on the natural and built world' (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p. 240). Personal actions can be augmented by increasing one's own knowledge and getting involved in community action groups (Palmer, Suggate, Bajd and Tsaliki, 1998). However, O'Brien and Lovell (2009) found relatively low levels of concern for climate change amongst primary and secondary aged children. Their findings are mirrored in the YMCA surveys where young people placed environmental concern almost bottom of a list of 19 concerns, indicating a prioritization of more immediate and personal impacts ahead of the potential harm (to themselves) climate change could present (YMCA, 2019). On the other hand, a survey by Barnardo's found that over half of young people surveyed felt that climate change (along with Brexit and concern about the NHS) was one of the three most important issues facing the country (L. Smith, 2019). The apparent difference may be due to the framing of the question as relating to individual or country level impact rather than a lack of concern, but a review carried out by Lee *et al.* (2020) after the worldwide school climate strikes of 2018/19 found that concern for climate change was still relatively low in the UK, being strongest in children aged 7-10 but then declining through adolescence with those young people being less willing to undertake pro-

environmental behaviour. There is clearly still a gap between policy and action and consequently an opportunity for the OL sector.

3.6   Covid-19

On 23rd March 2020, in response to the global Coronavirus pandemic, the UK population entered into the first of several lockdowns. The effects are likely to be far reaching and are not yet fully understood but the pandemic has highlighted the disparities that exist in UK society on many levels. Increasing financial inequality (Fancourt *et al.*, 2020) and low socio-economic status is exacerbating disparities that existed pre-pandemic, leading to further health and educational inequalities (Bambra *et al.*, 2020; Majeed, Maile and Coronini-Cronberg, 2020; Montacute, 2020). The value of green and blue space is recognised by Government (Defra, 2018; Public Health England, 2020) and the importance of exercise during the pandemic has been actively promoted by the Government. Lemmey (2020) identifies positive changes to human-nature relations as a result of exercise taken in the natural environment and an increase in desire to spend more time in nature post-pandemic. Positive feelings regarding the natural environment were also reported by Girlguiding (2020) who identified improvements to the environment and nature as having positive effects on mental health. However, access to high quality green spaces is unequal, especially for disadvantaged communities (Gray and Kellas, 2020), further compounding health inequalities.

The impact of Covid-19 on the OL sector has been significant and may herald a change in the OL landscape. By January 2021, 15 outdoor education centres had closed permanently as a direct result of the Covid restrictions (AHOEC, 2021b), while there has been increased interest in using the outdoors as a means of addressing post-lockdown reintegration challenges in schools (BBC, 2021). Numerous providers of outdoor learning for schools moved resources and delivery online during this period, in many cases removing paywalls to encourage and enable parents and teachers to access them. It is within this context of a potential re-drawing of the OL landscape that any study of outdoor learning must now be situated.

3.7   Chapter summary

The issues described above outline the context of OL within the broader central theme of inequitable access. The challenges facing CYPF are clearly significant, although will not be felt equally by all. Intra- and interpersonal, societal and global concerns combine with the social and economic challenges posed by Covid-19 to form a new contextual framework for OL practice and participation. Concerns about wellbeing, physical and mental health, employability, nature connection and climate change interact with personal circumstances to influence people's actions and, of relevance to this project, how they engage with OL. Such an interweaving of influences suggests a complexity to understanding access that is not just individual but also highly social in context.

3.8   Summary of Part 1

The preceding chapters have introduced the background to the thesis and explored the concept and context of OL as it is understood in England and in this project. Significant challenges face all levels of society, and it is in this context that the field of OL sits. For OL to contribute to this context beyond the current level of provision it is first necessary to understand how people engage with OL, how the benefits are understood, and what the factors are that influence access to OL opportunities. Part 2 explores these themes.

Part 2: Provision, progression and access to outdoor learning

4 The Provision of OL

4.1 Introduction

OL is provided through a wide range of settings, locations, approaches, activities and purposes. Notwithstanding the growing interest in health interventions for adults, the majority of OL provision, with its historical links to outdoor and environmental education (Ogilvie, 2013), is focused on outcomes for young people and is consequently accessed through three main routes provided by formal, non-formal and informal education opportunities. The typology is used to critically review the provision of OL, concluding with an assessment of participation data currently available.

Formal education is the 'hierarchically structured, chronologically graded 'education system'' that is found in schools, colleges and universities, and usually involves set curricula and agreed syllabi (Jeffs and Smith, 2001). Non-formal education refers to organised educational activities that take place outside of the formal system, are usually voluntary and short term, and are intentionally planned to meet specific learning objectives (Jeffs and Smith, 2001; Schugurensky, 2000). The third access route, informal education, involves the lifelong process of acquiring values, skills and knowledge as a result of everyday life and educational experiences (Jeffs and Smith, 2011). Informal education can happen purposefully, but it lies outside prescribed curricula. Learning may happen informally without any planning, but educators can also act purposefully in formal and non-formal settings to encourage informal learning. The formal/non-formal/informal typology can be confusing as there is significant crossover between them. For example, a school, ostensibly a formal setting, may deliver OL related syllabi, use OL as an approach to support and enrich curriculum delivery, or offer opportunities to engage with other non-formal activities such as residential visits. In this thesis the formal/non-formal/informal typology describes settings or programmes where the intended learning that takes place is *predominantly* in line with one of the three contexts described in the typology above and focuses on current provision as it has developed since 1980, when neoliberal polices began to shape the current OL field.

4.2 OL in formal settings

OL in the UK varies depending on country. In Scotland, outdoor learning has ministerial support and is a recognised approach to delivering the Curriculum for Excellence (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010). In Wales the new curriculum makes explicit reference to learning beyond the classroom, where 'experiencing the wonder of the natural world can contribute to learners' spiritual development and well-being, and can help to cultivate in them a sense of place and sense of belonging' (Hwb, 2020b). In Northern Ireland, OL is strongly supported in an extra-curricular format through the provision of experiences by the Youth Service (Education Authority Northern Ireland, 2021), but OL in the curriculum is inferred rather than explicit, limited to one mention under Physical Education (CCEA, 2007). In England, the 2019 National Curriculum maintains a subject based approach leading to OL featuring in a range of curriculum subjects, topics or initiatives at the discretion of teachers and schools (Prince, 2018).

With the introduction in England of the National Curriculum (NC) following the Education Reform Act (1988), outdoor and adventurous activities (OAA) were included in the first iteration as subject content in Physical Education (PE). Alongside this activity focused approach, cross-curricular themes of environmental education, health education and citizenship provided further opportunities for engaging with the outdoors, albeit not explicitly stated. However, the Dearing Review of the NC in 1994 resulted in a slimmed down curriculum, and the coherency and depth that might have existed previously was replaced with individual subjects 'owning' different aspects of outdoor education – OAA in PE, and field studies and environmental education in science and geography (Leather, 2018). The idea of using the outdoors for art, English or any other subjects was effectively hidden until the refocus on OL that occurred as a result of the Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Manifesto in 2006 (Department for Education and Skills, 2006).

The LOtC Manifesto was the result of a House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (HCESC) enquiry which concluded there were significant benefits to be had from learning beyond the classroom but that perceptions of risk and a lack of properly trained teachers were limiting opportunities (HCESC, 2005). The Manifesto set out a belief that 'every young person should experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of learning and personal development, whatever their age, ability or circumstances' (Department for

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Education and Skills, 2006, p. 0). Unfortunately, funding to support the Manifesto only amounted to £4.7m rather than the hoped for £30m, but did lead to the establishment of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC), a charitable organisation focused on promoting and supporting all learning outside the classroom through the development of resources, conferences to share good practice and influencing policy (CLOtC, 2019; Passy *et al.*, 2019). The Manifesto was welcomed by the OL sector but fifteen years after publication there is as yet no statutory guidance on creating the entitlement it suggested (Defra, 2019).

Although there has been no change at policy level, support appears to be growing elsewhere in Government. The Defra (2011) White Paper 'The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature' responded to evidence that children's opportunities to learn outside had been diminishing. The long-term aim of the initiative was to enable all children within England to benefit from learning experiences in their local natural environments and led to the Natural Connections Demonstration Project in the south west of England involving over 120 schools. The project successfully highlighted a range of benefits that can lead to raised attainment (Waite *et al.*, 2016; Passy *et al.*, 2019), yet, despite the compelling evidence, government support remains focused on demonstration projects such as the aforementioned Nature Friendly Schools.

Government policy influences school provision, and specifically OL, in other ways as well. Schools' accountability to government and choice-empowered parents means that priority is often given to the traditional, specified curriculum subjects that can be tested and measured. The resulting league tables, based on SATs, GCSE scores and Ofsted gradings can influence parent's choice of schools. Savage (2017) suggests that this measurement and accountability framework is marginalising social, emotional and personal aspects of education, traditionally the domain of OL, an understandable outcome as head teachers react to priorities dictated by Ofsted, Local Authorities and Governing Bodies. Schools with more positive Ofsted ratings can feel they have more opportunities and freedom to implement alternative pedagogies than those deemed to be worse performing (Kemp and Pagden, 2019; Pimlott-Wilson and Coates, 2019).

Government influence through the marketization of education over the past 40 years means that many aspects of OL provision are now commodified and bought as packages (Evans and Davies, 2015). OAA can be bought in through residentials or external providers, OL advice

and training can be bought in as a consultancy package, and numerous resources are available to buy that can help teachers deliver OL in schools. As a result of the discretionary nature of OL provision in England, opportunities in school are varied. Hawxwell *et al.* (2019) conceptualise them as a spectrum with outdoor adventure at one end and curriculum enrichment at the other, roughly corresponding to a number of motivators for taking learning outside that include recreation and reward, team building and problem solving, and direct curriculum coverage. Much of the focus of OL in schools provision occurs in the Primary phase where OL falls into a number of distinct areas: OAA in PE (Webber and Hardwell, 2019); OL as an approach to delivering aspects of the curriculum (Waite *et al.*, 2016; Marchant *et al.*, 2019); residentials that involve OAA or that have a curriculum focus (Menzies, Bowen-Viner and Shaw, 2017); and specific initiatives such as Forest School (Knight, 2009). On the one hand, these different conceptions of OL illustrate the complexities attendant in moving from the specific application of OL to policy level discussion. On the other, support for any of these approaches can constitute a positive step towards increasing opportunities and participation.

In English and Welsh secondary schools, teaching and learning reflects a subject led approach that becomes increasingly syllabus driven as students move towards statutory exams (GCSE) in Year 11. As a result, OL opportunities become limited to specific examples that relate directly to subject curricula. Lower down the secondary school age range, personal and social development (PSD) through OL is often more highly valued, but provision is dependent on individual school settings and levels of deprivation (Power *et al.*, 2009). PSD focused outdoor residentials are used by many schools for Key Stage 3 pupils, often post–transition from primary school (Menzies, Bowen-Viner and Shaw, 2017). Some schools also use challenging outdoor activities as a means to develop confidence aimed at improving academic performance and 'closing the gap' between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more privileged peers. There is some evidence to support these approaches (EEF, 2021) and research is ongoing. Further opportunities can also be provided through schemes like the D of E or NCS programmes, both of which have an outdoor learning component (see 4.3.2 below).

Beyond school, Further and Higher Education opportunities tend to be focused on particular subjects, although some universities use OL experiences for personal and social development or to enhance subject delivery (e.g. University of Birmingham (2021)). Breunig *et al. (*2017)

found that there was significant increase in the sense of community amongst college students who had engaged with outdoor pursuits trips, suggesting a potential market for OECs seeking to diversify their offer. More specifically related to OL, FE colleges and universities offer courses focused on potential career pathways into the OL sector. It is possible to gain academic qualifications from levels 2 to 8 (for example, Pearson, 2019; University of Cumbria, 2021), although geographical and socio-economic barriers may hinder access (discussed further in **Chapter 8**).

4.3   OL in non-formal settings

4.3.1   Outdoor education and activity centres

Much of non-formal OL provision in the UK has historically been - and continues to be - connected with schools, largely through the development of Local Authority (LA) subsidised outdoor education centres (OECs) from the 1950s onwards and more recently outdoor activity centres (OACs) that have their origins in holidays for young people rather than education (Cooper, 2018). The historical development of this aspect of the sector is well covered elsewhere (see, for example, Hopkins and Putnam, 1993; Cook, 1999; Nicol, 2002; Ogilvie, 2013; Cooper, 2018), so this section, and the thesis, focuses on the current provision and the place of the OEC/OAC in the map of provision.

The nature of the sector, and the range of choice available to potential customers, is considerable although difficult to quantify. It is also changing: in 1979, 'the heyday of OECs' (Cooper, 2018, p. 105), there were 400 day and residential outdoor education centres (Ogilvie, 2013); in 2010 there were 235 English LA Centres (Taylor, 2010). Wood and Pritchard (2014) analysed the scale of the UK sector through accreditation databases (including AALA licence holders, IOL, AHOEC and BAPA) and found that just over 60% of providers were private sector, 20% public sector and the rest not-for-profit organisations. Although there is no difference in the data between a sole operator and a multi-centre company such as PGL, the authors suggest a minimum figure of 1899 organisations involved in field studies, outdoor and adventure education, overseas expeditions and activity holidays, giving a reference point based on replicable methodology. The loss of provision that could result from the Covid-19 pandemic (IOL, 2020) suggests the need for a re-survey soon.

Menzies *et al*. (2017) estimate that approximately 21% of English pupils participate in residentials each year, but that fewer residentials are available in disadvantaged areas. The threatened loss of centres as a result of the Covid pandemic, whatever their educational or business philosophy, has a potentially significant impact on children's experiences. The vast majority of outdoor activity focused trips are undertaken by primary schools (Cooper, 2018) with personal and social development goals. The picture looks unlikely to change in the foreseeable future as there is very little evidence that directly connects OA focused residentials to improved GCSE or A level exam grades (Christie, Higgins and McLaughlin, 2014), although Fuller, Powell and Fox (2017) have identified a connection between self-efficacy and confidence, suggesting that this has a significant effect on exam grades. The evidence step from OA residential straight to academic success may be too ambitious, but a wider understanding of how the outcomes can contribute to longer term impacts could be advantageous. This longer-term view of OL is at the heart of notions of progression and will be explored further in **Chapter 6**.

A further impact of the economic and political changes is the reduction in course length. Longer courses have been shown to have a greater benefit (Fiennes *et al.*, 2015), yet economics conspire to make these increasingly unviable. It is possible to view this as a natural evolution, of course, and accept the change for the pragmatic reason that to not accept it and continue with outdated business models would lead to closure. From an educational perspective, though, I believe there is also an argument that shorter courses allow more children and young people to access the provision, a more equitable approach than a few accessing longer courses. For many younger staff working in the sector the 'new' way is the way it has always been, but Leather (2018b) warns against uncritical blind acceptance of change, a useful reminder as the social justice ideals that inspired the OEC movement are as relevant now as they were then. Providers face a dilemma over whether to accept the business model driving practice, or to continue to try and influence policy that encourages a return to the practices that evidence supports as having greater benefits. Perhaps a pragmatic application of both strategies is required.

4.3.2   Other aspects of non-formal education

Despite youth work being recognised as able to make significant contributions to the development of young people's life skills, resilience and character (APPG on Youth Affairs, 2019), non-statutory youth service provision saw cuts of £387m between 2010 and 2016,

resulting in the loss of almost 140,000 UK youth service places and over 600 youth centres (Unison, 2016). Some English LA provision still exists through dedicated outdoor education services (see, for example, Cheshire East Council, 2021), and some youth providers offer specific OL functions to support young people (WHYP, 2021; Wigan Youth Zone, 2021), but it has largely been left to third sector organisations and private companies to provide youth engagement opportunities, resulting in a complex picture of provision. The Cumbria Youth Alliance (CYA), a membership and support body for over 100 different organisations in Cumbria working with young people, demonstrates the atomised service provision that exists through its diverse membership, which includes scout groups, local youth projects, church groups, young farmers clubs, residential centres, university departments and the Lake District National Park (CYA, 2019). Within this provision, access to OL can occur through residential visits to centres or through self-led provision, although the latter is highly variable and depends on staff competence, confidence and resource availability (Harris-Evans, 2017).

The wider non-formal sector incorporates further provision through sail training organisations, youth expeditions overseas and schemes such as the D of E, the NCS and uniformed youth groups including the Scouts and the Girlguides. From one perspective, all the schemes offer ways to access OL, and outdoor activity features strongly in publicity materials and website images for many. However, it should be noted that although there is a strong connection with OL, it is not necessarily the main focus. The D of E scheme, for example, involves developing new skills, community engagement and personal fitness as well as the well-known expeditions, while the NCS scheme includes an initial OL residential as a precursor to developing a community project. The Scout movement 'actively engages and supports young people in their personal development, empowering them to make a positive contribution to society' (Scouts, 2020, p. 7), and Girlguiding work with girls and young women 'inspiring them to discover the best in themselves and to make a positive difference in their community' (Girlguiding, 2020, p. 2). OL experiences are significant but form part of a bigger purpose, a point that emphasises the place OL has in the broader range of experiences that young people should or could access.

An alternative way to engage with OL is provided through the John Muir Award, an environmental award scheme that 'encourages people to connect with, enjoy, and care for wild places' (John Muir Trust, 2021). The JMA has an environmental focus rather than an activity one, although it may be undertaken as part of a wider programme or expedition that

makes use of adventurous activities. As such, it is often completed as part of a residential visit by school children but can also be accessed through numerous other organisations by individuals, families and groups.

OL also encompasses skills development related to outdoor activity, for example, canoeing, rock climbing and navigation, chiefly accessed by adults. Many skills-based progressions and qualification frameworks adopt formal syllabi and increasingly include aspects of environmental knowledge as well as technical skill (see, for example, British Canoeing, 2015; Mountain Training, 2018). The blurring of boundaries between OL and OR is apparent as participants move from being led to leading others, training others to become independent and informed in their own recreation time.

4.4   Informal settings

Directly facilitated experiences in the formal and non-formal sectors account for some of a learner's time, but recreation time provides a wealth of opportunity for OL experiences that rely on individual, family or community motivation to engage through venues and facilities. The venue or facility can 'create informal routes to knowledge' (Jeffs, 2018, p. 70) through notice boards, self-run activities and signposted trails that help people to interact with the natural environment and develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours without the direct support of a (human) facilitator. Examples of informal settings include Forestry Commission 'Gruffalo Trails' (Forestry Commission England, 2021), '50 things to do when you're 11 ¾' (National Trust, 2021), the 'Big Garden Birdwatch' (RSPB, 2021) and the Wildlife Trust's 'Family Days Out' (The Wildlife Trusts, 2021).

Targeted interventions with families using OECs and outdoor venues to develop resilience skills and explore new experiences have been shown to have a positive impact on young people's attitudes to school and their home environment (McManus, 2012), and contribute to parents' confidence to engage with the outdoors independently with their families (Goodenough, Waite and Bartlett, 2015; Flynn *et al.*, 2017). Although outdoor recreation provision itself is beyond the scope of this study, taking this perspective emphasises the potential scale of the OL field and the opportunity that exists to make more explicit the links between outdoor learning, families and outdoor recreation.

Other settings for OL are less well represented in the sector and highlight the traditional roots of UK OL in adventure and school provision (Loynes, 2007; Hempsall, 2019). Of greatest significance is the provision through care farms, community gardens, green care and social prescribing services. In 2017 there were 250 care farms operating in the UK, providing health, social or educational care to 9750 people from vulnerable groups through farming related activities, many participants referred from LA social services, carers and community mental health teams (Care Farming UK, 2017). Recognition of the potential value of such provision is reflected in the Growing Care Farming delivery project (2019-2021), funded by the DfE as part of the Children in Nature Programme (Social Farms and Gardens, 2021a).

The Social Farms and Gardens charity, which represents the care farms, 1000 community gardens and 200 city and school farms, work with over 3 million visitors per year (Social Farms and Gardens, 2021b). The increasing focus on social prescribing within the NHS will see the referral of 900,000 people by the end of 2024 (NHS, 2021), a strategy that potentially offers opportunities for the more traditional (i.e. schools and outdoor centres focused) OL sector to expand its involvement, especially when one considers the inclusive definition of OL being adopted by the sector.

4.5   Assessing the scale of participation in OL

Fiennes *et al.* (2015 p. 8) recommended that the sector 'pull together the various data sources…to give the current picture, and create a system to regularly capture data on the types and volumes of activity'. However, assessing levels of engagement with OL is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, the different perceptions of OL, reflected in its broad definition as an 'umbrella' term, lead to different ways of accounting for participation. Primary school provision, for example, can be regarded as an approach to delivering the curriculum, outdoor focused residentials, OAA as part of the PE curriculum, Forest School provision or John Muir Award participation. Secondary schools, on the other hand, may look to residentials, the D of E Award, activity weeks at the end of the summer term, and GCSE and A-level provision.

The second problem is one of quality and 'what counts' as measurable OL. Is two hours of Forest School per week with 6 year old children comparable with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme targeting 15 year olds? Different provision leads to different outcomes, and

so it is important not to conflate all outdoor experiences into one 'homogeneous entity' (Mannion, Mattu and Wilson, 2015, p. 6). A related issue of significance to the voluntary D of E, Scouts, Guides and NCS schemes is that these are broader than OL alone and allow for different levels of OL engagement. OL is a core part of Phase 1 of the NCS scheme but is highly variable in terms of quality and content (Anderson, Simms and Harvey, 2019). Simply assuming that membership of the Scouts or Guides equates to OL engagement is also problematic as there may be variation in local provision that depends on personal interest, volunteer capacity and leader qualifications.

The third challenge is available data. Organisations hold varying levels of data for their own participants and members, and account for it in different ways. Research requests to the Scouts and D of E revealed local level data down to individual school level (D of E) and unit level (Scouts), but with differences in geographic boundaries between the two organisations. A similar issue is apparent in social prescribing settings where Primary Care Trusts cover multiple counties and LAs, making any data that may be gathered from such bodies difficult to compare. The John Muir Award can provide individual participation numbers at a local provider level, but data from the Forest School Association is currently limited to the number of practitioners registered at a county level. A potentially large source of data is available through the Evolve school visit notification and approval system, currently used by over 22,000 schools in the UK (Edufocus, 2021). LAs that buy the Evolve service require maintained schools to submit details of trips and visits that fall into three categories: overseas, residential or involving specifically designated outdoor and adventurous activities. Activities that are part of normal on-site school practice (e.g. orienteering, team building or curricular related activity) do not require notification. National level interrogation is feasible but is highly problematic at a more local level as academies are not required to use the service and different LAs have their own particular requirements. Attempts to gather data from providers of OL, such as Outdoor Education Centres, have proven difficult due to different accounting methods, response rates and organisational membership, but the AHOEC estimates a figure of 3 million person days per annum (AHOEC, 2020). Geography creates a further issue in that some areas (e.g. the Lake District National Park) have more providers and venues when compared with other areas, such as large inner cities. The socio-economic and cultural landscape that overlays the physical one may well have an influence on provision that creates a distorted picture when taken in isolation.

4.5.1 Participation data

In a school context, assessing participation is difficult. One potential data set is provided through the use of GCSE and A level enrolment numbers (Joint Council for Qualifications, 2019a, 2019b), while in a broader context Mannion *et al.* (2015) have surveyed primary and secondary schools in Scotland with an eight year gap using an instrument that recorded learning events in a given period and captured time spent outdoors, as well as what they did and where. Data shows 30 minutes per pupil per week being spent on outdoor provision, up from 19 minutes per week in 2006. Approximately one third of the time was spent in school grounds, a further third beyond the school and a quarter on residentials. In secondary schools, 16 minutes per pupil per week were spent on outdoor provision, up from 13 minutes in 2006. Residentials accounted for approximately two thirds of provision. Repeat surveys are planned in subsequent years which will enable an assessment of policies and practices seeking to encourage greater participation. Although the survey was limited to a small sample size, there is potential to apply a similar methodology in other UK countries to gain an understanding of levels of provision in schools beyond Scotland and to provide, as in Scotland, a replicable measure to gauge progress in the quantity and nature of OL provision. It may be possible to increase the sample size significantly by accessing the Educational Visits Coordinator network through the OEAP, who conduct the majority of their training.

In the residential sector, Menzies *et al.* (2017) used Evolve data to estimate that 1.8m children took part in a residential every year, equivalent to 21% of the school population. On average, 2.5 residentials per year were organized by educational establishments, although analysis of associated deprivation data showed that there were fewer opportunities for those from disadvantaged areas (Menzies *et al.*, 2017). Elsewhere in the non-formal sector, the relative scale of participation through different organisations varies but collectively they have considerable reach. Member organisations of the Sail Training Association, for example, work with over 10,000 young people per year (UK Sail Training, 2011), while World Challenge (2021) claim over 150,000 participants on multiday overseas expeditions since 1987. On a different scale, D of E in 2019/20 saw over 490,000 young people engaged in one of the three award levels (D of E, 2021a) and the NCS scheme over the same period involved 92,000 young people (NCS, 2020); in the UK, the Scouts have 640,000 members and the Guides 400,000 (Walker, 2019). Ministry of Defence supported cadet forces have a further 131,000 members (Ministry of Defence, 2016). In the environmental sector, the Field Studies Council (FSC) worked with almost 164,000 learners in 2019, 73,000 of them residentially (FSC, 2019).

Also environment-focused, over 43,000 John Muir Awards were completed bringing the total number to over 250,000 since its inception in 1997 (John Muir Trust, 2019).

Assessing participation in the informal sector is extremely difficult. Membership numbers of organisations such as RSPB or National Trust do not indicate activity levels. Visitor numbers provide one possible solution but collation of individual organisations' data would require significant resources. Initial research enquiries for this project highlighted the difficulty of gathering meaningful data as venues collected data in different ways. For the purposes of this thesis data from venues has been excluded and the focus placed on formal and non-formal OL participation. Other data sets, such as that provided through the decade of MENE surveys (Defra, 2019), shed some light on participation in recreational activity outdoors, but although the data provides evidence to support the benefits of spending time outdoors, the scope of the survey means that there is little to link it with specific OL experiences. Table 4.1 summarises current data sets available in the public domain.

Collating the various data sets for meaningful comparison is almost impossible. Some figures infer an OL engagement level that can be extrapolated from the data (e.g. GCSE Geography fieldwork or D of E expeditions) while others, such as the JMA can be wholly interpreted as OL. Other data, such as the numbers of people involved in Scouting or the NCS programme make no allowance for what experiences and opportunities are being accessed. Further, multiple engagement is not allowed for. To take an extreme (although entirely feasible) example, a young person could be taking GCSE Geography which involves a residential to complete fieldwork. Outside school they are also completing their D of E Award through the Scouts, part of which includes the JMA. All D of E expeditions that are run through LA maintained schools must be approved, often through the Evolve system. Data is therefore at risk of being counted multiple times.

Source	Year	Numbers	Notes
School OL (Primary)	2015	30 minutes per week	Currently Scotland only
School OL (Secondary)	2015	16 minutes per week	Currently Scotland only
GCSE Geography	2019	265,169	England, Wales and N Ireland
A level Geography	2019	34,960	England, Wales and N Ireland
D of E	2019/20	490,000	UK
NCS	2019/20	92,057	England only
FSC	2019	163,907	UK
JMA	2019	43,000	UK
Evolve (residentials)	2017	21%	Percentage of School children participating in residentials (England)
Scouts	2019	640,000	UK
Girl Guides	2019	460,000	UK
Cadet forces	2016	131,000	UK Latest data available
Care farms	2017	9,750	UK

Table 4.1. Publicly available OL engagement data

Participation data from any OL related organisation that shows increasing provision is justifiably a cause for celebration, but while the data sets may tell us how many people are doing something specific, they also raise a fundamental question: what do they actually tell us about access to OL? The range of different organisations and institutions represented all incorporate some aspects of OL but whether or not OL is the main element is debateable. Further, showing an increase or decrease in participation in a specific category may be helpful to demonstrate a trend but does little to develop understanding of the reasons why they are at that level as the data only shows how many people are involved. It does not show if that figure is a natural capacity (i.e. that everyone who wants to is accessing the opportunity) or whether access is constrained by various factors. Despite these shortcomings, however, an update of Table 4.1 on a regular basis would be straightforward and when combined with longitudinal studies such as the ongoing People and Nature Survey (Natural England, 2020c) would provide a high-level indication of OL access trends.

4.6   Chapter summary

OL is provided through a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal routes. In the formal sector, nurseries, primary and secondary schools provide opportunities within statutory provision. Beyond the Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS), however, multiple factors influence what is essentially a discretionary approach and provision is consequently highly variable. At secondary school, opportunities exist to choose environment related subjects (such as Geography or Biology) at GCSE and A-level, and many schools offer the D of E Scheme. Residentials are offered by many schools across all Key Stages, providing memorable experiences that contribute to a wide range of personal development and curricular outcomes (Menzies *et al.*, 2017). Post school, colleges and Universities offer formal OL related courses that may lead to a future career in the OL sector, and outdoor providers offer training schemes and apprenticeships as pathways to employment (IOL, 2021d). Outside school uniformed and non-uniformed youth groups offer opportunities to engage with OL experiences on a voluntary basis, and charitable organisations such as the RSPB, Wildlife Trusts and the National Trust offer opportunities for families on a more informal basis.

Data from different providers shows encouraging levels of engagement but provide an incomplete picture. The disaggregated nature of the data reflects the current landscape of OL, a landscape shaped by market forces and neoliberal notions of accountability where participants become consumers and providers focus on their own sustainability. The findings show how a plethora of stakeholders and agendas interact with policy, local contexts and culture to create a picture of provision that incorporates a wide variety of approaches to achieving a range of goals (illustrated graphically in Figure 4.1).
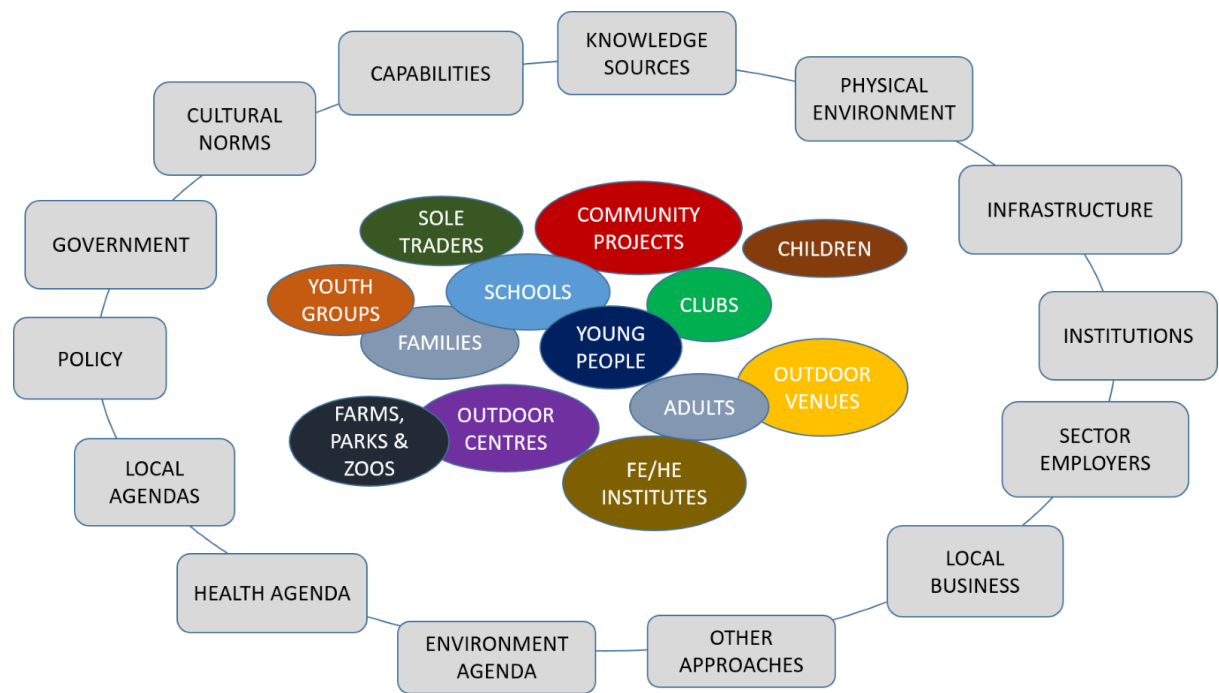
Figure 4.1. The disaggregated provision of OL

Returning to Fiennes *et al.*'s recommendation of assessing levels of provision, it is clear that no single data source can meet this need as there are numerous interpretations and participation groups. The variation in national datasets makes comparison impossible and different interpretations of OL make surveying difficult. Comparison within each dataset provides a measure of change and so will only reflect policy within a specific context. National level statistics also do not show the differences that may exist at more local levels, nor do they bring to light the various factors that affect provision and engagement. The existing datasets do, however provide a replicable way to quickly assess changes in levels of provision.

Many aspects of the critical agendas outlined in **Chapter 3** can be addressed though OL provision, yet these goals are less likely to be reached while provision remains disaggregated. Pathways that link the various elements of provision do exist, but they are often identified by the participant based on interest rather than identified by the sector itself. From an individual perspective, there are theoretically numerous ways to engage with OL throughout the life course. Any linking between them, though, is left up to either self-directed individual participants or enabling adults operating on behalf of others. In other words, the benefits of OL can be missed as the sector itself lacks a sense of coherency, failing

to provide any sense of progression beyond that specifically provided by organisations such as the Scouts, D of E and JMA, leaving the potential beneficiaries (i.e. the consumers) to make their own decisions. This reality is at odds with the idea of progression that seemingly lies at the heart of OL and forms the subject of the next chapter.

5   Progression in OL

5.1   Introduction

In their guide to *High Quality Outdoor Learning,* the English Outdoor Council (EOC) suggest progression 'from early years to lifelong learning' as a core theme that can lead to lifelong physical activity and improved health and wellbeing (EOC, 2015, p. 3). More recently, the UK *Outdoor Citizens* campaign has called 'for progressive experiences from birth to adulthood that build on each other to develop knowledge, skills and familiarity with the outdoors' (Outdoor Citizens, no date). However, while the calls for progression may be clear, there is little sense of either what progression actually consists of nor how these goals can be achieved.

The lack of explicit connection between the various opportunities is recognised by Hunt (2017) when she proposes that a model is necessary 'to mobilise the sectors with an interest in people and the natural environment, so that they can better meet cross-governmental policy priorities (individual, societal and environmental)' related to the environment, health and wellbeing, community development, education and skills and the growth of economic/natural capital. For Hunt, the goal is to increase provision to be able to access the benefits of the natural environment, but she also recognises and highlights the need for a more coherent approach to delivery that can be understood both at policy level and at a local, practitioner level where there are multiple operators and inequitable access to provision. I suggest that the same arguments can be applied to the broader OL sector.

This chapter examines the notion of progression in OL and current understanding within the sector of its application.

5.2   Understanding progression

At their heart, notions of progression associated with learning are built on constructivist concepts of knowing, where learners are viewed as individuals who already possess a range of prior knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours which influence how they relate to and interpret the world (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000). New knowledge and meaning are essentially 'constructed' from existing knowledge and beliefs as learners actively confront

their existing understanding in the light of new experiences (Moon, 2004; Bada, 2015). Heritage (2008, p. 2) is clear that 'by its very nature, learning involves progression. To assist in its emergence, teachers need to understand the pathways along which students are expected to progress. These pathways or progressions ground both instruction and assessment.' Bada (2015) suggests that a constructivist approach logically leads to the need to design experiences that enable learners to be directly exposed to the material being studied, a necessary condition for deriving meaning and one that OL practice has traditionally facilitated. Humans are viewed as goal directed agents who are inherently curious and actively seek information, the outdoor world providing a rich environment for experiences that involve discovery, exploration and learning (Hodgkin, 1976; Hopkins and Putnam, 1993).

In the field of OL, where experiential learning has been widely adopted as an underpinning philosophy in post-industrial western civilisations (Rea, 2008; Beames and Brown, 2016), the constructivist approach is often articulated through the ideas of John Dewey and is supported by a large body of literature (see, for example, (Kolb, 1984; Beard and Wilson, 2006; Berry and Hodgson, 2011; Roberts, 2012; Quay and Seaman, 2013; Jeffs and Ord, 2018). For Dewey, writing almost a century ago, education was about achieving a continuity 'in which the past and present interact to create the future, and the meaning of such interaction is directly correlative to the connections we make in the process' (Roberts, 2012, p59). Hayward *et al.* (2018, p. 179) echo Dewey in their comprehensive guide to progression in the new Welsh Curriculum, stating that 'implicit in progression is the notion of continuity and coherence. Learning is not seen as a series of discrete events, but rather as a trajectory of development that connects knowledge, concepts and skills within a domain.'

This thesis adopts a constructivist perspective but acknowledges that although seemingly fundamental to OL practice, it is not without its critics. Loynes (2002), for example, suggests that constructivist theories applied through linear models have been largely responsible for the underlying language of process and industry in use today to the exclusion of alternatives, while Seaman (2008) is concerned that the uncritical and dominant adoption of constructivist perspectives in experiential outdoor and adventurous learning ignores the historical and cultural contexts in which they originated. These perspectives are useful reminders when undertaking assessment of current progression models and the subsequent development of future ones: what works in one context may not apply elsewhere without

critical evaluation beforehand, and other models of progression built on alternative ways of knowing may be equally (or more) productive.

5.3   Existing examples of progression in the UK

In the formal education sector the UK home nations' curricula offer varying opportunities for OL progression, although the differing levels of support for (and development of) OL in each country's schools leads to differing outcomes. The English National Curriculum, for example, maintains a dispersed approach to OL that has unfortunately left implementation decisions to individual teachers and schools (Prince, 2018). In contrast, teachers in Scotland are encouraged to 'take full account of children and young people's previous experience of outdoor learning' (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010) when planning progressive OL experiences. It is in this context that Beames, Higgins and Nicol (2012) suggest a straightforward progression model for schools based on increasing distance from the school itself (Figure 5.1). Their concentric circle model differentiates between school grounds, the local neighbourhood, day excursions that often involve transport, and longer, overnight residentials or expeditions. The model is helpful in being clearly relevant to teachers across the UK, legitimising their use of school grounds and thus low-resource activities to engage effectively with the outdoors. The focus on the experiences of children and young people brings together a spatial perspective with a temporal one – as children get older their capacity to go further afield for longer increases. The model is simple and has potential transferability to other fixed-base settings such as youth clubs and Scout/Guide groups, where it could form the basis of progressive OL programme development.

Figure 5.1. The Four Zones of Outdoor Learning (Beames, Higgins and Nicol, 2012)

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In the non-formal sector, residentials offer opportunities for youth and school groups to build on prior learning (Kendall and Rodger, 2015; S. Cooper, 2018) but the degree to which this is achieved varies according to the group leader, the centre delivery model and the operational constraints that centres operate under. Cooper (2018, pp. 111-112), for example, asserts that many activity centres merely offer a range of 'quick thrill activities...more in keeping with a theme park...Often there is no coherence; they are simply a collection of activities rather than an educational programme'. The shortened courses that are prevalent today can rely on the skill of the tutor to forge the narrative thread that leads children through a progression of outcomes rather than an ideal activity progression, the whole residential often representing an isolated special event rather than being part of a clearly identified progression (Harvey, 2011).

Progression pathways are also evident in many well-established skill development, leadership and coaching courses run by national governing bodies (NGBs) (see for example, British Canoeing, 2021; Mountain Training, 2021; RYA, 2021) and through the badge schemes offered to Girlguides and Scouts (Girlguiding, 2021b; Scouts, 2021a). Award schemes such as the D of E and John Muir Award offer a stepped approach accessible beyond school age,

although there is no requirement in either scheme to have completed lower levels before accessing higher ones.

5.4   Broader OL progression models

Notwithstanding the potential for progression in the specific examples outlined above, models that adopt a more holistic view are scarcer. Keighley (1998), writing for teachers in England and Wales in the 1990's, proposed a model that reflected a belief in outdoor education's capability to cross subject boundaries. He saw outdoor education as 'embracing three interlinked areas of experiential learning: outdoor adventurous activities, outdoor environmental studies and the residential experience' (1998, p. 23). The different areas offered opportunities to develop activity skills, to develop personally, socially and academically, to grow their understanding of the natural world and, ultimately, to achieve a political understanding of environmental issues through engagement with clubs and organisations (such as the National Trust) beyond the school gate (Figure 5.2).

Keighley's model, although ultimately a product of its time and consequently out of line with current outdoor learning practice (largely due to the loss of opportunities for OE in secondary schools), does retain a number of key strengths. The model's linked pyramids highlight the interconnectedness of the different areas, and subsequent models showed how this could be mapped across the school year leading not just to competence in OAA, but also to political awareness and environmental action (Keighley, 1998). Unfortunately, although the content is still in many ways relevant, government education policies over the last 20 years have led to an increased focus on academic study, often to the detriment of non-tested enrichment activities. The situation is compounded by the backgrounding of OAA in the PE curriculum, and the lack of expertise and confidence amongst teachers (Webber and Hardwell, 2019).

Self-reliance and survival skills, conservation, leading to political understanding of environmental issues

OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Introduction to the environment

Field studies as an integrating theme across the whole curriculum

Outdoor studies as part of outdoor education course

Field studies related to particular subjects

exams

Affiliation to a club/group eg Natural Trust

Observations and interpretations of constituents and processes in the environment. Care of and concern for the environment.

THE RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCE

Aesthetic awareness

Enjoyment of the environment

A period away from home at one of the LEA Residential Centres

1-3 day self-programmed courses

5 day outdoor education courses

CAMPCRAFT EXPERIENCE

'A journey'

County expeditions abroad

Self reliant journey

OUTDOOR ADVENTUROUS ACTIVITIES

Rambles in the countryside

Introduction to: basic mapwork, navigation, orienteering

Introduction to adventurous activities (low skill): gorge walking, rafting, orienteering, campcraft, Canadian canoeing

Introduction to outdoor pursuits: skiing, canoeing, sailing, caving and climbing

Development of skill in one or more outdoor activity

Affiliation to a club/group to pursue a specific activity

Figure 5.2. A Framework for Progressive Curriculum in Outdoor Education (Keighley, 1998)

Further afield and more recently, the introduction of the Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes (21CC) in Singapore led to the introduction of outdoor education into the PE curriculum (Ho *et al.*, 2016). There, the OE framework contributes to the overall curriculum goals of creating a concerned citizen who is a confident person, a self-directed learner and an active citizen and has three distinct learning outcomes that specifically relate to the affordances of outdoor education: physical health and wellbeing; risk assessment and management; and a sense of place, all of which are based on a constructivist approach that emphasise a progression from the familiar to unfamiliar environments, and from controlled to dynamic situations requiring judgement and decision making (Figure 5.3).
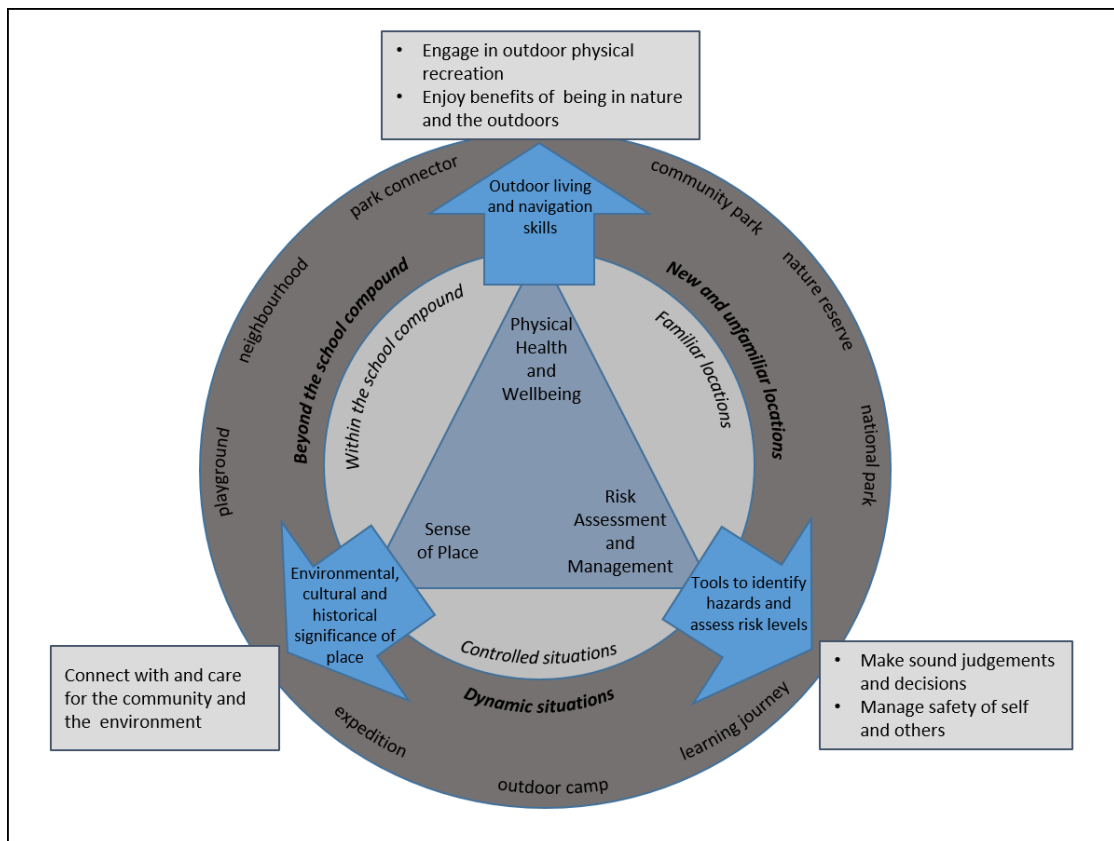
Figure 5.3. Singapore framework for teaching and learning Outdoor Education in PE (Ho *et al*., 2016, p.280)

Like Keighley's model, the Singapore framework focuses on formal education but identifies engagement beyond school in terms of personal recreation with a similar connection through the goal of long-term environmental connection and care. The model is attractive in that the more distal outcome goals associated with the environment, personal safety in the outdoors and engagement with the outdoors recreationally, resonate with goals for outdoor learning in the UK. However, caution is needed when considering the transposition of models between different countries. Ho *et al*. (2016) emphasise the context and history within which the Singapore PE model developed as part of a wider educational model designed to meet specific national concerns and goals. In so doing, they underline the point that it is not always possible to simply transpose a model from one setting into another without an understanding of its associated cultural, social and historical heritage, whether at a local or global level. The implication that progression is towards a specified goal means that clarity is needed around what the goal actually is, a goal that will be culturally unique. The

model's school focus is also time bound, leaving a question about further development into adulthood and across the life course.

5.5 Beyond the school environment: development across the life-course

Moving beyond the confines of time bound programmes (e.g. as found in schools) to life course progressions necessarily involves consideration of broader influences on development where the environment, social and cultural factors combine with biological, genetic and psychological factors. Human development is 'an incredibly complex process that grows out of transactions between a changing person and a changing world and out of dynamic relationships among biological, psychological, and social influences' (Sigelman and Rider, 2015, p. xx). It is not, in other words, simply a matter of applying one particular theory across the whole life course but is inevitably a blend of theories that can be applied when most appropriate for particular issues or groups. With the growing amount of evidence showing how children's connection with the environment influences their actions and life trajectory as adults (Martin *et al.*, 2020), understanding human development across the lifespan becomes increasingly important if effective interventions are to be planned and delivered. Previously popular cognitive stage development theories have been criticised for being overly simplified and culturally biased (Fine, 1999), and the key idea that development follows an invariant, discontinuous sequence has also been questioned, development now being known to be influenced by multiple factors and generally accepted as being the product of nature and nurture (Sigelman and Rider, 2015) rather than one or the other.

Life course theory (LCT) (Elder, 1994) provides a useful lens through which to develop an OL progression model by emphasising the interconnection of four key principles (Sigelman and Rider, 2015). Firstly, human lives are connected to time and place. When and where a child is born can have significant effect on how they develop, their opportunities and their subsequent development trajectory. Social mobility research highlights the damaging effect that economic deprivation can have on the life chances of young people (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Secondly, social expectations affect what is considered normal for a particular age group at a particular time. The granting of permission by adults as children grow up to travel and play unaccompanied, for example, is largely influenced by the local context within which people live and has been shown to have an effect on their independence and potential connection to nature (Shaw *et al.*, 2013). Thirdly, human lives

are interlinked and characterised by relationships – with peers, with family, with friends and classmates, adults and co-workers. Relationships between teachers and children, for example, have been shown to be enhanced through residential experiences, leading to positive benefits back in school (Kendall and Roger, 2015). The final principle is that humans develop agency, the power to make decisions and have control of their own lives, albeit within certain social constraints. This principle underpins the concept of empowerment and agency proposed by Maynard and Stuart (2018) that is based on gaining self-awareness, understanding choices and acting, a progression focused on wellbeing that ultimately leads to people thriving rather than merely surviving. The four principles can be summarised as related to time and place, identity, relationships and agency, the interaction of which influences how people develop. These aspects will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

LCT has been used to study a variety of social issues including poverty, careers and health, and also to show that childhood participation in nature could lead to a pro-environmental life trajectory. Wells and Lekies (2006), broadening the scope of previous research into significant life experiences by authors such as Chawla (1998) and Palmer, Suggate, Bajd, Hart, *et al.*(1998), specifically focused on environmental attitudes across the wider population rather than in just committed environmentalists. In a study that was the first to look at an environmental connection through the lens of life trajectories, they found that childhood experiences are a strong determinant of later life outcomes. Pretty *et al.* (2009), using a similar concept and drawing on extensive research into socio-economic effects, mental health outcomes and social capital, go further and suggest a range of life pathways exist between positive and negative tracks. Drawing on child development theory, their Life Pathways Model (LPM) incorporates three 'ages of childhood': 0-5 years, where attachment, security and nurture are most significant; 6-11, where exploration, engagement and memory making are central; and 12-18, where independence, inclusion and risk taking come to the fore. The LPM suggests that for people on the positive pathway the outcomes can be increased life expectancy, better wellbeing and positive nature connection leading to pro-environmental behaviours, while the opposite outcomes are likely on more negative pathways. Every individual will experience their own pathway dependent on a wide range of contextual factors, with nature deemed a significant contributor to positive health and wellbeing (Figure 5.4). The authors recognise that people can move from the positive to negative trajectories and vice versa.
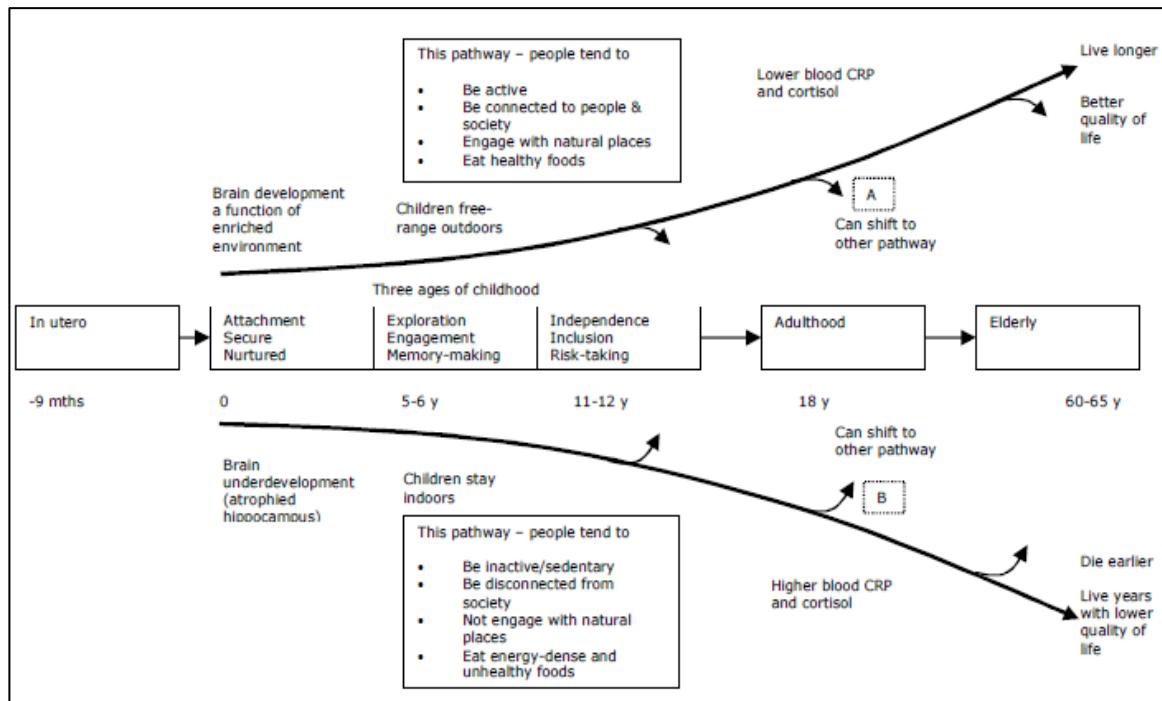
Figure 5.4. The Life Pathways Model (Pretty *et al*., 2009, p.6)

The LPM model has heavily influenced attempts to map a progression pathway related specifically to OL, the majority of the work thus far being focused on nature connection and health. Hunt (2017) suggests that by enabling direct experiences in natural environments personal outcomes related to wellbeing, connection with nature, and knowledge and skills will lead to increased personal relevance and concern for the natural environment, ultimately leading to healthier lifestyles and pro environmental behaviours. She outlines a framework for progressive opportunities built on work done by the Strategic Research Network (SRN) for People and Nature that uses the LPM model as a basis to map interventions from different groups across the life course: family, carers, formal education, friends, employers and community groups.

Following Pretty *et al*. (2009) and Hunt (2017), Loynes (2019) developed a specific model of outdoor learning progression (Figure 5.5), linking provision through informal, non-formal and formal routes to the positive outcomes pathway. Targeted interventions are shown as means to move from negative trajectories towards positive ones. The model is therefore multidimensional in that it demonstrates an individual's hypothetically ideal pathway and the support from different aspects of provision and opportunities. Implicit within the model is an acknowledgement that institutions (e.g. government, the health service, families) and

organisations (e.g. schools, youth groups) understand and seek to utilise the outdoors as a vehicle for positive change.
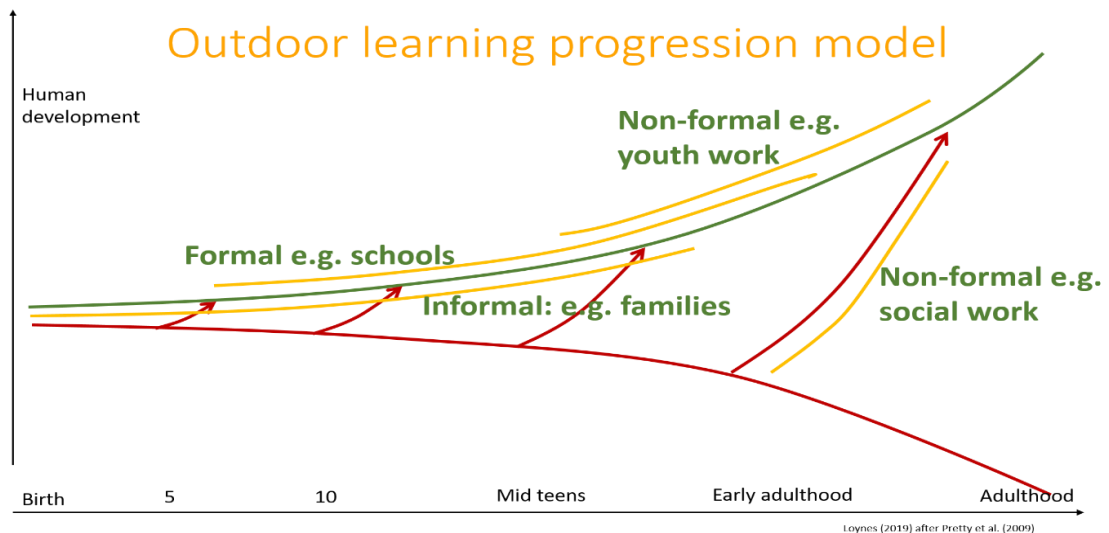
Figure 5.5. Outdoor Learning Progression Model (Loynes, 2019)

The various conceptual diagrams have led to attempts to articulate progression in tabular form. Although not intending to articulate an idea of progression, Maller (2009) developed a model that identified outcomes mapped against age and learning context. Hunt (2017) builds on this idea and suggests a matrix approach to mapping interventions based on demographics that incorporates outcomes, settings and activities. Developing the idea further, Robinson (2018) maps OL opportunities against specific ages and contexts for learning (Figure 5.6). Activities are discovery and exploration based at the younger ages and lead towards self-directed activities and community engagement (in line with Keighley, 1998) for older ages. There are a number of key issues with this strategy, however.
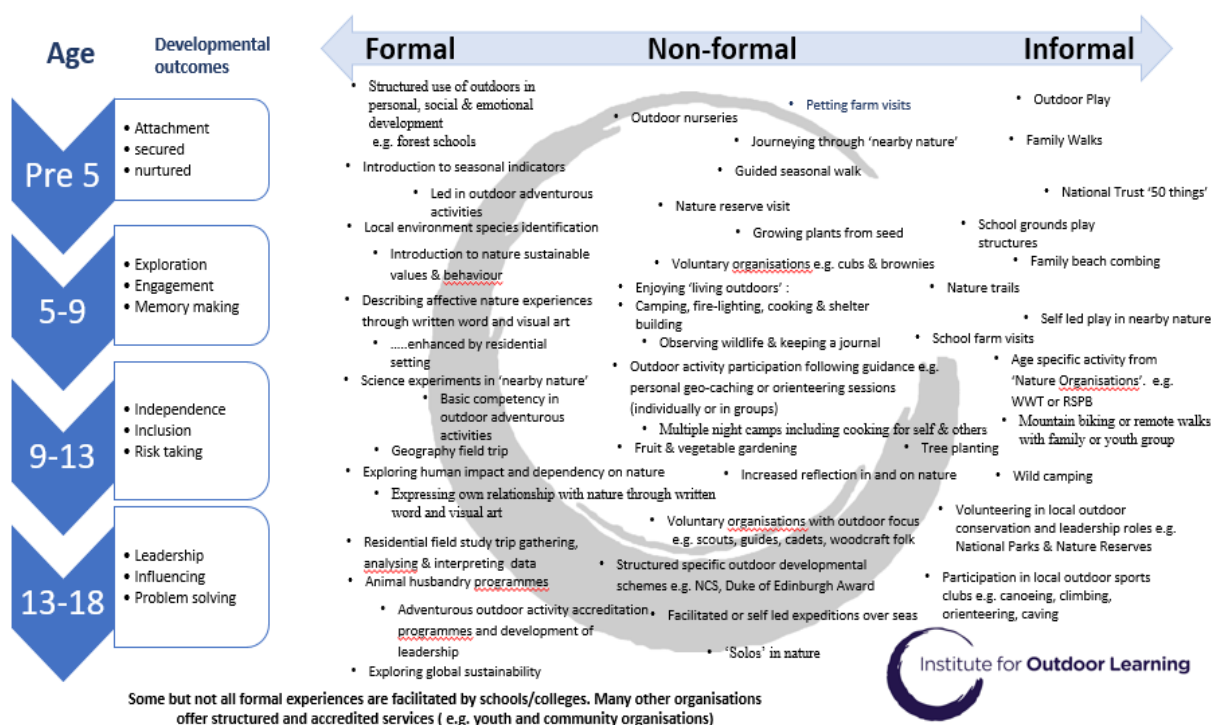
Figure 5.6. A progression of outdoor learning experiences (Robinson, 2018)

Firstly, the map of opportunities alone, while a useful summary, fails to provide a meaningful way to develop provision. The framework may serve as a template for providers to map their own provision, but it does not address the issue of coherence across the boundaries of outdoor contexts and can be regarded as a consumer model that attempts to link discrete experiences. This raises a question about how the different stakeholder groups can coexist in, and benefit from, the same model. Practitioners, businesses and organisations form small parts of the jigsaw of provision meaning that high level pictures of opportunities are more focused on policy makers and those with a broader view than those delivering OL. Hunt (2017) and Robinson (2018) both acknowledge this issue but little progress has been made to address it thus far.

Secondly, the potential reasons to engage with OL are much broader than 'just' health or nature connectedness. The perspective that a progression model's purpose is to enable government priorities to be met assumes that the government's policies are entirely in the interest of the population, and, while many may agree that they are, an alternative view suggests that it should be the right of the individual to choose what they do with the

potential benefits. A third perspective offers the view that society, through its institutions and adults makes an assessment of the needs that young people have, identified as the gap between where they may currently be at and the ideal that society expects (Eisner, 1985). The goal of increased opportunities is still shared across all perspectives, but the underlying purpose for providing the opportunities and enabling access to them is different.

Finally, holistic models are based on an 'informed expert' view as opposed to the participant's view. Provision in formal and non-formal contexts is time bound and reflects a series of facilitated experiences whereas, for the individual, life has a continuous flow. People engage with a wide variety of opportunities and experiences throughout their lives, some of which may be facilitated OL. There is clearly a difference between the provision of progressive OL experiences - the sector perspective - and the experiencing of these as an individual. An individual may consider similar experiences repeated over time as a desirable outcome, while the sector is suggesting a progression model influenced, perhaps, by practitioners' own experiences and values. This leads to a further challenge for the sector in that sector driven models necessarily involve multiple providers, whereas models that derive from one context are more reliant on a single provider, such as a school. Given the disaggregated model of OL provision in the UK described earlier, this is an issue of some magnitude.

5.6   Towards a purpose for OL

The preceding discussion has shown that while opportunities for progression in OL exist in multiple formats, there is no obvious connection between them. Discussing school curricula, Donaldson (2015) suggests that they are dependent on a notion of purpose which directly influences decisions about content, pedagogy and assessment. The interrelatedness of these aspects of teaching and learning would seem apparent, but it is only with an underlying sense of purpose that they can be linked coherently: there needs to be a sense of where the learning is heading (Black, Wilson and Yao, 2011). The same would seem to be true for any OL provider beyond school who is seeking to achieve specific outcomes in a similar way. The integration of assessment and progression depends on being able to recognise the things that are either hindering or blocking progress as well as being able to assess where a learner has got to on their particular journey. Being able to help learners who are achieving their goals with next steps is equally important and underpins the idea of effective learning

transfer (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000; Seaman, 2008; Roberts, 2012; Loynes, 2018; S. Cooper, 2018), implying that practitioners need to provide onwards guidance if their input is to be part of a progressive set of experiences.

What are learners progressing towards? In a school context, progress is characterised by learners becoming,

> more ambitious, capable, enterprising, creative, ethical, informed, healthy, confident individuals. Progression is characterised in terms of depth, complexity, level of abstraction, accomplishment and skill, for disciplinary knowledge and wider competencies, and each child's learning continuum functions as a journey through the curriculum. This journey will include diversion, repetition, and reflection, as appropriate for each individual to make progress in learning.
> (Hayward *et al.*, 2018, p. 17)

Progression, in other words, encompasses a wide range of knowledge, attributes and skills, achieved via a non-linear journey. Where prescriptive school curricula exist, such as England's NC, they embody a top down approach in that they reflect what society, through government policy, believes to be the desirable content to be taught. The wider purposes of educational policy drive the content, and progression is thus designed and evaluated against these goals. OL, though, while highly significant in a formal education context, is relevant to adults as well as children and young people. Moving beyond the boundaries of the school therefore raises the question, 'what is the purpose of outdoor learning that we can design and evaluate progression against?'

While debate continues around the purpose of education as a whole (Biesta, 2015), there is little around the purpose for outdoor learning as a particular approach, discussion tending to focus on outcomes and the way that they can contribute to key policy and social agendas (Allison, 2016). One notable exception, however, has been provided by Malone and Waite (2016) who propose a strategic policy level framework for student outcomes achievable through outdoor learning. In their view OL provides opportunities to contribute 'to societal outcomes that will improve young people's capacity to be successful and productive contributors now and in their future lives' by addressing health, social capital and aspirational outcomes' (p. 15). Drawing on international research they propose a framework of five themes, situating each one in the research and policy context and indicating the role of OL in delivering the desired outcomes: a healthy and happy body and mind; a sociable, confident person; a self-directed and creative learner; an effective contributor and an active

global citizen. The authors contextualise their framework in a societal desire for young people who are 'future ready as successful, healthy and confident contributors in the 21st century' (p. 15) and suggest that it 'effectively closes the circle for practice and policy decision-making by providing guidance on the types of outdoor learning most frequently associated with desired outcomes, thus signposting policy implementation routes' (p. 31). Outdoor learning, in the view of the authors, provides opportunities to contribute 'to societal outcomes that will improve young people's capacity to be successful and productive contributors now and in their future lives' by addressing health, social capital and aspirational outcomes (p. 15).

Malone and Waite's five themes draw on Singapore's Framework for 21st Century Competences (Ho, 2015) but also reflect similarities elsewhere, most recently introduced in the revised Curriculum for Wales. Their recommendations for policy makers to adopt their framework reflect similar aims in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2021), Wales (Hwb, 2020a) and New Zealand (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007), all of whom make specific reference to outdoor learning or outdoor education within their curricula (Table 5.1). So far, in England, this has yet to be realised.

Table 5.1. Purposes of education

Malone and Waite	• Healthy and happy in body and mind • Sociable, confident person • Self-directed and creative learner • Effective contributor • Active global citizen
Scotland	• Successful learners • Confident individuals • Responsible citizens • Effective contributors
Singapore	• Concerned citizen • Confident person • Self-directed learner • Active contributor
New Zealand	• Confident • Connected • Actively involved • Lifelong learners
Wales	• Ambitious, capable learner, ready to learn throughout life • Enterprising, creative contributor, ready to play a full part in life and work • Ethical, informed citizen of Wales and the world • A healthy, confident individual, ready to lead a fulfilling life as a valued member of society.

In the broader OL field, Ogilvie (2013, p. 744) has suggested that outdoor education's earlier goals of individual awareness and respect are not enough and that they need to be 'expanded and translated from the internal, individual dimension of the person into the wider political and external community context of society in general.' Malone and Waite's desired outcomes provide a possible framework but the disaggregated nature of the field means that they pose challenges for OL practitioners and providers operating in isolation. Without an overarching curriculum in which to situate the goals it is difficult to see how they can do anything beyond what they are already doing. Is there something specific that (a) underpins the capacity to meet the identified learner challenges, and (b) provides practitioners with something tangible that they can contribute to? This is a key question and will be explored through the research studies in this thesis.

5.7   Development

Progression models offer a way to illustrate the connection between OL opportunities and the potential outcomes and impacts that may result from participation. They are, however, stylised and conceptual in nature, and a danger with trying to capture what can be a complex picture in a single two-dimensional image is that the interrelationships of different factors that influence progression pathways are inevitably reduced and at risk of marginalisation. Acknowledging these weaknesses, however, they can be helpful for articulating current practice and for providing a reference frame to drive proposed practice.

One of the key underlying concepts of a progression model is the sense of purpose, or in other words, an answer to the question, 'progression towards what?' While schools may have clear goals for their learners articulated through their curriculum frameworks, providers operating on a more short-term basis must do what they can in the time available. Loynes' (2019) model suggests that the various OL interventions, experiences and opportunities accessed by a person contribute to a continuous positive trajectory of human development; Robinson (2018), meanwhile, maps a range of opportunities against age and stage of development with potential outcomes. Both models allude to a purpose but I suggest that the lack of focus leaves unaddressed the translation of theory into practice. As a result, neither of Hunt's (2017) goals are being met: providers remain unclear about their potential to meet policy objectives, and policy makers unclear about how the sector can contribute to their goals.

One field where these goals appear to be met is in the field of music education in England. Following the publication of the National Plan for Music Education (NPME) (DfE, 2011), the UK Government established and funded local music hubs (currently over £75m p.a.) to promote and coordinate music education in and beyond school. Music education hubs are 'groups of organisations – such as local authorities, schools, other hubs, art organisations, community or voluntary organisations – working together to create joined-up music education provision, respond to local need and fulfil the objectives of the Hub as set out in the National Plan for Music Education' (Arts Council, 2021).

In the NPME the Department for Education state that

> The value of music as an academic subject lies in its contribution to enjoyment and enrichment, for its social benefits, for those who engage in music seriously as well as for fun. High quality music education enables lifelong participation in, and enjoyment of, music, as well as underpinning excellence and professionalism for those who choose not to pursue a career in music. (DfE, 2011, p. 9)

Although the emphasis is on music as a subject, it is possible to rewrite the above statement with an OL focus and maintain the same outcomes that would be recognised by OL advocates, practitioners and providers alike. Further support for benefits that resonate with OL come later in the NPME where music is recognised as having positive impacts on personal and social development 'including increased self-reliance, confidence, self-esteem, sense of achievement and ability to relate to others' (DfE, 2011, p. 42), along with 'discipline, teamwork, cooperation, self-confidence, responsibility and social skills' (ibid, p. 43).

To benefit from a progression of OL, participants (and I here include people who organise as well as participate) need to be aware of what progression looks like, what the opportunities and reasons are to benefit from it, and to be genuinely able to access those opportunities; providers need to understand how they fit into a progression model and what they can contribute to it. Development of a theoretical progression model that can be translated into practice is thus a key focus of this thesis. Understanding the gap between theory and practice requires a theoretical lens through which to examine the different factors that affect provision. Such a framework is suggested by Access Theory which is the focus of the next two chapters.

6   Accessing OL

6.1   Introduction

In Chapter 4, I described many of the ways that OL is provided in the UK. As the participation data shows, however, the existence of opportunity alone does not mean that it will be accessed by everyone who wants to, resulting in inequitable access to potential benefits. Access Theory (AT) (Ribot and Peluso, 2003) provides a framework that enables analysis of the multitude of ways that people 'benefit from things' and is here applied to the field of OL for the first time, with the goal of suggesting strategies to improve engagement and participation. AT was originally presented as an analysis tool to understand how people benefit from natural resources but has since been used in a multitude of settings to analyse how people and institutions gain, maintain and control access to resources (Myers and Hansen, 2020). In this section I explain how I have translated and applied the framework to OL, theorizing that the natural resource in question is 'the outdoors' and the benefits are those associated with facilitated activities that lead to personal and social development, improved wellbeing and environmental awareness. The theory goes beyond looking solely at enforceable claims (or 'rights') that are 'acknowledged and supported by society through law, custom or convention' (p. 155) to engage with the structural and relational mechanisms that allow the ideas of how access is gained, maintained and controlled to be explored (Myers and Hansen, 2020). AT acknowledges the interrelatedness of factors that influence access to the outdoors for learning, development and recreation. It enables the study of multiple factors within what may be regarded as the 'ecosystem' of provision (an idea that I will explore further in **Chapter 15**).

6.2   Introducing Access Theory

AT involves three stages (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, pp. 160-161):

1)   Identifying and mapping the flow of benefits;

2)   Identifying the mechanisms (i.e. the barriers and enablers) by which different actors involved gain, control, and maintain the benefit flow and its distribution;

3)   An analysis of the power relations underlying the mechanisms of access involved in instances where benefits are derived.

In the context of my thesis, adopting an AT approach involves understanding the reasons why people engage with outdoor learning, i.e. the benefits, the barriers and enablers that influence those opportunities, and the relative powers that the different stakeholders have to improve the situation.

The different stakeholders include participants, enablers, providers and gatekeepers. Participants include children, young people and adults, all of whom have different degrees of freedom to choose what to do and to engage independently. Children are largely dependent on families and carers. Young people can exercise more choice, but still need families and carers to help them participate through providing funding and transport, for example. Adults theoretically have the greatest freedom and, as parents or carers, influence children and young people's access to OL. Enablers in this context are teachers and youth leaders who facilitate OL experiences, but OL is regarded as one aspect of their role. Providers include those people and organisations whose main role is the delivery of OL. They may be constituted as private companies, charities, voluntary groups or LA (i.e. public sector). Gatekeepers are those people who have a higher level enabling role. They may be, for example, senior leaders in schools, council officers, land owners, funders or community leaders.

Access to the benefits of OL happens via a range of interrelated 'rights-based', structural and relational mechanisms. Hicks and Cinner (2014) group these into four types: rights-based; economic; knowledge; and social and institutional. In the context of OL, AT provides a useful framework through which to assess the influence of social institutions such as families, schools, youth groups and clubs; the knowledge of how to access opportunities and the skills and resources to do so; the social and institutional networks that facilitate access; and the economic factors such as capital, transport and infrastructure.

AT is one way of analysing barriers and enablers and defines access as something shaped by structures, relationships and legal frameworks. Some aspects of AT, however, have been critiqued by Koch (2008) as being indistinct and confusing, specifically around the way that mechanisms and power are conceptualised, leading to an approach to access that largely ignores agency. Acknowledging these potential shortcomings, I adopt AT as a heuristic that provides a conceptual framework to guide analysis (Myers and Hansen, 2020) of the factors

affecting access. Issues of power and agency emerge from the analysis and are addressed in the subsequent theory development (**Chapter 14**).

A further critique is hypothetical. AT has not been used in this context before in its entirety and the research may highlight deficiencies in the theory or adaptions necessary to make it relevant to the field. The research will test this, providing an analysis of the theory-in-use and its potential for future application in the field. Application of AT begins with understanding the 'flow of benefits', which is the subject of the next section.

6.3   The flow of benefits of outdoor learning

Access 'is the ability to benefit from things', benefits being important 'because people, institutions, and societies live on and for them and clash and cooperate over them' (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, p. 155). Addressing access to OL begins with understanding the 'flow of benefits' (ibid, p. 161), a process that consists of understanding the benefits themselves and then how people access them.

Dickie, Ozdermiroglu and Phang (2011, p. 4) utilised the idea of 'benefit pathways' to describe the ways that benefits accrue from OL. A benefit pathway identifies where the intervention happens, who the potential beneficiary is, what the outcomes could be, and what the more distal outcomes (i.e. impact) could be (Figure 6.1).
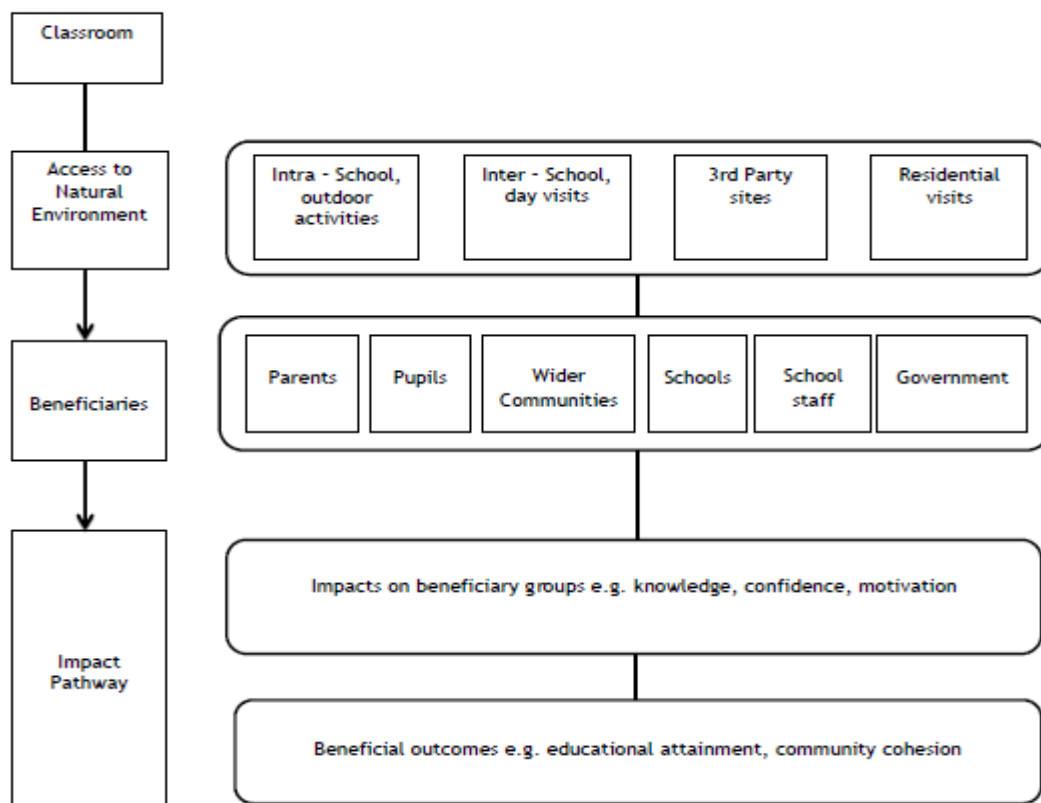
Figure 6.1. Benefits pathway flowing from OL in schools (Dickie *et al.*, 2011, p.6)

An alternative (and more current) approach could be to build appropriate evaluation into a 'theory of change' which would capture the same data as well as detailing the pedagogic approaches used. Theories of change (ToC) were originally developed as a means to analyse complex social interventions but are used increasingly to articulate long term impact by international non-government organisations (James, 2011; Vogel, 2012), charities and social purpose organisations (Harries, Hodgson and Noble, 2014), and increasingly organisations in the outdoor learning sector (see, for example, Outward Bound Trust, 2017; Scouts, 2020; Noble, Kenley and Pate, 2017). ToC is not a new concept in the field of OL (see Nichols (2004)and Learning Away (n.d), for example) but it has taken Fiennes *et al's* (2015) more recent criticism of the quality and reliability of OL research and their suggested use of ToCs as a solution to raise awareness and interest in the idea. As a result, ToC are becoming increasingly visible in OL research designs (Prince, 2020; Tiplady and Menter, 2020).

Figure 6.2 shows a theory of change model capturing a generic flow of benefits through OL experiences.
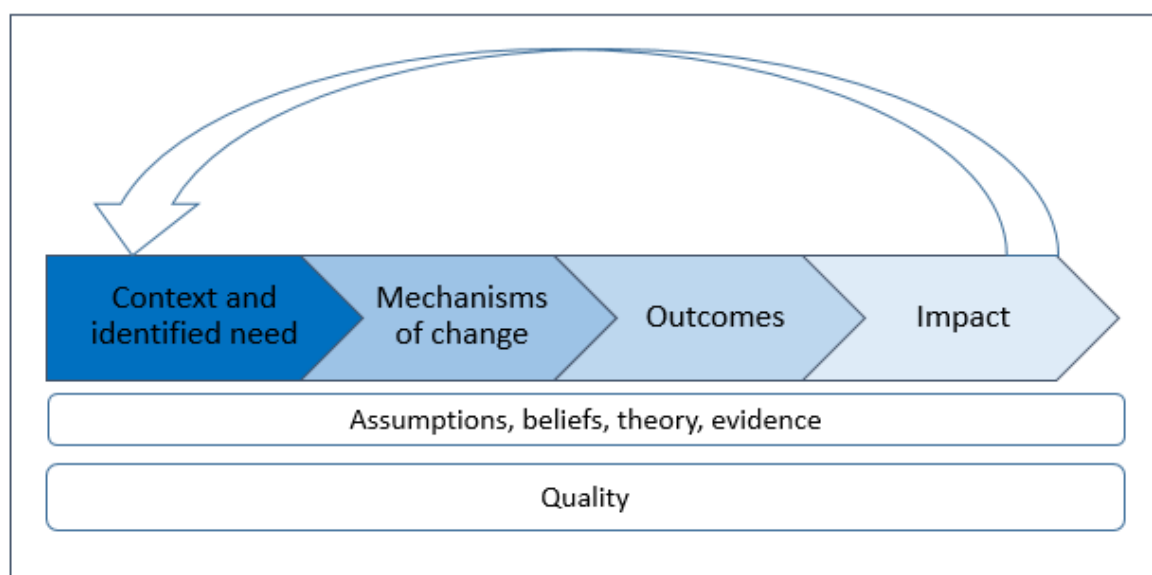
Figure 6.2. Theory of change model

The ToC outlined in the model begins with the context and identified need that a programme or intervention aims to address. The 'mechanisms of change' created by providers include not just the activities but the conditions that will contribute to the outcomes - the intended or achieved goals of specific programmes or interventions - achieved by participants that can be measured. These in turn contribute to the impacts, 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia' (Kings College London, 2015), which in turn contribute to the needs and context. Threaded through the ToC is 'quality', which adds to the concept of a flow of benefits by considering consistency across different practitioners and participants and depends on the criteria agreed to gauge success. In terms of OL programmes it often relates to safety and quality of practice (Harvey and Maynard, 2020). Underpinning each aspect of a ToC may be a number of assumptions (philosophical or practical) and supporting evidence. Some of the evidence may exist in the form of previous evaluations, but equally it may be found from academic research, the subject of the next section.

6.4   Research into the benefits of OL

The benefits of fresh air and activity outdoors have long been recognised in the UK, yet initial attempts to detail the benefits of OL were not research based, relying 'more on statements of faith than anything else' (Hattie *et al.*, 1997, p. 77). Higgins (1997) described a wide range

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of benefits associated with the UK concept of outdoor education, a particularly school orientated approach, including: the integration of curriculum subject knowledge; development of intellectual, physical, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual aspects of personality; improvement of health and fitness; an outlet for curiosity, play and adventure; personal and social development; understanding and awareness of the environment; developing a sense of belonging and place; understanding decisions and consequences; developing citizenship; reflection and resilience; and achieving potential that might otherwise go unnoticed. Higgins acknowledged the scarcity of research that existed at the time supporting his list, but pointed out that 'it is clear that a number of convincing arguments have been made in the past, and that these have found favour. Otherwise, there would have been no growth and development of Outdoor Education' (1997, p. 11). This 'self-evident' approach can also be seen in the English Outdoor Council's publication 'High Quality Outdoor Education' (EOC, 2005), which presented benefits as a series of (unreferenced) outcomes preceded with the qualifier, 'When schools, youth organisations, clubs or centres are providing high-quality outdoor education, they see young people who...'. The benefits were assumed in the opening sentence: 'Britain has a long tradition of involving young people in adventurous activities, and the positive impact this can have on a young person's education is widely acknowledged' (EOC, 2005, p. 1).

The focus on benefits framed as individual outcomes is continued by the English Outdoor Council (EOC) in their guide to High Quality Outdoor Learning (EOC, 2015) which references a growing body of research to describe the benefits in terms of outcomes through raising attainment, promoting health and wellbeing, increasing self-efficacy and resilience, developing social and emotional resilience, fostering sustainable and pro-environmental behaviours, and developing skills for risk assessment and management. The EOC (2015) approach, one of only a handful of OL quality frameworks available in the UK, is provider-focused, the benefits being translated into desirable outcomes for children and young people and a description of what good practice ('high quality' in their language) looks like.

Benefits are also described in terms of individual outcomes by Malone and Waite (2016) in their 'Pathways from Evidence to Impact' report. The broad benefits they describe under the headings of health, learning, social and emotional skills, and sense of place and pro-environmental behaviour reflect a synthesis of systematic reviews covering the various approaches, participants, settings and programmes that constitute the field of OL, and are

openly aimed at policy makers. Yet while there appears to be general agreement around the benefits, the disparate nature of OL makes it difficult to compare research studies into individual programmes and interventions. Forest School activities with 5 year-old children are very different to a multi-day wilderness expedition with young people at risk of exclusion from school, for example, yet both 'qualify' as OL.

A number of systematic reviews and meta-analyses of the evidence base supporting the benefits of OL have been completed, the most recent of which, commonly referred to as the 'Blagrave Report', was conducted by Fiennes *et al.* (2015) who reached the conclusion that 'almost all outdoor learning interventions have a positive effect' (p. 7). They also concluded that longer programmes had a stronger effect but that overall questions of effectiveness had yet to be answered reliably. In reaching their positive conclusion, the authors drew on previous systematic reviews that covered a range of potential approaches and activities including adventure programmes (Hattie *et al.*, 1997), the use of ropes courses for team building (Gillis and Speelman, 2008), time spent in natural environments (Gill, 2011), overseas expeditions (Stott *et al.*, 2015), field work (Rickinson *et al.*, 2004) and creativity (Davies *et al.*, 2013). Outcomes measured were chiefly ''character development-type' outcomes (communication skills, teamwork, self-confidence etc.)'. Evidence for pupils' personal, social and academic achievement was positive although thinly spread (Fiennes *et al.*, 2015, p. 6). Despite the overall positivity the report's authors were critical of the depth and breadth of evidence, suggesting that there was an uneven spread of target groups and impact evidence. They were also concerned about the quality of the evidence and the lack of links between funders' or customers' agendas and that of researchers, making a strong case for increasing the use of theories of change to describe programmes and facilitate more robust evaluation.

Reference to customers and funders raises questions about *who* values *what* research and *why*. There are multiple beneficiaries of OL, as well as benefits. Dickie *et al.* (2011) in their analysis of the impact of school-based OL, identify pupils, teachers, parents, communities, schools and government (in terms of 'avoidance costs' associated with supporting ill health, anti-social behaviour, underperforming schools, etc.) as beneficiaries. To this list could be added any organisation or sector who see the value of OL experiences in helping them to achieve their goals.

Ford (2017), addressing leaders and managers of outdoor learning provision at the 2017 AHOEC conference, pointed out that the different sectors who have an interest in OL (e.g. health, business, education, etc.) have different measures of success, work within different timeframes and have multiple and competing demands on resources. Suggesting that the language to communicate performance is different in each sector, Ford (2017) echoes Fiennes *et al*. (2015) in challenging practitioners to better articulate the benefits and to be better informed about who they are trying to influence. Ford's arguments also add further weight to the call for a progression model.

Understanding *who* values the evidence relates closely to *how* the evidence is valued. For those attempting to influence policy (see Malone and Waite, 2016, for example), evidence of impact justifies the inclusion of OL in different forms of provision. For people organising OL experiences evidence suggests how likely the benefits they seek are to be achieved; for practitioners, evidence informs the quality of practice and helps them to market their provision. Finally, for potential participants, the benefits give an idea of what they could gain from taking part that could help them to meet their own goals. The various stakeholder's views may overlap but their individual perspectives will influence what information, in the form of impact evidence rather than just a list of benefits, they value.

Rather than using the terms uncritically, for the sake of this discussion use of the term 'benefits' can be understood to incorporate the positive effects, intended or otherwise, that result from participation in facilitated outdoor learning and include outcomes and impacts as defined in section 6.2 above.

The next section utilises the formal, non-formal and informal settings framework described in **Chapter 3** as a basis for assessing the benefits of OL.

6.4.1   Benefits associated with OL through formal settings

The potential beneficiaries of OL in schools include children and teaching staff directly, with parents, communities, and society increasingly benefiting more indirectly. CYP are the obvious focus of curriculum related OL approaches, and much or the research literature is focused on outcomes for this group. However, in line with Fiennes *et al.* (2015), Hawxwell *et al*. (2018) found that the majority of OL related academic papers published between 2010 and 2015 focused on the development of intra- and interpersonal skills. The gap that exists

in attainment research suggests that a better understanding of academic benefits would greater support understanding of OL as a viable pedagogic approach rather than 'as a burdensome luxury, a type of extrinsic reward used to motivate pupils to pursue the goals and targets of the formal curriculum' (Hawxwell *et al.*, 2018, p. 327). In schools, work continues to explore the link between OL and curriculum attainment: academic performance in reading, writing and maths (Quibell, Charlton and Law, 2017; Otte *et al.*, 2019) and creative thinking and wellbeing (McAnally, Robertson and Hancox, 2018) have all been shown to be positively affected by repeat OL experiences over multiple weeks.

One particular example of regular multi-week programming is provided by Forest School. The volume of research examining the benefits of Forest School continues to grow with Coates and Pimlott-Wilson (2019) finding that the blending of Forest School with mainstream settings contributes to children's social, cognitive, emotional and physical skill development through experiential learning using play. Harris (2017) identified the focus of learning at forest school as social development: teamwork, relationships with others, self-knowledge, and learning to take risks. Children also engaged with nature and developed an attachment to the woods where Forest School took place, supporting a wider view of education than a pure curriculum focus.

Increased awareness of the need for a robust evidence base, post-Blagrave, is leading to a reassessment of some long-standing research such as Hattie *et al's* (1997) meta review, still highly quoted over two decades after it was published in support of claims for the benefits of outdoor learning. Higgins *et al.* (2013), for example, drew on Hattie *et al.* (1997) to inform the Education Endowment Fund's (EEF) section on adventure learning in its Toolkit of teaching interventions, despite its substantive focus on adult, multi-day adventure courses in the Australian bush. An ongoing project sponsored by the EEF acknowledges the age and scope of the research and is seeking to assess the impact of adventure learning in a more relevant way, comparing school and residential delivery of adventurous activities on attainment and non-cognitive learning (EEF, 2020). The research may contribute to a more robust evidence base for the impact of outdoor and adventurous learning strategies in particular, and on a range of outcomes related to OL.

The role of adventurous education in the wider development of children and young people's health and wellbeing, both in school related settings and beyond, has been researched using

different activity foci. Surfing (Hignett *et al.*, 2018), sail training (Fletcher and Prince, 2017), dinghy sailing (Cotterill and Brown, 2018) and Forest School (McCree, Cutting and Sherwin, 2018; Tiplady and Menter, 2021) have all been shown to have positive effects on aspects of wellbeing, supporting the use of such interventions to address the growing emphasis on wellbeing at policy level (see section 3.2).

Evidence of the long-term benefits of OL in school settings was established through the Natural Connections Demonstration Project which ran for four years with 125 schools in the south-west of England from 2012-2016. Benefits for children included improved enjoyment of lessons, connection to nature, social skills, engagement with learning, health and wellbeing, behaviour and attainment. Significantly, the project also showed that there were benefits for teachers as well in terms of positive impacts on teaching practice, health and wellbeing, professional development, job satisfaction and teaching performance (Waite *et al.*, 2016). Similar benefits were previously noted by Dillon *et al.* (2005) and Nundy, Dillon and Dowd (2009) who found that teachers gained knowledge about their local area, increased their confidence in teaching and self-efficacy, and improved their relationships with their children. Given that over 30% of teachers currently leave the profession within 5 years of training (Lough, 2020), these latter findings have potential significance for recruitment and retention strategies.

6.4.2 Benefits associated with OL through non-formal settings

The benefits of school residentials have been extensively explored by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Their *Learning Away* initiative, carried out between 2008 and 2015, involved 60 schools incorporating all forms of residentials (rather than just those to OECs) and found that well planned and progressive residentials had a positive impact on multiple factors, including relationships; resilience; self-confidence and wellbeing; engagement with learning; achievement; knowledge, skills and understanding; and teacher pedagogy (Kendall and Rodger, 2015). The positive outcomes (i.e. direct benefits) identified through the project provide strong support for the inclusion of residentials at all levels of schooling, but more focused research into the benefits of OL related residentials by Loynes, Dudman and Hedges (2020) suggests stronger evidence for affective outcomes over cognitive ones. They attempted to find a connection with SATs results and Year 6 outdoor activity focused residentials but found little evidence to support academic achievement unless the residential had a specific curriculum focus. Similar findings were reported by Christie, Higgins and

McLaughlin (2014), although they did find that outdoor activity residentials had a positive (although limited) impact on self-efficacy, and that students developed a learning community that impacted on socialisation, maturation and pro-active learning behaviours that are sustained in the classroom post-residential. Richmond *et al*. (2018) reached similar conclusions in their study of girl's participation in outdoor adventure focused residentials in the United States, suggesting the affective outcomes of such experiences could be used to support student success back in the classroom. Fuller, Powell and Fox (2017) conducted a three-year study incorporating multiple residentials that suggested students' developing sense of self efficacy and confidence translated into enhanced exam results. The link between academic performance and outdoor residentials would appear to be a staged process, with the experiences developing measurable outcomes which in turn can be translated into improved exam results. Attributing improved exam grades directly to outdoor activity focused residentials without a specific curriculum focus would appear (currently) to be a claim too far.

The longer-term affective benefits of residentials are not always maintained (Kendall and Rodger, 2015). Scrutton (2015), examining 'one-off' residentials, found a small gain in personal and social development measures after a residential but noted that this was lost 10 weeks later due to a lack of integration of the experiences into classroom life. The reason for this was identified as a reluctance on the part of the teacher due to not all the class members attending the residential, highlighting the inequitable access to OL opportunities, even within a single class. Pupils with poor personal and social skills appeared to gain most from the experience, but it was this demographic that potentially missed out on the experience due to the cost. Contrary to Scrutton, Prince (2020) analysed four longitudinal studies looking at more sustained impacts of outdoor residentials over periods of longer than one year and identified self-confidence, independence and communication as common to all studies. As one of the studies involved a similar demographic and one-off residential approach to Scrutton's (2015) study it would be interesting to return to Scrutton's cohort to assess longer term impact at a later date.

Benefits have also been identified with other forms of residentials. Stott *et al.* (2015) found evidence of increased confidence, resilience and self-reliance, improved social skills, emotional stability and reflectivity, and increased environmental awareness and appreciation associated with overseas youth expeditions, while McCulloch *et al.* (2010)

describe benefits in social learning, overcoming challenge and practical skills and knowledge development resulting from sail training voyages. A systematic review by Schijf, Allison and Wald (2017) supported these findings with evidence of sustained changes in personal and social domains through single and multi-day voyages.

6.4.3 Impact in the wider non-formal sector

Accessing OL through youth organisations provides a range of pathways to benefits. The extended time factor that outdoor learning experiences provide is considered crucial by Harris-Evans (2017) for building relationships between young people and youth workers and developing inter- as well as intra- group relationships. Robertson (2018) describing a Princes Trust team course for young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) that included a residential at an outdoor centre, found evidence of improved confidence, self-efficacy and agency as a result of overcoming challenges through unfamiliar activities. A further benefit is the contribution to social justice achieved by providing and enabling access for marginalised young people to take part in (and benefit from) activities that their more privileged peers may take for granted (Harris-Evans, 2017).

Several organisations that have strong associations with OL have sought to gauge the impact of their programmes on the young people they work with. The D of E, the NCS, the Scouts and Sea Cadets are all organisations that offer significant OL opportunities and experiences but whose primary focus is more holistic. The D of E Award scheme is often cited as a key OL opportunity for young people through its expedition section (Robinson, 2018). In their impact report on the scheme, Campbell *et al.* (2009) found that the expedition section contributed to a range of outcomes including improved relationships, life skills, personal awareness and confidence and understanding of the outdoors, and longer-term impacts on personal development, broadened horizons and wellbeing. Although the expedition section is the most popular section of the award (Campbell *et al.*, 2009), the D of E scheme is more than just the expedition and it is difficult to extract specific impacts that relate specifically to OL related activity. Wider scheme impacts include the development of social skills, enhanced employability skills, and broadened horizons. It does illustrate though how OL experiences are interwoven with other aspects of life and that focusing solely on the OL related aspect only gives part of the picture. A parallel can be drawn with the OEC experience where only approximately one third of the time will be spent on specific OL activities but outcomes and impact relate to the whole experience. A similar challenge (and identified impact) is

apparent in the NCS, a four-week personal and social development programme for 15-17 year olds that culminates in a community action project. Like the D of E scheme, participants rate the outdoor adventure residential in the first week most highly (Cameron *et al.*, 2017; Mills and Waite, 2017) but overall impacts including supporting transition to adulthood, community involvement, social mixing, and teamwork, communication and leadership are related to the programme as a whole.

Along with the Girlguides, the Scouts has a strong historical association with the outdoors that continues today (Ogilvie, 2013; Girlguiding, 2020a; Scouts, 2021c). An impact study by PACEC (2011) identified the benefits associated with Scouting as 'fun, friendship, exciting activities, contributing to the community and improving life chances in terms of education and employment.' Key skills (social, teamworking and leadership) and relationship building were identified as important outcomes, 'the activities help[ing] Scouts to build long-lasting social networks which lead to a sense of commitment to oneself, one's peers and the wider community.' Wider impacts of Scouting found by PACEC (2011) related to community engagement through volunteering, and employability, and a similar holistic approach is evident in the Sea Cadets, where there is a focus on three key outcome areas of life skills, values and qualifications. A review by Denselow and Noble (2018) found evidence of impact on long term aims of improved school attendance and engagement, post-16 outcomes, and wellbeing, as well as reduced problem behaviour and increased community participation.

The impact of the John Muir Award has also been measured. A report by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) into health impacts associated with the award found that 'the vast majority (95%) of the respondents enjoyed their John Muir Award experience and felt they had achieved something by doing it (92%).' The longer-term effects were reported as a desire to spend more time outside and visit more natural environments. However, they found that there were no significant impacts on self-esteem, physical activity levels or the frequency of visits to wild places (GCPH, 2009). The last finding is interesting as the researchers hypothesised that aspirations to visit the countryside more did not always translate into future visits due to confounding factors such as the need to go with parents, transport, time available, technical skills or people to go with. The gap between aspiration (through knowledge and prior experience) and long-term ability to access the benefits continued participation would bring is apparent and a central theme to this project that I will return to in subsequent chapters.

Impact reports are also produced by organisations themselves. Inevitably, any outward facing report produced by an organisation that reflects its own activities will contribute towards its overall marketing strategy and will consequently be open to the charge of internal bias. However, transparency around methodology and the use of a theory of change can mitigate these concerns (Fiennes *et al.* 2015). Outward Bound, for example, claim improvements in resilience and confidence, willingness to take on difficult tasks, environmental awareness and adoption of pro-environmental behaviours, and confidence to interact with others (Outward Bound Trust, 2017). Their claims are based on a theory of change and clearly described methodology, enabling readers seeking to draw on the research to match the claims to their own situation.

6.4.4   Benefits associated with OL through informal outdoor learning settings

Informal OL settings, by their very nature, create challenges for researchers attempting to assess the benefits of activities, and invariably it is organised interventions that are evaluated. Ridgers and Sayers (2010) found that a Forest School project with families led to increased visits to local green spaces and a positive impact on leisure time choices after the course. Goodenough, Waite and Bartlett (2015) drew similar conclusions when they explored an intervention programme run by the National Trust that provided opportunities for families to spend time in woodland. The activities contributed to 'both self-confidence as 'competent parents' in guided events and possibly stimulate[d] independent family engagement with nature' (2015, p. 377). Mansfield *et al.* (2018, p. 2) have subsequently conducted a systematic review of family outdoor recreation for wellbeing and concluded that the resultant positive family interactions had the potential to increase wellbeing through 'enhanced self-competence learning and identity, a sense of escapism, relaxation and sensory experience, and improved social bonding as a family.' The benefits for families would seem to be positive but thus far remain under-researched.

A different perspective on informal learning is provided by Gordon, Chester and Denton (2015) in their analysis of adult participation in outdoor sport and recreation. They found that spending time with family, connecting with nature, having fun with friends, and relaxing were the main reasons for participation, but that participants could be categorised depending on their main motivation for engagement. Of the eight different groups, the 'Learner' category is most relevant to this discussion, their primary motivation being learning and personal development by having fun and being close to nature through challenging and

enjoyable activities. Gordon *et al*. (2015) suggest 7% of recreational participants fall into this category, implying that conscious learning, even in an informal/non-facilitated way is still significant to many adults. The MENE survey (Natural England, 2019) also asked about reasons for visits to the countryside. Unfortunately, there is no correlation with Gordon *et al*'s category of personal development, although 3% of respondents in 2018 indicated that they visited to learn something about the outdoors. Some of the stated benefits of OL in terms of positive mental health (feeling calm and relaxed, feeling refreshed and revitalised, and getting physical exercise) are strongly supported by the MENE data.

6.5   Addressing critical agendas

The majority of evidence concerning the benefits of OL is focused on intra- and interpersonal skills. However, when attempting to influence government policy, understanding and presenting the benefits in terms of fiscal impact on key agendas is perhaps more important (Malone and Waite, 2016). It is a challenging strategy, however, as it requires the attribution of financial benefit to what are essentially social impacts stemming from subjective experiences (BOSS, 2019).

Dickie *et al.* (2011) consider the direct economic benefits to be measurable, such as the value of increased attainment, but also acknowledge the indirect benefits such as the development of lifelong recreational habits that lead to improved wellbeing. Economic impact can be measured in terms of positive attribution (increased income, paid tax, etc.) or avoidance costs (such as savings in the fields of health or crime, for example). Aspects of critical agendas pertinent to health, environment and employability can all be monetised. For example, in 2009/10, 'the total cost of mental ill health in England was £105.2 billion, including £21.3 billion in health and social care costs, £30.3 billion in lost economic output and £53.6 billion in human suffering' (Centre for Mental Health, 2010). In a different context, each young offender in the criminal justice system costs £8000 per year (Ministry of Justice, 2011).

The direct economic benefits of successful engagement in school leading to qualification and employment are starkly illustrated in a Public Health England (PHE) health equity evidence review. Over a lifetime of public finance costs, it was estimated that the cohort of NEET young people aged 16-18 in 2008 would cost the government between £12bn and £32bn

(Coles *et al.*, 2010). The figures include a small amount of health care but the increased risk of long-term health issues as a result of being unemployed may well lead to additional health service costs (PHE, 2014). Improving engagement at primary school can help to prevent children becoming NEET later (PHE, 2014), suggesting that OL interventions found to improve engagement (through the Natural Connections Demonstration Project, for example) have potentially wider impacts later on. Dickie *et al*. (2011) make the point that even if OL interventions make as little as 0.1% positive difference then the net effect or return on investment will be highly worthwhile in terms of both economic value and avoidance costs.

Alternative strategies using financial proxies for teacher time and travel costs have also been used to estimate financial benefit. Dickie *et al.* (2011) use such a method to estimate between £11.6m and £17.5m worth of benefits attached to visits by school children to natural areas. This method equates cost to benefits assumed to exist from spending time in the outdoors and highlights the challenges of arriving at a meaningful figure as the figure is calculated using the only directly measurable costs. Perhaps more significantly for OL experiences, there is nothing in the choice of measurables that distinguishes between outdoor or natural environments and any other sort of visit. Exactly the same figures could be applied to visits to any other sort of location, activity or venue.

Other economic values have been attributed to the provision of OL experiences. Denselow and Noble (2018), for example, estimated the value of c. 9000 people who volunteer with Sea Cadet units to be over £54m per year based on volunteer time and equivalent pay, and a similar exercise by the John Muir Trust counted over 36,000 volunteer days of conservation activity as part of the John Muir Award valued at nearly £1.3m.

Also in the non-formal sector, the contribution of residential outdoor education centres to the economy has recently been brought into sharp focus as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. With over 70,000 pupils not attending, lost revenue due to the ban on school residentials has been estimated at £275m for the year from March 2020, the negative impact also being presented in terms of lost opportunities for education, mental health and active lifestyles (IOL, 2020). Given the known benefits of residentials in terms of personal and social development it remains to be seen what impact the lost opportunities will have on the children and young people who have missed out, and indeed whether it can be attributed to residentials at all.

As the evidence base supporting and articulating the benefits associated with OL continues to grow, it is interesting to note that it is becoming increasingly conflated with the evidence that supports engagement with green spaces from public and planetary health perspectives, rather than personal and social development (see for example, Muñoz, 2009; Moss, 2012; EOC, 2015; Malone and Waite, 2016; Defra, 2018; Prisk and Cusworth, 2018). Cotteril and Brown (2018) in their study of outcomes related to dinghy sailing, for example, draw on research into the value of natural environments for promoting mental health and wellbeing (Depledge *et al.*, 2011), the impact of blue space for health benefits (Volker and Kistemann 2011), and the benefits of exercise in the natural environment to support health and wellbeing (Pretty *et al.*, 2007) as well as research supporting adventurous activities. Further links are being established through the ongoing development of research into nature connection for wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours (Mensah *et al.*, 2016; Lumber, Richardson and Sheffield, 2017; Lovell, Depledge and Maxwell, 2018; Twohig-Bennett and Jones, 2018; Richardson *et al.*, 2019; Richardson *et al.*, 2020).

The environmental impact of OL experiences is difficult to measure but can also be described in terms of direct and indirect benefits. The John Muir Trust (2015) estimate that in 2015 alone volunteers participating in the John Muir Award planted over 12,500 trees and cleared three hectares of invasive species. Forestry Commission England (n.d.) state that 'it has been calculated that a 33% increase in woodland cover would deliver an emissions abatement equivalent to 10% of greenhouse gas emissions by the 2050's', indicating a positive impact towards meeting emission targets. Further impact evidence can be found in the UK Governments' Natural Capital Accounts (ONS, 2019) where it is stated that in 2017, 'the cooling shade of trees and water saved the UK £248 million by maintaining productivity and lowering air conditioning costs on hot days'. Monetising the natural environment through a natural capital approach provides a way of estimating the benefits to the economy of the goods and services provided by nature, and natural assets, such as mountains and rivers. Although such an approach provides a way of assessing the impact of conservation work, it is not welcomed by all, Monbiot (2018) describing attempting to put a value on nature as 'morally wrong, intellectually vacuous, emotionally alienating and self-defeating.'

6.6   Negative effects of OL

Any account of the benefits of OL needs to be balanced with one of potential negative effects. Unsurprisingly perhaps, given Hawxwell *et al*'s (2019) observation that 100% of the authors of academic papers about OL are either experts or advocates for OL, there is little specific research into the negative effects. Documented negative effects tend to fall into one of two categories: those associated with the safety of activity itself; and those concerned with simply being outside.

For Fiennes *et al*. (2015, p. 6) 'safety is obviously a major issue in outdoor learning since it can be dangerous: few social interventions can result in broken limbs or fatalities'. While they are correct in their assertion that safety is a major issue, other interventions are routinely far more dangerous than OL related activity. Children are far more likely to be injured playing football or rugby than on a school walking trip (RoSPA, 2013), for example, and analysis of English hospital admissions by Kirkwood, Hughes and Pollock (2019) shows that sports injuries accounted for almost 20% of attendances, with children and young people making up almost half of that number. Injuries, accidents and fatalities do occur, though OL related fatalities in the UK are very rare chiefly due to the fact that extensive risk assessment and risk management procedures are in place (Barton, 2007; Hodgson and Bailie, 2011; OEAP, 2021).

Beyond the more publicised traumatic injuries, other medical and psychological concerns also exist. Eigenschenk *et al.* (2019) highlight the tension between the positive effects of sunlight in terms of increasing levels of vitamin D and the negative effects that such exposure can have in terms of skin cancer. As with other aspects of safety, heightened awareness by providers means that risk management procedures are in place, often supported by high profile campaigns (for example, the Outdoor Kids Sun Safety Code (British Association of Sports and Exercise Medicine, 2020)). A similar initiative supports awareness of ticks (Public Health England, 2019).

The potential for psychological harm through over-exposure to perceived risk has long been recognised (Mortlock, 1984; Priest, 1999). Certain outdoor education activities often put participants into vulnerable positions where they face the risk of psychological harm (abseiling, for example) through failure or fear that can create a negative situation with

potentially disastrous consequences to aspects of self-concept (Klint, 1999). Further, working with vulnerable populations places practitioners in roles where the boundaries of therapy, care and regular practice are blurred, leading uninformed (or over-confident) practitioners to potentially cause harm (Richards, Hardie and Anderson, 2020). The increasing focus on mental health at policy level, the prevalence of mental health issues amongst children and young people, and the developing OL social prescribing opportunities make developing practitioner understanding and skills a priority.

Not everyone relates to the outdoor environment in the same way, and people bring aspects of their background, identity and previous experience to the outdoors (Berry, 2011). Many of the potential negative effects of OL can be mitigated through planning and risk assessment, but some elements of practice, such as the impact of the weather, defy planning. In extreme environments, such as those found on an ocean voyage, for example, sea sickness can be a significant issue (Prince and Fletcher, 2019), but cold and wet weather can be counterproductive to effective teaching and learning no matter what age a participant is. At the end of the day, being outside simply does not suit everyone.

The natural environment provides spaces and places for OL experiences. As a result of these, facilitators hope to achieve positive outcomes for the people they work with and hopefully contribute to a longer more sustainable impact as well. However, any desire to increase the use of the outdoors for educational purposes creates a tension between the desire to educate and the impact on the environment itself. Cooper (1998) identifies social, physical, psychological and ecological impacts through overuse or misuse of venues by groups but makes a strong case for using codes of good practice and environmentally sensitive approaches to delivery rather than ceasing the activity. Beyond the facilitated experience there is also a need for education that supports sustainable use of the environment in recreational contexts, and environmental sustainability is now commonplace in policies and qualifications through provider quality marks such as the AHOEC Gold Standard (AHOEC, 2021a), professional accreditation (IOL, 2021f) and coaching, leadership and skill awards (for example, Mountain Training, 2018).

6.7   Chapter summary

In this chapter I have shown that the benefits of OL are well supported by a growing evidence base and can be assessed as direct, in terms of outcomes, or indirect, in terms of impact. The outcomes that are achievable through facilitated OL experiences are commonly represented as intra- and interpersonal skill gains. Longer term impacts, relating more to societal and global goals, are harder to measure but a slowly growing body of research is seeking to map the broader socio-economic benefits against interventions. There is a considerable body of evidence now that supports OL across a range of formal and non-formal settings, although gathering evidence from informal settings is more difficult. However, as informal OL is mostly associated with recreation time, the corresponding research into the value of recreation in green and blue spaces provides a platform upon which to build a more robust evidence base.

Beneficiaries of OL include children, young people, families, teachers, youth leaders, practitioners, communities, society and the environment. At an individual level OL contributes to social, cognitive, emotional and physical skill development; in schools towards enjoyment of lessons, connection to nature, social skills, engagement with learning, health and wellbeing, and improved relationships, behaviour and attainment. Longer term benefits include increased self-confidence, independence, communication skills, broadened horizons and wellbeing. From a provision perspective, OL providers contribute to the local and national economy, employees gaining personal and economic benefits from working in the sector. Wider economic benefits have been identified in terms of health, employability and volunteering value. Direct environmental benefits are limited but there is scope for programmes such as the JMA to contribute further, and there is growing interest in the role of OL for teaching about sustainability (Prince, 2017).

Government awareness of the benefits of OL appears to be recognised but messaging is inconsistent. On the one hand, it is encouraging to note the government funded demonstration projects, support for character development (DfE, 2019a), the Government's Activity Passport (DfE, 2019b) and, more recently, the introduction of the Climate Leaders Award. Beyond school, phase 1 of the National Citizen Service currently involves OAA, while the 25 year Environment Plan sets out clear goals for improving environmental connection to address health and wellbeing, developing school grounds and access to green space for therapeutic purposes and to enhance wellbeing (Defra, 2018). On the other hand, the Covid-

19 pandemic has highlighted the variable perceptions of OL that exist within Government. DfE guidance now recommends the use of outdoor classrooms, not from a pedagogic perspective but as a way to mitigate risk of viral transmission (DfE, 2021a), while the lack of support for the OEC sector appeared to reinforce its low status.

Although the evidence base is growing it remains largely academic or accessed by providers, enablers and policy makers within the sector itself. One positive outcome from the pandemic, however, has been the increased public awareness of the benefits of the outdoors in general (for health) and OL specifically, both in schools and OECs (for personal and social development). The *#saveoutdoored* campaign (Save Outdoor Education, 2021) and work by UK Outdoors created a large volume of news stories that were extensively broadcast in the popular media, which led to the formation of an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Outdoor Learning. Raising awareness of the benefits of OL is an obvious strategy for anyone keen to increase participation in OL, but there is little research into how OL is perceived outside the sector. This line of enquiry will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

The previous chapters, constituting the first part of an AT analysis, have examined the flow of benefits associated with OL (i.e. what they are and how they can be accessed). The next stage involves an analysis of the various factors that influence access.

7 Factors influencing access to outdoor learning provision in England

7.1 Introduction

As the previous chapter shows, the benefits of OL are being increasingly understood in an academic and sector context and at government level. However, the lack of a coherent progression model and the discretionary and fragmentary nature of OL means that whether or not these benefits are realised depends on a variety of factors that differ depending on perspective. This analysis assumes that provision either exists (or is desired to exist), and examines the literature regarding access to OL opportunities from a participant / enabler (i.e. teacher, youth leader etc.) perspective. Analysis of OL providers through an AT lens lies outside this thesis and is an opportunity for further research.

7.2 Factors influencing access to OL in schools

School provision begins with the EYFS, a statutory framework covering the birth to five years age range that incorporates an expectation that learning will involve the outdoor environment as well as the indoor one (DfE, 2021b). Outdoor activity provision or an outdoor play area are mandatory but the framework is non-specific regarding what activities are appropriate. There is, however, considerable scope for outdoor exploration to be part of 'continuous provision', where children choose, explore and engage independently with resources (Bryce-Clegg, 2013), important precursors of the development of autonomy. Despite the opportunities, lack of understanding of the potential educational benefits of learning outdoors and subsequent failure to communicate objectives effectively with parents can lead to reduced opportunities for outdoor play (Parsons and Traunter, 2020). The significance may be far greater for later engagement as well, as bringing parents on board at the start of school, understanding the benefits of OL and how the perceived negative results (such as getting dirty) can be mitigated, could lead to greater engagement not only further up the school but also beyond the school gate.

Forest School plays a growing role in outdoor learning provision. A 2019 survey of Forest School and OL in England (Hemery, Hurst and Petrokofsky, 2019) found that funding, mostly related to protective outdoor clothing, was a key barrier but the most straightforward to

address. The proximity of sites, especially in deprived urban areas, and the consequent issues relating to transport to locations away from school was noted as an additional barrier.

The barriers to OL in EYFS and key stages 1 and 2 - funding, lack of time, teacher confidence and knowledge, curriculum pressures, existing beliefs, lack of support from other staff, lack of training, measuring impact and connecting with the curriculum recur across multiple studies (Higgins, Nicol and Ross, 2006; Nundy, Dillon and Dowd, 2009; Waite, 2010, 2011; Dillon and Dickie, 2012; Waite *et al.*, 2016; Marchant *et al.*, 2019) - are replicated in key stages 3 and 4. Systemic differences between primary and secondary schools create further complex challenges through restrictive timetabling and disruption to classes (Dillon and Dickie, 2012). Funding for staffing, which in primary schools tends to be focused on improving ratios, is more related to cover costs for replacing the teachers accompanying trips (Higgins *et al*., 2006).

One aspect of OL that, in theory at least, circumvents the discretionary nature of OL is the position of OAA in the National Curriculum, and the location of OAA in PE means that Pupil Premium and Sports Premium funding can be accessed to support delivery. Despite this, individual, organisational and societal values associated with the outdoors already noted often conspire to limit on-site delivery to orienteering and problem-solving activities, leaving the more adventurous activities to be accessed through optional (and therefore inequitable) residentials (Webber, 2019).

Two additional issues, safety and teacher values, merit further exploration. Safety is raised as a concern by teachers in a number of studies across the age ranges (Higgins *et al.*, 2006; Waite, 2011; Michek, Nováková and Menclová, 2015; Marchant *et al.*, 2019), but teachers' concerns seem to be significantly reduced as they become more comfortable with OL (Marchant *et al.*, 2019). This appears to be in stark contrast to the decades either side of the millennium when society was heavily influenced by what Furedi (2002) calls a 'culture of fear', characterised by 'a generalised and insidious anxiety about safety that has found expression in fears for children even though they are statistically safer than at any point in human history' (Gill, 2007, p. 14). Understanding (or perhaps a lack of understanding) of risk coupled with a fear of litigation has led to some teachers being unprepared to engage with what they see as potentially risky activities (Gill, 2007). However, there does appear to be a cultural shift taking place. Prince (2018) notes a culture of risk benefit present amongst

committed OL teachers, although Marchant (2019) is clear that this culture needs to be adopted within the whole school for effective implementation of OL to occur.

The second issue is the impact on OL provision of teacher's values. Waite (2011) argues that values and context inform pedagogy, suggesting that teachers and practitioners who value the outdoors themselves will be more likely to value OL as an approach to use with their classes. However, these values and beliefs can be in conflict with institutional (government) values that favour assessment and accountability, discouraging schools and individual teachers from experimenting with alternative pedagogies (Waite, 2011). They can also be opposed to values held by other staff or senior leaders who do not value the outdoors in the same way but who are equally passionate about other offers, such as sport or the arts. Through their research in Scotland, Higgins *et al*. (2006) suggest that staff training and formal legitimisation of the benefits associated with OL would be productive in changing attitudes rather than simply increasing resources. Marchant, *et al.* (2019, p.18) are more explicit, proposing that it is 'essential for education inspectorates to view and support outdoor learning as a method in achieving curricular aims and this should be mirrored in testing requirements in which schools are judged.' For some schools, where limited knowledge of the benefits influence perceptions of value, implementing OL strategies is regarded as simply too risky a strategy given the perceived pressure from Ofsted to perform academically (Kemp and Pagden, 2019). Individual values, influenced by perceived external forces as well as internal beliefs, can define future practice.

7.2.1   Extracurricular OL activities and residentials

For many children, the opportunities for residentials form highlights of their school careers, but provider and transport costs can mean that provision is inequitable and dependent on funding, either through school budgets or voluntary parental contributions (Kendall and Rodger, 2015). Research by Menzies *et al.* (2017) shows that children from poorer backgrounds and lower socio-economic areas have fewer opportunities than those children from more affluent backgrounds. Tighter constraints on school budgets mean that the funds to support parents on low incomes are increasingly less available, resulting in an evident disparity of access between top, middle and bottom income brackets (Sutton Trust, 2014).

Leather (2018) highlights the tension between educational objectives and commodified OL with the example of the D of E scheme. Expeditions can be run in-house by school staff,

often in addition to their teaching role, or externally by approved activity providers who sell packages of expeditions based on unit cost/day pricing plans. It can now cost a young person (or more likely, their parents) anything up to £1000 to go through bronze, silver and gold awards (Adventure Expeditions, 2018). The cost of the awards can be even higher when equipment requirements are taken into account. Recommendations on the D of E website promote specific retailers and equipment, and there is an expectation that participants will be appropriately equipped: 'The D of E Expedition Kit List is your essential checklist when preparing the kit you need for your D of E expedition.' (D of E, 2021b).

7.3   Factors affecting access to OL through youth providers

Many of the challenges facing teachers in creating and maintaining access to OL also exist in youth organisations. Funding, fear of litigation, meeting outcome targets, the demands of bureaucracy and demand from parents for risk-free activity could lead to a reluctance to explore new venues for activities (Harris-Evans, 2017). Visits to residential centres provide one way of ensuring that risk management is covered, but challenges still remain around behaviour management requiring additional skills from the youth workers taking the trip and the provider staff alike. Harris Evans (2017) highlights concerns that the desire to keep costs down in the interests of profit leads to a reduction in quality that does not necessarily serve their client's needs well, echoing Cooper's (2018) similar education-based concerns.

Studies of OL provision in UK youth work settings are scarce but a study in Estonia found that other barriers to provision included 'the youth worker's lack of time, the location of the youth centre, the passivity of the youth, the absence of outdoor activities as a priority in the youth centres' action plans, entanglement in customary activities and little support' (Veigel and Reedik, 2016, p. 368). Youth workers also identified a desire for training to enable them to make the most of opportunities and venues that were close by but underutilised. There appears to be much in common with the barriers already discussed facing teachers in schools.

One particular challenge that faces some youth organisations concerns the numbers of volunteers available. The Scouts, for example, have a waiting list of 30,000 children and young people who are prevented from joining due to lack of volunteer leaders (Scout Adventures, 2021). The Scout Association recognise a change in how people volunteer their

time meaning that more people are needed in an organisation that already has over 100,000 male and female volunteers (BBC, 2019). Daubney (2017) however, highlights a further, more sinister, reason: 'the very real fear among many men who want to work with children that they will be branded a potential paedophile.' In part this is due to historical, well publicised cases associated with the Scouts, but also meshes with societal narratives that support a position of suspicion around the motivations of male adults to work with children (Tufan, 2018).

7.4   The participant perspective

The previous discussion has highlighted some of the factors that influence the creation and maintenance of OL provision. 'Simply' creating opportunities, however, forms only part of the process as a wide range of individual factors will influence whether people can actually access them. The majority of the research into barriers to OL participation relates to school provision rather than participation from a personal perspective, so I will draw on evidence from the field of sport and recreation to inform the discussion.

In EYFS and primary school settings parent's perceptions of education and what learning is for, stemming from their own histories and cultural backgrounds, intersect with views of the outdoors to shape how they view OL. Collier (2013, pp. 12-13) describes the conflicts that some parents face:

> Parents want children to look good and avoid getting dirty so that people don't think that they are poor and also because parents can't afford to replace clothes or buy items specially [sic] for outdoor activities and trips to the launderette are expensive. In these communities the prevailing cultural attitude is that dirty clothes equals poverty. These children are caught between a materialistic message, itself evoked to cover a sense of shame or inadequacy about poverty, and any desire to engage with nature. A disadvantage that many children from middle class homes don't encounter, where the perceived cultural attitude may be that dirty clothes equals productivity and having fun.

Mycock (2019) concurs and describes how in Forest School settings some children can equate 'muddy' with 'dirty', echoing parental values. Even if the value of the outdoors is understood, parents' more pressing social identity needs outweigh the potential benefits. The availability of protective clothing (i.e. waterproofs and wellies), either sourced from home or through the school thus becomes an essential enabler for OL to thrive and highlights the importance of the parent – school communication channel.

For teenagers and young people in school, the issue of cost of trips and visits is the same (see above discussion about the D of E scheme). Parental contributions are often the only way that such visits can go ahead, and schools need to put in place extended payment plans and try to reduce costs to enable fair access (Menzies *et al.,* 2017). Those that cannot pay face exclusion from activities and the potential reinforcement of social barriers to participation further afield. Collier (2013) recognises the barriers this can create for city dwellers for whom the cost of travel to the countryside 'is effectively a large fence blocking off the countryside, that says 'keep out, affluent people only' and reinforces the sense of the city as a prison - too expensive to leave.' (p. 12)

With the notable exception of a Sport England study of participation in outdoor recreation carried out in partnership with the outdoor retail sector (Gordon, Chester and Denton, 2015), there is limited research into the barriers related to OL engagement in England from a participant perspective. The Sport England report identified a number of generic barriers to accessing outdoor activities (Figure 7.1), many of which are congruent with those identified by teachers and youth workers. Of additional significance is the specific reference to the barriers related to social identity, the report highlighting the gender differences that underpin perceptions of the outdoors, where girls feel they are trespassing on boys' areas. Hempsall (2019) is more forthright, claiming that the dominance of gender stereotyping and the historical role of adventure in the UK leads to the perception of adventure as remote, risky and arduous and is alienating to anyone of any gender who doesn't meet that ideal. 'The lack of role models, and paucity of access perpetually reinforces the idea of adventure as a male privilege, because it is a physical and virtual space that is dominated by men.' (2019, p. 7)

Figure 7.1. Generic barriers to outdoors participation (from Gordon, Chester and Denton, 2015, p.26)

Gordon, Chester and Denton (2015) report further exclusion factors affecting under-represented groups in the outdoors. BAME communities, for example, as well as sharing concerns around safety, confidence and awareness of opportunities with other groups, potentially face cultural and language barriers and the belief that the outdoors is for other people, often categorised as white and middle class. Similar class perceptions are also reported as barriers for 'deprived communities' (ibid, p. 28) for whom costs associated with participation also appear (Collier, 2013; Social Mobility Commission, 2019). Such perceptions

are borne out by the MENE survey (Natural England, 2019b), which categorised participants by age, social status and ethnicity, and showed significant differences in access to the natural environment at least once a week between white and non-white access (69% of white people compared to 42% BAME, 41% Black and 38% Asian) and by social group 74% social group AB, 68% C1, 63% C2 and 53% DE). The MENE children's survey employed similar categories, finding that gender and age were not strong predictors for the frequency of children's visits to the natural environment (Hunt *et al.*, 2016). Ethnicity and socio-economic groupings, however, reflected adult data and were found to be significant due to the influence of parental activity and support (Natural England, 2019).

The barriers outlined above are not just confined to personal recreation, as a recent, highly critical, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) audit of the Girlguides shows. The report found that participants experienced 'reoccurring instances of racism, Islamophobia, homo/bi/transphobia and ableism against girls by leaders and other girls' (Bachmann and Dhillon, 2021, p. 5), describing the organisation as

> predominantly white and middle class, with Christian undertones and as very cliquey. Participants reported a lack of diversity at all levels of the organisation, but particularly in senior leadership. Marginalised participants said that there is a lack of inclusive decision-making and that their voices are often unheard. (ibid, p.5)

The authors made 28 recommendations for change, leading, in the report's introduction, to a formal apology and commitment to change from the Chair of the Board of Trustees, and the development of a specific strategic plan (Girlguiding, 2021a).

Beyond the non-formal opportunities which will generally be accessed through established groups, family access to informal activities is subject to the barriers outlined in Figure 7.1. In addition, parental concerns over injury and harm to their children can lead to over-control stemming from a fear that they will be criticised as parents (Muñoz, 2009; McManus, 2012), reflecting deeply held cultural values. Family projects, where parents and their children engage together to overcome these fears have been shown to improve family resilience and to help longer term engagement in school (McManus, 2012).

Research into participation in outdoor activities in England is supported by a study by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), which found that more information about opportunities would help increase participation amongst young people (Scott Porter Research &

Marketing, 2011). However, time constraints relating to commitments at school, home and elsewhere were the main barriers to participation in outdoor activities for young people, suggesting that greater understanding of the benefits and values is necessary if young people are to prioritise outdoor activity above other demands on their time. The issues identified in Scotland are supported by more general sport participation research elsewhere. For young people, as the SNH study indicated, competing demands on time mean that things that make access harder will push outdoor related activity down the list of desirable things to do (Sport England, 2014). Motivations to participate in sport, for example, include fun and enjoyment, parents who are engaged themselves or at least supportive, and friends and peers with similar interests (Bailey, Cope and Pearce, 2013). The provision of local opportunities is also important but not enough on its own, as lack of awareness, transport to get there and entry fees can result in low participation (Audit Commission, 2009; Somerset and Hoare, 2018). These operational barriers work in conjunction with others that are related to intra- and interpersonal relationships, such as: fear of being judged or being embarrassed in front of peers; negative experiences at school or elsewhere; concerns about body image; and emerging identity issues (Sports Council Wales, 2009; Sport England, 2014; Somerset and Hoare, 2018).

For young people with emerging identities and the capacity to choose how they engage with OL opportunities, the factors influencing their decisions to engage are invariably individual, complex and interlinked. Somerset and Hoare's (2018) summary diagram (Figure 7.2) shows how a distant location requires transport, but transport costs money and takes time, all of which may conspire to reduce or prevent access. When combined with the internal and external person-centred influences on participation it can be seen that solutions to the challenge of increasing engagement are not straightforward.
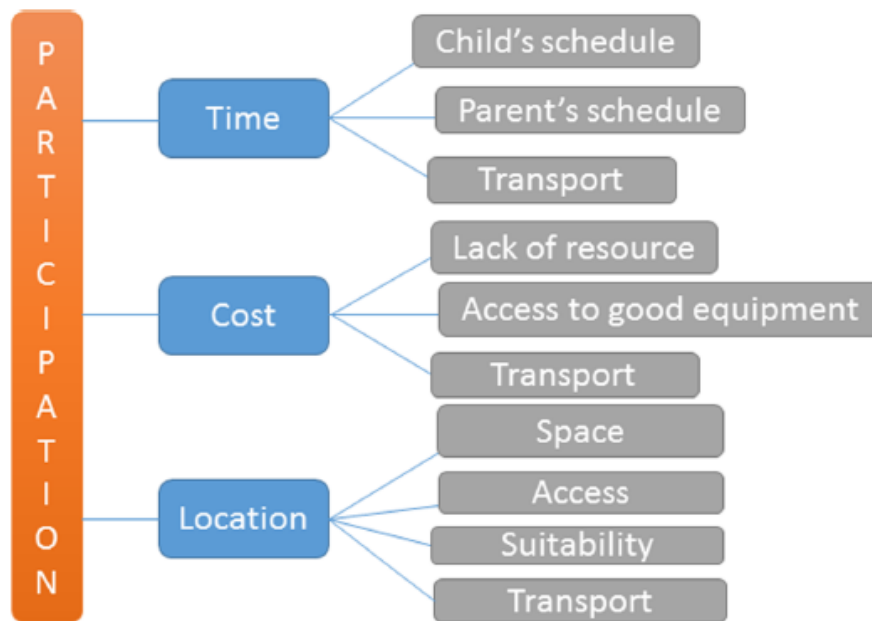
Figure 7.2. Practical barriers to participation in sport for children (Somerset and Hoare, 2018, p.13)

Drawing again from Scottish research, Higgins *et al*. (2006) explored teacher's approaches and attitudes to engaging with the natural heritage of Scotland, concluding that barriers invariably overlapped, creating a complex picture that varied depending on context and individual. What may be seen as barriers by one person could be opportunities for another. Much of the literature, however, focuses on barriers and with it an unconscious suggestion perhaps that they are things that need to be dismantled to enable success. Introducing OL practice into a school that goes beyond one individual teacher's lone practice implies a desire to change the practice and perhaps pedagogic beliefs of others. What might be seen as barriers to implementation, causing slow progress, by an advocate could very well be seen as very good - and justifiable - reasons not to be engaging by another. The same argument holds true for individual people and their voluntary engagement (or otherwise) in OL experiences. Quite simply, not everyone wants to participate. However, there is a significant difference between choosing whether to engage, given the knowledge and opportunity to make an informed choice, and not having a real choice due to the competing factors that actually create the decision-making framework.

In terms of employment in the sector, social identity plays a significant role (Allin and West, 2016). Despite the MENE data showing that gender is not an issue for children accessing the

outdoors (Hunt *et al.*, 2016), recent studies into gender equality in the sector have highlighted that this initial engagement does not necessarily translate into a career in OL. The identified disparity between male and female representation (Allwood, 2016; Webster, 2018; Leonard and Williams, 2019) has led to specific programmes aimed at addressing the underrepresentation of girls and women in the outdoors by facilitating a potential progression from initial participation to employment. The Outdoor Partnership's 'This Girls' adventure', for example, aims 'to inspire more women and girls from across North Wales to participate in outdoor activities for health, social and economic reasons' (Outdoor Partnership, 2021a), while Outward Bound's 'Women's Outdoor Leadership Course' attempts 'to develop well-rounded, aspiring female instructors' (O'Brien, 2019).

A similar progression pathway applies in the context of ethnicity where initiatives aimed at increasing sector representation from BAME communities have been ongoing for a number of years. Only 1% of Summer Mountain Leaders and Rock Climbing Instructors are from BAME communities (O'Brien, 2020), and increasing representation 'requires more people from BAME backgrounds to choose to get involved, but choosing to get involved requires knowing and feeling it is an option available to "someone like you".' (ibid, p.19). In addition, Allin and West (2016) contend that personal values and motives must be developed along with technical and interpersonal skills and competencies, all of which take time, commitment and money and are heavily influenced by gender, ethnicity, social class and other aspects of social identity.

7.5   Chapter summary

The above discussion has highlighted a range of barriers evident in different contexts relevant to OL. Many factors that present as barriers appear to be common across different groups, but can mean different things. 'Transport', for example, is a practical issue for young people (how can they get somewhere?), and an issue of logistics and funding for teachers. Similarly, time and money have different meanings depending on perspective.

Thus far, research into the factors affecting access to OL has largely focused on school provision, and the barriers perceived by teachers are accordingly well rehearsed and understood. In non-formal contexts there is limited research that is specific to OL, although there is increasing awareness of potential barriers beyond school, where the focus shifts to

the participants. Drawing on research from recreation and sport has provided some insight into the issues CYPF may face accessing OL, but whether the factors highlighted in the literature actually translate to OL suggests further investigation.

AT, introduced in **Chapter 6**, provides a framework through which to examine the various factors as mechanisms, implying that each is a tool that can be applied to leverage access. It also enables analysis of other, wider aspects of provision, and it is to this that I now turn.

8 Access to OL through the lens of Access Theory

8.1 Introduction

The analysis in **Chapter 7** highlights a wide range of factors that influence access to the benefits that can accrue from participation in OL/OR. However, much of the research tends to focus on the factors as particular barriers to engagement, treating them as entities rather than processes. Access Theory (AT) reframes the factors as means, relations and processes, or 'mechanisms' for short (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, p. 160) which can be categorised under the broad headings of rights-based, economic, knowledge, and social and institutional.

8.2 Rights-based mechanisms

Rights based mechanisms are sanctioned by 'law, custom or convention' (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, p. 162) and are evident in formal OL contexts as well as recreational ones. Whether OL is part of statutory provision or remains discretionary, for example, influences the implementation of OL strategies in schools, as can be seen by the different cases of OAA and FS. OAA, as part of PE in the statutory curriculum, forces a minimum level of provision for all, whereas FS is optional and delivered via a range of different interventions and interpretations that depend on how it is viewed and supported (or legitimised) in the setting (Kemp and Pagden, 2019). Similarly, in a community context, how the outdoors is viewed culturally affects the degree to which access is legitimised. This is discussed further in section 8.5 below.

8.3 Knowledge based mechanisms

Issues related to knowledge recur from multiple perspectives. Knowing what to do, how to do it, where to go and (perhaps most significantly for those not imbued in a culture of the outdoors) why to access OL, are key issues for potential enablers and participants. The evidence base and public awareness of the benefits of OL are growing and there are numerous organisations offering training, yet the literature suggests that there is a gap between what seems to be available and what is actually accessed. Making training available is one part of the picture but needs to support a culture that values OL at both societal and specific community levels. The challenge can be regarded as one of working out how to

bridge that gap, and suggests a high level OL sector strategy of promoting the value of OL. This was a key sector goal in 2000 when the IOL was created and is a key goal in 2021 for the proposed Outdoor Learning Association.

8.4 Economic access mechanisms

This group of mechanisms includes access to technology, capital, labour, and what is framed in AT terms as access to markets. Access to appropriate **technology i**ncludes infrastructure - the ways and means to get somewhere - and the equipment needed to take part in the activity once there, and features repeatedly as a barrier. **Capital** is exchanged for something desirable. It is chiefly understood in terms of money or property but can also refer to social capital (networks and relationships), cultural capital (knowledge and skills) and symbolic capital (prestige and recognition) (Bourdieu, 1986). The amount of capital someone has at their disposal influences their access to training, transport, equipment, resources, venue entry, course fees, car parking and accommodation. Access to **markets** relates to selling a product and in the OL field has relevance to providers operating in the open market. From a participant perspective, 'markets' may perhaps be changed to 'opportunities', and access enables the benefits to be accrued as a result of participation: the opportunities have to exist in the first place to be accessed, and the proximity of venues and the mechanisms in place to facilitate participation (e.g. cycle and wheelchair accessible paths, gates, stiles and picnic benches) become relevant. The fourth category, access to **labour** is again more pertinent to providers, although it has significance in terms of voluntary provision as well.

8.5 Social and institutional mechanisms

The preceding mechanisms can be regarded as practical categories in that they can be addressed with specific solutions, albeit complex and difficult ones to implement. Roads can be built, regulations or policy introduced, money provided to fund equipment or projects, knowledge and skills gained through training or campaigns run to raise awareness. As such, they are comparatively easy to understand as barriers to participation and are well rehearsed. Social and institutional access mechanisms, on the other hand, are considerably more complex, Ribot and Peluso (2003) identifying three distinct categories: access to authority; access through social identity; and '*access via the negotiation of other social*

relations of friendship, trust, reciprocity, patronage, dependence, and obligation [which] form critical strands in access webs.' (p. 172)

Access to authority refers to the key people or institutions who act as focal points for a variety of direct or indirect forms of access that incorporate multiple access mechanisms. For most participants, gaining and maintaining access to OL opportunities often requires support from the people who act as 'nodes of direct or indirect forms of access control where multiple access mechanisms or strands are bundled together in one person or institution' (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, p. 170). People and institutions in this category have the means to facilitate access to the benefits of OL for others at a local level and play a significant role without perhaps realising their potential impact. Authority rests with them in their capacity to create opportunities or to encourage participation through their role in a particular community, and examples include parents, faith leaders, teachers, youth workers and community leaders.

There are different levels of authority and influence. A child or young person wanting to take part in an activity has to receive authorisation (consent) from their parent or carer to do so; a teacher wanting to introduce Forest School needs the support of their head teacher and perhaps Governing Board; opening up opportunities for people in specific groups, such as BAME, LGBTQ+ or disabled, requires policy enactment at a provider level; negotiating with Government to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on providers requires a direct line of communication from the providers through their representative associations to the DfE (IOL, 2021e). Understanding this process as a mechanism draws attention to the role of key people or institutions, a role that is neglected in the literature.

Access through negotiated social relations 'are central to virtually all other elements of access' (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, p. 172), suggesting that developing quality relationships would appear to be instrumental in facilitating access. The quality of relationships that exist within neighbourhood communities (Stoddart, 2004) or professional ones (Allin and West, 2016) is known as social capital, the holding of which 'empower[s] individuals in communities to gain access to different opportunities' (Stoddart, 2004, p.2). Johnston and Percy-Smith (2003) suggest that having high levels of social capital through strong formal and informal networks developed through participation in groups means that people can access more opportunities, improve their quality of life and overall life chances. Summarising the

work of key theorists Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam on social capital, identifying common threads of reciprocity and trust, they state that:

> Individuals behave towards each other with the expectation that they share certain norms and values; they engage in actions which are of benefit to others in the expectation that those actions will be reciprocated at some point in the future. And, furthermore, membership of such social networks gives rise to benefits to those with access to them. (ibid, p.325)

Beames and Atencio (2008), taking an OE perspective, suggest that institutions (such as schools and outdoor education centres) play a crucial role in developing these networks, involvement in which leads to economic, cultural and social benefits (Stoddart, 2004; Beames and Atencio 2008). Positive (OL) experiences of trust and cooperation provided through formal and non-formal programmes enhance the likelihood of similar exchanges happening again, creating a self-reinforcing, virtuous circle (Johnstone and Percy-Smith, 2003).

Social capital can be developed through strong and weak ties and what Putnam (2000, cited in Beames and Atencio, 2008) refers to as 'thick' and 'thin' trust. Strong, often internally developed, identification with a group or community leads to high levels of 'bonding' social capital, which tends to support existing structures; 'bridging' social capital is concerned with the weaker ties that exist between different groups (ibid) and is more socially inclusive. Thick trust is developed over a period of time that enables someone to prove themselves as trustworthy; thin trust relates to a more generalised trust in other people and is potentially of greater value as it can be extended to wider communities (Stoddart, 2004; Beames and Atencio, 2008). Opportunities where people are forced to interact with others that they do not know, such as those found through OL residentials for example, encourage the growth of thin trust and weak ties that have the potential to be used beyond the specific programme.

Access through social identity relates to membership or social identity within a group - for example, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, cultural identity, geography, status etc. Social identity defines and evaluates a person's self-concept and how they will be treated and thought of by others (Hogg, 2016) and is interwoven with negotiated social relationships 'of friendship, trust, reciprocity, patronage, dependence, and obligation' (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, p. 172). It 'profoundly affects the distribution of benefits from things' (ibid, p. 170) and

thus influences access to opportunities as a participant, the provision of the opportunities by providers, and the actual constitution of the sector workforce itself.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides a helpful theoretical framework as it distinguishes between categories and groups, a social identity being a person's knowledge that they belong to a specific social category or group (Stets and Burke, 2000). While a category is decided by the person who defines it (Jenkins, 2014), a social group is defined in terms of the relations between its members, 'a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category' (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 225). Social groups can include large demographic categories (e.g. ethnicity, age, gender, etc.), self-selected groups based on, for example, a geographic locality or a shared interest (e.g. Scouts or a canoe club), or small task orientated teams created for specific purposes, such as a river restoration project group (Hogg, 2016). Common to all is a shared identity that 'prescribes and evaluates who they are, what they should believe and how they should behave (ibid, p. 6). Crucially, social identity highlights the characteristics that make the group (the in-group) distinct from others (the out-group) through a 'perception of oneness with or belongingness' that incorporates both success and failures (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 34).

Beyond the externally categorised groups there are other, self-formed groups that are not necessarily categorised but have a significant influence on access. Social identity is different to personal identity which 'differentiates the unique self from all other selves' (Jenkins, 2014, p. 114) and relates to 'who you are, where you are going, and where you fit into society' (Sigelman and Rider, 2015, p. 343). It is the combination of two or more people that creates a group and hence a social identity. Notwithstanding Jenkins' (2014) assertion that all human identities are social identities, as they all involve notions of comparison between persons or things, there is a distinction to be made between individual identity, where the self is seen as the occupant of a role, and a social identity that relates to a person's knowledge that they are a member of a specific social group or category (Stets and Burke, 2000).

Within the OL sector, there is extensive evidence regarding the impact of social identity on access. The conflicts faced by parents informed by their personal histories (e.g. Collier, 2013; Mycock, 2019), participation by marginalised groups (e.g. Gordon, Chester and Denton, 2015; Natural England, 2019; Bachman and Dillon, 2021), and the socio-economic and gender issues in the sector referenced in section 7.4, are all increasingly researched.

Social identity is a function of the culture within which one lives. The above discussion relates to how individuals relate to a group, but the social identity of others is also significant. Values held by parents around risk and safety, for example, or what is socially or culturally acceptable, influence what they do with their own children or allow them to do (Muñoz, 2009; McManus, 2012). Values held by head teachers or other key authorities can enable or constrain opportunities, and culturally embedded practices in institutions (e.g. timetabling, homework expectations, assessment demands) can serve as barriers (or enablers) to practice. Custom and practice extends to the whole range of social and professional activity of which OL participation is just one aspect.

8.6   Time

Access theory provides a framework to examine OL provision and has relevance from multiple perspectives. The access mechanisms hold different degrees of significance for different groups at different times but, despite the disaggregated model of provision that exists, all are interlinked when considering the benefits that can result from participation. Some barriers to OL provision that are harder to allocate to AT mechanisms than others, two examples being access to opportunities (addressed in section 8.4) and that of time.

Time is effectively a resource and invariably reflects prioritisation based on perceived values of different demands. Is it a form of capital? Or is it related to social identity through reference to values? Issues of time are related to the discretionary nature of OL/OR participation. For teachers, time for training to upskill and increase their knowledge is regarded as essential, as is fitting OL opportunities into an already crowded curriculum. For young people with competing interests and demands it represents prioritisation based on values and obligations. For those who value OL more highly time is less of an issue as they will choose to prioritise the things that hold more perceived value. When regarded in this way, the process of *creating* time, for example by sanctioning training or planning in work time, or providing opportunities for CYP that do not compete with other demands, becomes a process that can be consciously addressed. From an AT perspective, time can be accommodated into other mechanisms but, as it appears consistently as a factor in the context of discretionary OL, I suggest that it is acknowledged as a separate mechanism.

8.7   Chapter summary

AT provides a way to identify and assess the different processes and relationships that influence access to OL. Figure 8.1 shows how the different access mechanisms relate to the benefits flow associated with OL. The creation of the opportunity must come first and relates to the provider perspective (Box 1). Incorporated in this aspect is the provision of OL in schools as well as outside, hence the inclusion of time (shown in purple). Access to markets and labour are specifically provider sector related (coloured orange). Participation (Box 2) follows from the creation of the opportunity and is subject to the access mechanisms identified above. Participation leads to the potential personal, social, societal and environmental benefits (Box 3).
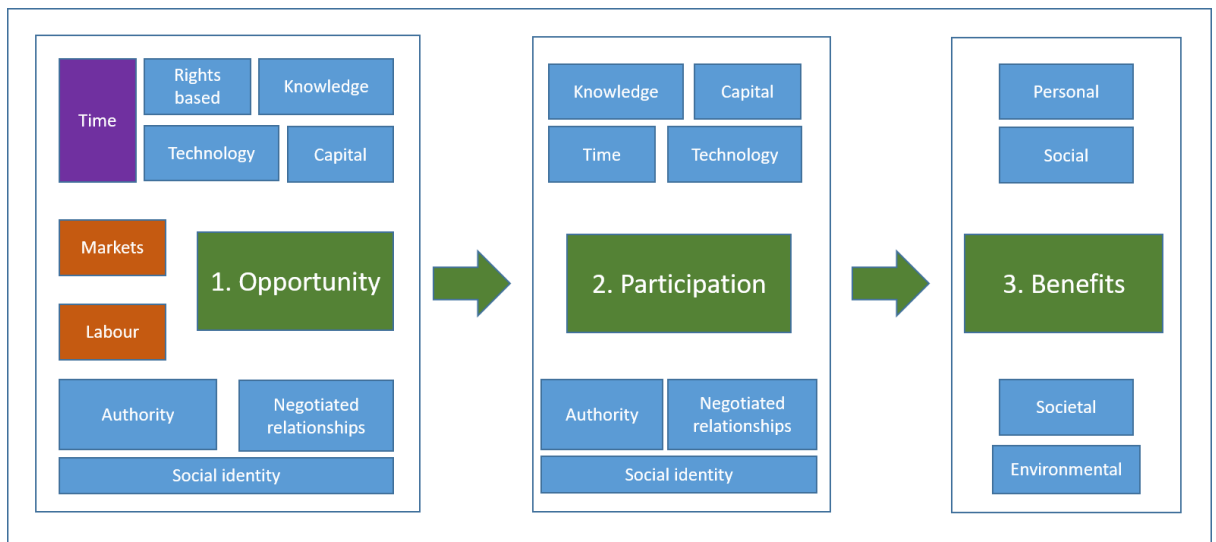
Figure 8.1. Access theory and the flow of benefits in OL provision

Access mechanisms are not mutually exclusive and may be related in multiple configurations: they may conflict, enable or support others, and may be sequential or nested. The relationship between them is unique for each individual and their particular set of circumstances. The linked nature of the various access mechanisms can be seen when considering the example of potential employment in the sector. As people seek to enter the OL sector as employees or volunteers, knowledge is codified into qualifications, the holding of which has a direct impact on the levels of employment or work open to them. Pathways to achieve this are provided through education at Further and Higher levels, and apprenticeship

and trainee offers through employers (IOL, 2021d). Whether opportunities are able to be taken up though depends on a complex mix of the proximity of training providers to young people's homes, transport to get there, course fees, cultural factors and social identity issues. The degree to which a person has control or power over each mechanism influences their capability to benefit from the opportunity.

AT focuses on the powers that people hold that are embodied in the various access mechanisms. People and institutions change over time, meaning that the bundle of powers and hence their ability to access opportunities also changes. People have more power in some relationships than others, each individual bundle of powers constituting a 'node' in a wider web.

AT subdivides access into the gaining, maintaining and control of access. The literature discussed in Chapter 7 focuses chiefly on the factors associated with gaining access, while the issues around maintaining access to OL/OR are implied through the need for ongoing access to transport, the financial resources to maintain participation, or the support to maintain a strategy in school. Longitudinal studies that address long term access are rare, although the Natural Connections Demonstration Project showed that the common challenges of funding, time and linking OL to the curriculum changed as confidence grew and previously existing problems were addressed (Waite *et al.*, 2016).

Focusing on maintaining access highlights the temporal nature of the various mechanisms. Changes can occur at all levels from government to individual, with any single one having potentially positive or negative effects on access. The potential impacts of government policy change with regard to the curriculum have already been noted, but while those changes may perhaps be most felt in the formal education sector, those that occur at institutional or individual levels can be equally significant in terms of participation. At an institutional level, for example, changes may occur to provision through a lack of volunteers, the cessation of funding or changes to key personnel. For individuals, changing family circumstances, interests or demands on a person's time may influence choices. Simply growing up may move a person into a different age category with a different group of peers that prompts a change of focus.

Framing the discussion in terms of gaining, maintaining and controlling access recognises the influence of social, political and cultural factors on participation and is therefore central to the provision of progressive OL opportunities. Maintaining access requires the interaction over time of a number of different stakeholders and associated mechanisms to keep access open, suggesting a degree of interrelatedness that is not addressed in the literature. The third aspect of AT, controlling access, and the crucial role of gatekeepers in this capacity, is similarly missing from the literature. These gaps are the focus of the studies and subsequent theory development in Parts 3 and 4.

8.8   Summary of Part 2

Social constructs of time and cultural narratives about what is perceived to be important create the framework within which decisions are made (Urry, 1995; Cass, Shove and Urry, 2005). The challenge to increasing participation would seem to be one of increasing the perceived value of the outdoors (and hence OL) such that the outdoors is valued in its own right as an inherent good that people want to access. What is valued thus becomes embedded in people's own values and, given such a motivation to engage, the potential barriers become things that can be willingly approached rather than seen as reasons not to do something. Values have been shown to be a critical factor in motivating teachers to establish and maintain OL provision in schools (Waite, 2011) and are significant for many OL practitioners (Everard, 2004), but there is a paucity of research looking at how the values and contexts of other stakeholders can influence provision.

The discussion of social identity highlights the role of context in their formation. The research into access to sport and OL provides reasons why people do not engage but is less forthcoming on how these issues can be addressed, and by whom. Government sponsored education demonstration projects serve to highlight issues and good practice in schools and initiatives such as the IOL Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) webinar series (IOL, 2021c) are beginning to tackle wider issues of equality, yet the wider participation of CYPF in OL remains under-researched. Understanding the context in which participants live, their cultural norms and the practical barriers they face to progressive lifelong participation in OL is a key goal of this thesis.

By using an access theory framework I have identified the key mechanisms that affect provision and participation. The literature suggests a disaggregated field with multiple stakeholders and agendas, and describes a landscape of inequitable access. The goal of this research is to add to the body of knowledge that supports increased participation in OL. Informed by the literature review, the research detailed in **Part 3** focuses on the question of how context affects the provision of OL, examining the role of social identity in progressive OL participation. The research focuses on the geographical area of Copeland (see **Chapter 10**) and asks the following questions:

1. Who are the stakeholders in outdoor learning?
2. How do the various stakeholders understand and engage with outdoor learning?
3. How do the various stakeholders understand and engage with (access) outdoor learning in Copeland?
   a. What is the level of OL provision in Copeland?
   b. What are the barriers and enablers influencing access?
4. How does context affect the value that individuals attach to concepts and practices of outdoor learning in local communities in Copeland?
   a. How do these values impact on the potential progression model?

Part 3: Accessing outdoor learning in Copeland

9 Research Design

9.1 Introduction

Building on the literature review and subsequent analysis of access mechanisms pertaining to OL, this chapter sets out the philosophy, methodology and research design that underpins the empirical research in this thesis. Access, ethics and the impact of Covid-19 on the research are also discussed. Figure 9.1 revisits the conceptual framework, introduced in **Chapter 1**, 'the mental map that connects the various dimensions of the research process such as the researcher's a priori knowledge and interests, the literature survey, theory, methods, data analysis and findings' (Waldt, 2020, p. 3).
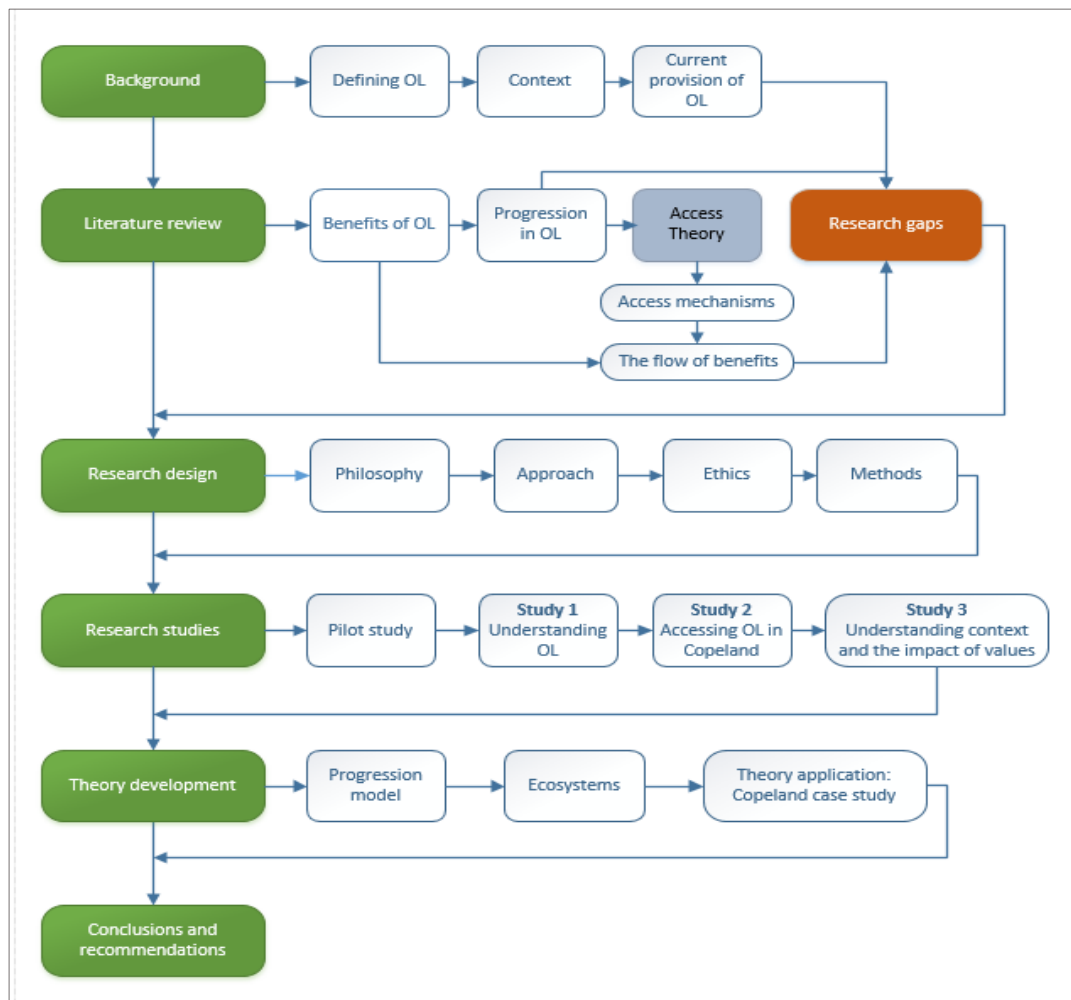
Figure 9.1. Thesis concept map

9.2   Philosophy

The role of values and ethics in research – axiology – provides a framework and philosophy that governs how I will build my research design and carry out the research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Understanding the impact of my values on my practice is, for me, the foundation upon which actions are built, so if values can be seen as 'a concept of the desirable with a motivating force' (Hodgkinson, cited in Zakus, Malloy and Edwards, 2007, p. 144), identifying the 'desirable' becomes a central issue. At the heart of this project lies a personal belief in the value of progressive outdoor learning experiences for all, no matter what their background or circumstances. These values, my desire to make a positive difference to the lives of young people, fellow researchers and practitioners, coupled with a belief in the right for an individual (research subject, practitioner, colleague or young person) to be heard and listened to, are key drivers for me and form the building blocks upon which the research is designed.

Choices about the questions and approach to the research are influenced by my values, personal history and belief system. There is an associated danger, though, that those very values lead to an unconscious bias whereby a person who is a member of a privileged group in the field of research (and who therefore benefits from the inherent structural inequalities) fails to consider the power structures as problematic (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). It is therefore essential that I retain an awareness of my role in the research and acknowledge the way in which I influence the research processes and outcomes. Haynes (2012, p. 73) describes this researcher reflexivity as involving 'thinking about how our thinking came to be, how pre-existing understanding is constantly revised in the light of new understandings, and how this in turn affects our research.' This has been an important part of my own research journey as I have moved from a position of context specific knowledge related to certain aspects of OL to a broader understanding of the wider field. As my awareness has grown, I have increasingly questioned my own beliefs, values and responses, a process that has not always been easy.

Ontological and epistemological considerations, for me, follow on from axiological ones as my everyday practice is driven first and foremost by my values. I believe that what people think is important, and that I will only know what is happening and why people do what they do if I ask them and listen carefully to what they have to say. Everyone's view will be

different and understanding the relationship between these factors will be a central challenge of the research. This aligns with a social constructionist perspective which suggests that 'reality is constructed through social interaction in which social actors create partially shared meanings and realities' (Saunders *et al.*, 2016, p. 130). Research into context, history and geography provides a level of detail that aids understanding of how different realities are perceived and what any shared components of those realities might be. The picture, in other words, is constructed from the ground up rather than being imposed by outside 'experts'. This is an important point, as it potentially creates a tension between the constructed world of the outdoor sector as represented by the IOL, the reality as understood by the non-outdoor sector actors and potential beneficiaries, and my own values. My goal as a sponsored researcher is to identify and understand the different perspectives, and to use this understanding to further develop and inform practice, both that of the sponsor and more widely.

Axiologically, ontologically and epistemologically, my personal perspectives are a close fit with the philosophy of pragmatism which follows the idea that realities and knowledge are constructed from habits and beliefs that are socially constructed (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Knowledge is thus generated from experience, much of which is socially shared, a philosophy deeply embedded in many aspects of OL found in the UK and rooted in the works of John Dewey (see Quay and Seaman, 2013; Ord and Leather, 2011). As a paradigm through which to orientate this study, pragmatism offers a sound philosophical basis upon which to acknowledge the varied interpretations and perceptions that actors and stakeholders bring to the research. With its practical focus, pragmatism places the research questions at the forefront of the research design, rather than ontological and epistemological considerations. Data that are gathered from research subjects that asks for their view and understanding of a social situation is going to be subjective, i.e. it will be coloured by the subject's cultural background, experience, values and beliefs. Qualitative and quantitative data are all valid as they can shed light on different aspects of an individual's world view. Knowledge is perceived as practical and context specific, and it is successful action that defines the truth of a particular theory (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Pragmatism as a research paradigm is regarded as relevant when the concepts being researched support action. Pragmatism has 'an interest not only for what 'is', but also for what 'might be'; an orientation towards a prospective, not yet realized world. Pragmatism is

concerned with an instrumental view on knowledge; that it is used in action for making a purposeful difference in practice' (Goldkuhl, 2012, p. 140). Research starts with an identified problem and then aims to develop practical solutions that will influence and inform future practice (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). The research goals of understanding the field of OL, how it is currently accessed and what might be done to address the existing inequalities suggest a range of methods be adopted as the most appropriate strategy to achieve them, a key rationale for selecting pragmatism as a research paradigm (Onwuegbuzie, Johnson and Collins, 2009; Morgan, 2014; Kaushik and Walsh, 2020). Further, pragmatism offers a strong connection with social justice (Morgan, 2014) as it 'grapples with analysing contemporary social issues and engages with themes of social inequality, power and politics' (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019), central themes of this thesis.

The goal of this thesis is to develop a model that can be applied in multiple contexts to enable more equitable access to progressive outdoor learning opportunities. The thesis is situated within a pragmatist paradigm as the nature of this study demands an approach that asks what and how questions, and then seeks to understand the reasons behind the answers. The pragmatic stance is necessary, rather than merely desirable, as the nature of the study suggests a mixed methods approach (i.e. the means of gathering data), all of which have relevance at different times, and a desire to contribute practical solutions that have the potential to influence and inform future practice (Onwuegbuzie, Johnson and Collins, 2009; Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

9.3   Methodology

Methodology is 'the lens through which the researcher views and makes decisions about the study' (Harrison *et al.*, 2017). Taking a pragmatic approach to the research enables the adoption of the methodology most appropriate to answer the research questions which, for questions where the primary interest is in understanding the way that people interpret their experiences in a particular context, is a case study (Yin, 2014). Research participants are influenced by the structures that surround them and contextual variables that include political, economic, social, cultural, historical and organisational factors. Their local context is significant for understanding how people access, provide and enable OL opportunities.

A case study can be defined as 'an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system' (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015, p. 37). The system in this instance is the resident population of the geographically defined area of Copeland in Cumbria (described in **Chapter 10**). The activity focus is OL, addressed cross-sectionally at a moment in time rather than longitudinally.

Case studies can further be identified by four characteristics (Merriam, 1988): they are particularistic, in that they have a specific focus; descriptive, in that they draw on a variety of sources and different perspectives to produce a 'rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study' (p. 11); heuristic, in that they enhance the reader's understanding of the focus of study; and inductive, in that new understandings emerge from the data. This case study is interpretive in nature, focusing on a specific population with a view to developing testable theory.

9.3.1 Theoretical orientation and development

Following the rationale that access to OL is inequitable, the study proposes that a model can be developed to enable greater progressive engagement with OL. By studying the situation in a specific area in depth through a range of stakeholders, a greater understanding can be achieved of the factors affecting access. This understanding may lead to a practical model that addresses inequitable access and that has application potential across other communities.

The unit of analysis is a key characteristic of case study methodology (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). To qualify as a case study, the unit of analysis has to be specific: in this instance it is the resident population of Copeland, rather than access to OL, the case providing the opportunities to explore access to OL. Copeland, a district of Cumbria, was chosen as the focus of the case study to enable me to develop research tools at a more manageable scale. The original intention was to conduct a county-wide case study that investigated the reach of OL provision. However, conversations with natural environment venues that had OL components to their offers (for example, Forestry Commission, National Trust, Wildlife Trusts and RSPB) showed that visitor data was difficult to access and variable in content, design and quality. It was therefore decided to exclude recreational visitors to Cumbrian venues as it was impossible to discern where they originated from. Similarly, although Cumbria has a significant number of OECs, their visitors are often from outside the county.

Visits made by Cumbrian schools to an OEC could be in the county or elsewhere – it was the fact that they were making any visit that was significant. The District of Copeland offered an ideal opportunity due to being a possible location for a National Lottery funded post supporting outdoor engagement delivered through the Wales-based Outdoor Partnership (Outdoor Partnership, 2021). Further, a study at district level encompasses institutional and community aspects of provision that may be less aligned at a larger scale. The potential to carry out a case study of a particular initiative that had significant overlap with my own research goals was a critical factor in the evolution of the research design and subsequent theory development.

9.4   Design

This section describes the four studies that were undertaken as part of the research, the methods used for data collection and how data was analysed. Figure 9.2 shows how the studies progressively narrowed in focus to produce the final proposal.
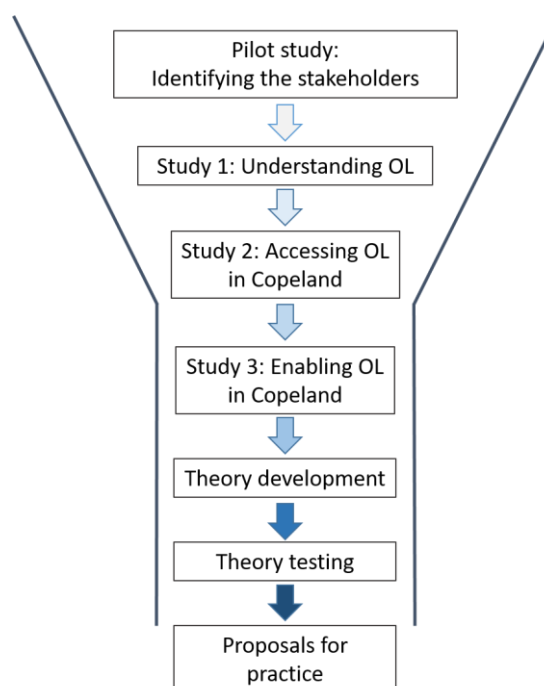
Figure 9.2. The research study funnel

9.4.1　The pilot study

Research question: Who are the stakeholders in outdoor learning?

Pilot studies are essential to understanding the meaning and values that participants attach to activities and ideas (Maxwell, 2012). With a view to checking my understanding of the field of OL a series of initial unstructured exploratory pilot interviews with providers of OL (n=3) who worked across a number of contexts were carried out to get a feel for the 'world of outdoor learning' that they operated in. For convenience and ease of access the research participants were selected from my own networks, a strategy advocated by Yin (2014). Provider A was a provider of residential camps for school children and Duke of Edinburgh (D of E) Award expeditions, B worked with school children and youth groups in a variety of settings, and C ran a youth work project focused on outdoor provision. Thematic analysis led to the realisation that there were a number of key groups of stakeholders that can be categorised as parents, enablers (i.e. teachers, youth workers, volunteers and other practitioners), providers (paid or voluntary) and young people themselves. Although they are not mutually exclusive (teachers can be parents as well, example), this disaggregation of the various stakeholder groups makes a distinction between the participants (children/young people) and the adults that have a role in providing the opportunities. A fifth group, harder to define but nonetheless significant, can be termed 'gatekeepers', or the people removed from direct involvement but who have the power to say yes or no to an event or opportunity taking place and could be, for example, head teachers or people commissioning youth services.
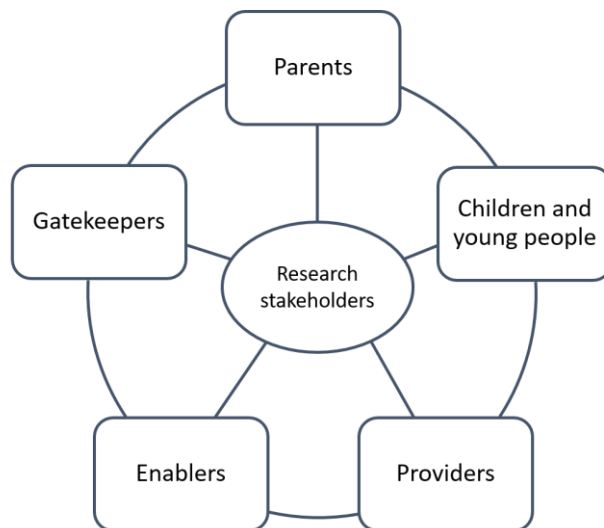
Figure 9.3. Research stakeholders identified through the Pilot Study

9.4.2 Research Study 1: Understanding and accessing OL

Research question: How do the various stakeholders understand and engage with outdoor learning?

Method

Having identified different actor groupings a range of people in the different categories were identified using a purposive sampling method (Saunders *et al.*, 2016): parents (n=11); children and young people (n=7); enablers (teachers and youth workers) (n=2); providers (n=7). The goal was to identify the factors that affected how they engaged with the outdoors and what they saw as the barriers and enablers to increased participation in outdoor learning activity. I treated these interviews as exploratory with a view to arriving at consistent themes that I could investigate more widely through the use of questionnaires and focus groups. Interviews were semi-structured, initially based around a set of key questions that focused on participants understanding of OL, and what their connection with it was. Later interviews expanded on references to personal values and experiences.

The exploratory nature meant that an inductive analysis method was appropriate: as I gathered data from one interview I could use it as a basis to explore further in subsequent ones, arriving at a clear understanding of what is needed to form the focus of subsequent data gathering (Yin, 2014).

Limitations

The purposive sampling method was necessary due to time constraints. A broader sample that involved people unknown to me could have offered alternative perspectives, but the inclusion of parents with no direct involvement in facilitated OL meant that these voices were heard. Although a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds were represented, ethnic diversity was missing, respondents being limited to White British only. The requirement for people to be able to articulate their thought also meant that there was insufficient time to explore the responses of those less able to do so. This was unintentional, becoming more apparent as my researcher journey – and self-awareness – developed, and is a clear opportunity for further research.

The interviews with children proved less productive than I had hoped, emphasising the difficulties of using the same techniques across a wide age range. As some of the children were unknown to me, establishing rapport in the time available was a considerable challenge. Timing, location and interview set-up were also important factors. Group interviews in controlled environments (e.g a youth club or school) using a variety of techniques (Cohen et al, 2007) appeared to offer a greater chance of gathering rich data and were planned for subsequent phases (see below).

Subjectivity and complexity are inherent in the interview (Merriam, 1988) requiring the interviewer to be neutral and non-judgemental. Interviewing people from within the sector required effort to avoid my perspective and any potential bias unknowingly affecting the responses.

9.4.3 Research Study 2: Accessing OL provision in Copeland

Research question:	How do the various stakeholders understand and engage with (access) outdoor learning in Copeland?
Sub-questions:	What is the level of OL provision in Copeland? What are the factors influencing access?

Method

The original plan was to identify young people and adults through schools, youth groups and community channels that would be willing to take part in focus group activities. Unfortunately, this phase coincided with the first UK-wide Coronavirus lockdown and schools and youth groups were faced with enormous challenges delivering online learning, meaning that any additional or non-essential activity had to be abandoned. An alternative research plan was developed and implemented which involved surveying discrete adult groups and then young people in two secondary schools in the district using online forms.

Surveys, in the form of questionnaires, provide a viable way of gathering data from a large number of people who are distant from the researcher. For a case study they provide a way of developing the rich description that constitutes a case study. The data was collected bearing in mind that survey data are self-reported and reflect what people think or think they should say at that particular time. They are also prone to interpretation issues when they are not administered collectively, so are useful for providing a broad overview rather than detailed analysis (Saunders *et al.,* 2016).

The sampling framework was purposive and based on the stakeholder groups gathered in the previous surveys. Rather than target providers who could be located inside or outside the area, the study focused on the people who either participated themselves (i.e. children and young people) or enabled others to take part (i.e. teachers and youth leaders). A third group, Scout leaders, were included as they represent a group that is engaged with local OL provision delivered by volunteers. The research participants are described in more detail below.

Some conversations in Study 1 elicited a feeling that Scouts already accessed OL and therefore did not need to be included in any attempts to increase participation. Rather than assume this was a correct assessment I wanted to check that this perception was accurate. The group is also multi-aged and geographically spread across the district. The Girlguides have units in the area and were invited to take part but did not respond to requests to engage. Gender representation was assured through the surveys with young people (see below).

Question design was similar for the primary school head teachers, youth and scout leaders, although slight modifications were incorporated to reflect the different contexts. Due to the relatively small numbers of intended respondents, it was felt that a limited number of open ended questions could be included that would elicit a more in depth response. Prince (2018) conducted a longitudinal survey of primary schools with similar goals, so the decision was taken to model the question design on that instrument allowing any data from the Copeland survey to be added to the existing database. This strategy also served to negate the need for a pilot phase of the survey as it had already been validated.

The secondary school surveys were developed using a similar philosophy but used a blend of sources to reflect the wider opportunities for provision (for example, D of E) that exist in that setting. The primary school survey formed the basis of the question design but was added to with questions taken from a secondary school survey used by the Outdoor Partnership in North Wales (Muskett, 2019). Again, the intention was to be able to add to existing data.

Young people were surveyed using online questionnaires. As stated above, this was not the first choice of method but provided a way to capture young people's voices. Year 9 and 10 students from two secondary schools who featured in the school sample (one in the north, one in the south of the district) were surveyed as they were the year groups that had access to the D of E Award. Year 11 were unavailable as they were on study leave, and Sixth form were not included as one of the schools did not have one so there was no cross-district representation. Surveys were piloted with young people of similar age beforehand to check for readability, understanding and completion time (Bell, 2005). Some suggestions were made regarding interpretation which were incorporated into the final version.

The surveys were designed and implemented using Google Forms, using a mix of ranking, open and category questions (Saunders *et al*., 2016). The data was collated in a spreadsheet that allows analysis and presentation of results. Open responses were first analysed inductively for repeated terms that were then brought together under thematic headings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes were then named and defined before comparison with AT categories.

Research participants

Schools

There are 39 primary schools, four secondary schools and one special school in Copeland, the head teachers of which are members of one of three local cluster groups: Whitehaven Heads; Cleator Moor and Egremont (CLEG) Heads; and the Partnership of Millom Schools (PoMS). The survey was completed either via a paper copy at cluster group meetings with the researcher present, or remotely online. 29 responses were received from primary school heads, and three from secondary heads, an overall response rate of 73%.

Cumbria Youth Network

Copeland has 9 youth groups run by 8 different organisations. They are all part of the Copeland Youth Network, which has a development officer funded by Copeland Community Fund and Cumbria Community Foundation. The survey targeted managers and youth leaders in the CYN. It was completed online and 9 responses were received (100% response rate), the majority of whom had been youth workers for over 10 years.

Scout groups

There are 8 Scout groups in Copeland, offering a mix of Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorers with approximately 400 members and 50 volunteer leaders. The survey targeted volunteer scout leaders accessed through the District Commissioner. It was completed online and 17 responses were received (34% response rate).

Young people

142 young people from two schools covering Year 9 (n=78) and Year 10 (n=64) participated in the research via an online survey sent out through school. Due to the pressures in school created by Covid-19 the sample sizes were significantly different in each school (n= 107, n=35). This was due to the research necessity of dealing with staff online and accepting any help they could give as the point of contact. Nonetheless, postcodes gathered in the questionnaires revealed a good geographic spread across the district (Figure 9.4). Gender representation was 56% female, 41% male, with 3% identifying as neither or preferring not to say.
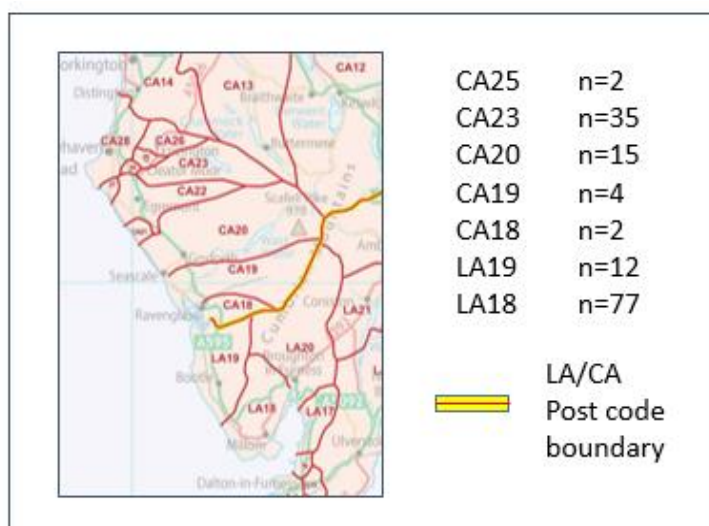
Figure 9.4. Postcode distribution of young people's survey respondents

9.4.4 Research Study 3: Understanding the role of context in how people value OL

Research question:	How does context affect the value that individuals attach to concepts and practices of outdoor learning in local communities in Copeland?
Sub-question:	How do these values impact on the potential progression model?

Study 3 formed the second data collection strategy for the Copeland case study and focused on 'gatekeepers', the fifth group of stakeholders. The aim of the research was to understand the various contextual (access) factors affecting outdoor learning provision in Cumbria (such as resources, values and motivations) and to devise a model that can be used by a community to introduce and/or develop OL provision at a local level. Sampling was purposive and involved interviews (n=12) with the newly established Outdoor Partnership Stakeholder group and other people who had a potential connection with wider OL provision but were not Partnership members themselves. The research sought to explore in depth how individual Stakeholder's values relating to the outdoors might influence their potential engagement with the development of OL opportunities through the Partnership.

Note: the term 'stakeholders' (lower case) is used when referring to the wider field of OL. 'Stakeholders' (capitalised) refers to the specific Outdoor Partnership group.

Interviews were semi-structured, lasted approximately one hour, and due to Covid restrictions were conducted entirely online. Potential limitations of this technique associated with a lack of sensory cues were acknowledged by the interviewer and interviewee beforehand. Although not explored as part of the process, it is likely that I had a high response rate due to the limited time commitment required of participants. All participants were also working from home which may have been a factor. There was also a considerable saving of time and resources for all parties in not having to physically travel to each interview.

Data was coded inductively, the data determining the themes. Recordings were transcribed into Nvivo software and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic codes were developed inductively based on interpretation of participants' responses (Saunders *et al.,* 2016). The responses were then brought together under thematic headings detailed in **Chapter 13**, before being analysed through the lens of AT with a specific focus on the categories related to identity, social and institutional factors. The data is thus used to illustrate the theory and to suggest strategies that support the development of a viable progression model.

9.4.5   Theory development and testing

The research overall takes an abductive approach (Suddaby, 2006) where data generated through the studies supported the development of a model for progressive outdoor learning that was subsequently tested against practice in the research area. The three studies outlined in Chapters 11,12 and 13 lead to the development of a theoretical progression model (**Chapter 14**) and delivery model (**Chapter 15**) which is then tested against the TOPC delivery model in the case study area.

9.5   Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Cumbria Ethics Committee for surveys and interviews with the identified stakeholders through 'hybrid' access routes incorporating both traditional and internet-mediated approaches (Saunders *et al.,* 2016, p. 222). The research was geographically located in Cumbria from the outset which made travel relatively straightforward as both the university and I are located centrally in the county. My professional networks facilitated initial access to research subjects for the Pilot study and Study 1, which then suggested the various stakeholders that would be the subjects of Study

2 and 3. Wider network development and referrals led to the identification of key gatekeepers (e.g. the Scout District Commissioner, the district Youth network lead, the primary head teacher forum chairs and secondary school head teachers) who were able to facilitate access to their own groups. These contacts enabled relationship building through direct meetings and visits that were scheduled to lead to focus groups with young people in their settings. Unfortunately, the development of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that this aspect had to be abandoned.

Case studies bring a further set of ethical issues in terms of gathering and analysing and presenting the data. Yin (2014, p. 112) warns that gathering data by interview 'can lead to a mutual and subtle influence between [the researcher] and the interviewee', leading to 'an undesirable coloring of the interview material'. This reflexivity may also potentially affect the analysis since any data is filtered through my particular theoretical position and biases (Merriam, 1988). Awareness of this potential source of bias is essential. A further issue is that of anonymity (ibid). Where a small sample is used in a specific context (i.e. Study 3) participants have been allocated gender neutral names; other samples (as in Studies 1 and 2) where it is not possible to identify individuals have allocated code letters.

9.6 Validity and reliability

Issues of validity and reliability are significant concerns in case study research (Merriam, 1988). Internal validity refers to the degree to which findings are congruent with reality (ibid, p. 183) and is addressed in this thesis through using multiple sources of data to create a rich description of the case and acknowledgement of researcher biases. Reliability, the extent to which there is consistency in one's findings (ibid, p. 183) is addressed through a clear explanation of the research process and theory, and how the findings were derived from the data. External validity, the generalizability of the findings, is provided through the rich description of the case and its typicality. Testing the theory derived from the data provides a further perspective on the potential generalizability and applicability of the findings (see **Chapter 15**).

9.7 Impact of Covid-19 on the research

Problems with access are to be expected in research projects, but the highly unusual circumstances created by lockdown from March 2020 and subsequent home schooling led to problems that were completely unforeseen and which necessitated a reassessment of research objectives. Access to certain groups was no longer feasible so research Study 2 shifted focus to accommodate the access that was going to be possible (Saunders *et al*., 2016) via online access. Fortunately, the relationship building had been largely accomplished beforehand which meant that the actual data gathering could be initiated more easily. Working with key staff in schools where I already had a connection enabled access to the young people, although it was only possible through mediated online access. Staff were happy to administer a survey through their online teaching platform resulting in high returns. Access was not possible with all groups. Youth leaders were focusing on the challenges of keeping young people engaged and research interviews were clearly a step too far at the time. Accordingly this line of research was abandoned but is a potential source of future research.

Study 3 developed throughout lockdown and involved online interviews carried out and audio recorded via Zoom. The lockdown required all but key workers to stay at home and all interviews were completed with people working from home. Reviewing this process I believe that it was more successful and easier in terms of access than attempting to meet people in their normal workplace. As a research strategy the online interviews worked extremely well with the adult subjects. However, as highlighted above, this was due in part to the relationship building that had already occurred and a developing ease with the technology on my part. The difficulties of accessing young people though digital platforms emphasises the need for face to face engagement to build trust and confidence and to ensure the safety of the research participants (Alderson, 2004).

10 The Research Area

10.1 Cumbria

As outlined in the **Introduction**, the geographical focus of the research is Cumbria (Figure 10.1), a county in northern England. The majority of the county's 498,000 population (54%) live in its rural areas, rising to over 70% in the districts of Allerdale and Eden (Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership, 2017). Just over 40,000 people live in the Lake District National Park (LDNP), which is situated entirely within the county and has recently achieved UNESCO World Heritage status. The population is 96.5% white British, significantly above the England and Wales figure of 80.5%, and 98.1% report English as their first language compared with 91.2% in England and Wales (Cumbria Observatory, 2021). Socio-economically, Cumbria has 1 in 8 households with less than £10k per year income and 11,700 children live in poverty, with 17% of children relying on free school meals (Cumbria Community Foundation, 2017; 2019).
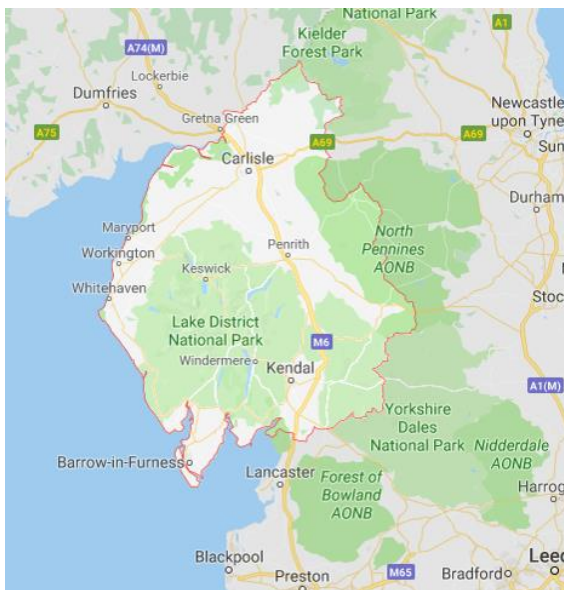
Map data © 2020 Google

Figure 10.1. Cumbria (Google Maps, 2020)

10.2 Copeland

The Borough of Copeland is one of six local government districts in Cumbria with an area of 730 square km, two-thirds of which lies within the LDNP (Figure 10.2). Only 4,000 people

from a total population of 68,900 (6%) live within the National Park boundary, but a further 54% also live in rural areas outside the Park boundary (Copeland Borough Council, 2019).
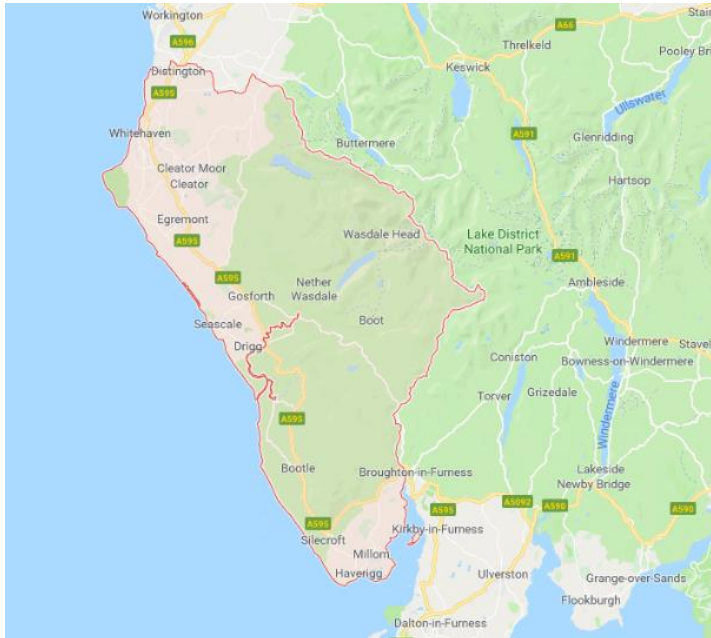
Map data © 2020 Google

Figure 10.2. Copeland (Google Maps, 2020)

10.3 Geography

There are four main population centres in the borough: Whitehaven, Cleator Moor and Egremont in the north; and Millom in the south. The fells and coastline constrain the main transport networks to the coastal strip and create a significant travel gap between the north and south of the district. A car journey from Whitehaven to Millom, for example, a distance of 32 miles, takes approximately one hour. The National Park acts as a natural physical barrier to eastwards travel, with no major arterial roads running through the fells. Minor routes that involve steep single-track roads exist up the Duddon Valley in the south, through Eskdale in the centre and via Buttermere in the north, but are unfeasible for anything other than local or tourist traffic. Long journeys are required to either the north or south to access the population centres of Carlisle, Keswick, Ambleside, Windermere and Kendal. The LDNP boundary follows the edge of the fells in the north, excluding the post-industrial coastal strip and the nuclear waste reprocessing site at Sellafield. South of the River Irt the Park includes the coastline until moving back inland to exclude the town of Millom. Access to the National

Park within Copeland is most common at Ennerdale and Wasdale (both road heads) and via Eskdale and the Duddon Valley (both very narrow roads leading to high passes). Copeland has a wide range of legally accessible green and blue space including 90km of coastline and 245km^2 of the LDNP. There are over 50km of cycleway, hundreds of km of public footpaths and rights of way, and numerous green spaces that are privately owned but to which the public has legal access.

10.4 Economy

Two thirds of the UK's nuclear facilities, including Sellafield and the Low Level Waste Repository, are situated on Cumbria's west coast and account for 50% of Copeland's jobs: Sellafield Ltd, the most significant employer on the west coast, directly employs around 11,000 people and a further 13,000 are contracted through the supply chain (Copeland Borough Council, 2019). The impact of Sellafield means that Copeland wages are higher than the national average, but Copeland also suffers from pockets of severe deprivation. Approximately 12% of Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Copeland are within the 10% most deprived LSOA's in England. Copeland is the second most deprived district within Cumbria and falls within the 30% most deprived nationally for overall deprivation. Sellafield and Copeland Borough Council (CBC), through their Social Impact Strategy and Local Area planning respectively, are committed to broadening the economy to make it less single-industry reliant (CBC, 2013; Sellafield Ltd, 2020).

10.5 Health

Despite the apparent abundance of green spaces and the association with outdoor activity in some parts of Cumbria, 62% of adults and 35% of 10/11 year olds are overweight (Cumbria Observatory, 2019a) and a major initiative run by Active Cumbria, aimed at tackling inactivity and physical health is currently underway (Active Cumbria, 2021). The strategy includes outdoor pursuits with the emphasis on health benefits, and there is clear crossover and opportunity to develop a progressive outdoor activity offer that links to other initiatives involving communities, schools and outdoor learning providers.

The percentage of children and adults in Copeland classified as obese is above the national average at reception age (4-5), year 6 (10-11yrs) and adult. Rates of diabetes are higher than

the national average and alcohol related hospital admissions of under 18 year olds are more than double the national rate. Copeland has the highest suicide rate in the county and the number of people diagnosed with depression is predicted to increase. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has had the effect of heightening pre-existing levels of poverty and raising concerns about wellbeing (West Cumbria Child Poverty Forum, 2020). Emotional health and wellbeing issues in Cumbria as a whole are estimated to affect 9.6% of the population or around 10,000 - 11,000 people aged from 5-16 (Cumbria County Council, 2014).

10.6 The Outdoor Partnership

The Outdoor Partnership (TOP) is a charity established in 2004 in North West Wales. Following its success there, Lottery funding was successfully sought to roll the programme out across other areas of the UK. The Cumbrian district of Copeland was identified as an area with similar socio-economic needs in terms of engagement and a high quality natural environment nearby. Initial meetings to gauge interest led to the establishment of The Outdoor Partnership Cumbria (TOPC) stakeholder group in 2019 and the appointment of a TOPC Development Officer in February 2020, one month before the first nationwide Covid-19 lockdown. The main role responsibility is to 'improve opportunities for more local people to achieve their potential through outdoor activities' by liaising with 'local communities, schools, youth service, health sector, third sector and other target groups to ensure that outdoor activity programmes meet local needs' (Outdoor Partnership, 2019). Initial research, carried out as part of this thesis informed the development of initial strategies in the TOPC region (Harvey, 2020).

Further detail is provided in **Chapter 15**.

11 Study 1: Understanding and accessing outdoor learning

11.1 Introduction

Research question: How do the various stakeholders understand and engage with outdoor learning?

The intention of this phase of research was to understand how OL was perceived both within and beyond the sector itself, and whether the mechanisms espoused through AT would provide additional insight into issues around access. The data reflect the lived experiences of the participants which is later contextualised within the theoretical frameworks offered through AT and Life Course Theory.

11.2 Results and discussion

11.2.1 Stakeholder's understanding of OL

Having been involved in developing definitions used by IOL (Harvey, 2012; Anderson, Harvey and Crosbie, 2021) my interpretation is very much in line with the IOL's stance. As a practitioner in the sector, I assumed that other practitioners would have similar notions of OL, and, to a certain extent, this was borne out in the conversations. For some, OL was conceived as traditional outdoor pursuits used for personal and social development purposes; for others, it was just about being comfortable in the natural environment.

Research participants, previously described in section 9.4.3, (anonymised as A, B, C…Z, AA, BB, CC, DD) were asked what 'outdoor learning' meant to them. Responses covered a wide range of perceptions and were influenced by their own relationship with the outdoors, both personally and professionally. Participants' roles inevitably overlap and are coded as the primary role under which they were interviewed: parent (Pt), provider (Pr), gatekeeper (Gk), teacher/youth worker (TYW), and children and young people (CYP). Participant quotes in this chapter are referenced in the format: research participant code, primary role.

Responses indicated a very broad conception of OL, ranging from the very informed to the more instinctive. Very few respondents had a clear and concise understanding, their

responses tending to incorporate a mix of settings, purpose, activities and outcomes. Interestingly, it was a more experienced practitioner who had the broadest idea:

> *OL is anything where you are learning and happen to be outdoors. Singing songs, in company, round a fire, bonding, could be on the development line but can also be highly academic. Outdoor learning is about having clear learning outcomes* [LOs]*…[but there's] lots of accidental learning going on as well, skills, knowledge, at the same time that isn't included in specific LOs.* (L, Pr)

The one connecting theme linking all practitioner responses was an appreciation for the natural environment *'when the outdoors has provided a specific environment [for learning] that maybe can't be achieved in another environment.'* (C, Pr)

This special quality (the 'unique selling point') provided by the outdoors is recognised as something distinct yet elusive:

> *There is a USP in OL. Most people don't know what it is. Most things can be done indoors. The USP is at the top end. You don't get it in a theatre workshop, wall, pool, etc., don't get the 'Oh My God' moment. Jaws drop… On one level it's about being in the outdoors, not necessarily about doing…* (D, Pr)

The sense of awe and wonder alluded to above suggest a spiritual side to OL that is not usually captured in definitions of OL. Also rarely captured are the links to wider life skills. In a residential OL setting, for example, one practitioner saw their work has having a deeper impact than simply teaching people how to perform an outdoor skill:

> *Outdoor learning would be them progressing hopefully in something that they are going to be doing whether it's socially or a skill… It doesn't have to be massive. If kids come on residentials and learn how to kayak, that's massive learning, or learn how to lay the table that's kind of massive isn't it?* (S, Pr)

For parents there was a common belief that school was the main setting for OL, with learning about nature a common theme:

I think outdoor learning means learning from the outdoors, so learning at school through starting young, maybe in the forest schools, … and getting toddlers and young children and people out into the woodland and just learning skills about finding their sense of place, finding joy in just walking and looking for sticks and what can you do with that and then hopefully that will build for children a lifelong passion for looking at nature and to engage them while they're little and as they move through outdoor learning means as you get a bit older maybe looking at more skills, looking at conservation, how can we protect the environment… (V, Gk)

One parent succinctly summarised a number of responses, stating that OL simply '*teaches people about the outdoors and the environment and how to look after it'* (E, Pt).

Benefits recognised by parents relate to health and wellbeing and family connection, and there is a sense that being outdoors is good for their children and therefore desirable. Parents understanding of OL as a specific concept depends on their own knowledge and connection with the sector, yet many of the desired outcomes of OL articulated by the sector are recognised as connected with activity in the outdoors. One participant described taking her four year old granddaughter for a walk in the dark and the enjoyment they both got from the experience; another described how regular beach walks in their childhood inspired a sense of connection with nature that they wanted their own children to have.

For children, OL was not a meaningful term: it is a concept that is applied to them rather than something they engage with. 'Being outdoors as part of lessons' had meaning but was conflated with PE in one response highlighting the focus on activity rather than outcome. The response also illustrates Elder's (1994) observation that time and place play significant roles in determining developmental outcomes

[at one school] *PE was beanbags on heads, running from one end of the corridor to the other…* [the next school] *was amazing. We used to do fellrunning up the pike, with like a foot of snow. The teacher was like, you're not going to maths… and we just ran all over the fells in the snow…it was amazing. That will stick with me for life.* (G, CYP)

The responses suggest that OL is more than the definition outlined in **Chapter 1**. Implicit in the perceptions of OL described above is a sense of connection between people and to the natural environment, and a personal meaning derived from experience. The data added to

my adopted definition (see **Chapter 1**) with respect to the conception of OL on a broader, perhaps more emotional level and although it does not change the working definition necessary to frame this thesis it does support the need to allow for these interpretations when communicating its benefits to different stakeholder groups.

11.3 Factors affecting stakeholder access to OL

Analysis of the data identified a number of themes: transport; knowledge; funding; time; communication; the existence of opportunities; social factors; and values and motivation. This section brings together these themes under the broad AT category headings of rights-based, economic, knowledge, and social and institutional mechanisms discussed previously in Chapter 7.

11.3.1 Rights-based mechanisms

Rights-based mechanisms include those 'sanctioned by law, custom or convention' (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, p. 161). Apparent within the data are a range of different interpretations of these mechanisms. Most closely related to the law were references to the impact of government policy on provision. In a field studies context, changes to Geography syllabi at GCSE and A-level were seen to have had a significant impact on opportunities for field work. Where the curriculum maintains a statutory requirement for field study work, many schools elect to outsource to specialist providers. One participant suggested that when this changed the impact is felt not only in the centre in terms of available provision but also in terms of the quality of education associated with the lack of opportunity.

The role of custom and convention was apparent in responses that illustrated different aspects of societal culture. One participant described the issues around enabling access to a residential for a group of Muslim girls. The nature of how the outdoors is described was discussed by one participant who used the example of adventure being attractive to some but disagreeable to others. Another talked about how magazines portrayed users of the countryside as predominantly white and middle class, sending a message of exclusivity, while a third described how people in their area simply did not engage with outdoor activities, the dominant culture being one of traditional sport. A teacher described how other teachers would ask if they were allowed to do something (related to OL), demonstrating the perceived need for permission from someone in authority.

As discussed in Chapter 5.5, a further interpretation of the importance of permission is illustrated by the granting of 'licenses' by parents to children (Shaw *et al.,* 2013). Such licenses dictate the degree of independence that a child or young person has and hence influences what they can choose to do and with whom. Children who were interviewed were asked about their degree of freedom and the responses supported this aspect of access. Interestingly, one parent also described how although their child was allowed to walk to school and they were aware of the benefits of doing so, they chose to drive them there as it was more convenient for them. Custom and convention appear to be complex and subtle in their effects.

11.3.2 Economic mechanisms

Transport

For parents and CYP access to personal transport, the cost of fuel and running costs, and challenges with public transport in terms of practicalities and cost were all highlighted as issues. A further complication was reported by one parent who was unable to transport their children due to work commitments. Access was only possible because the provider organisations offered a bus pick-up service. Where such a service does not exist access may be severely constrained, confirming Somerset and Hoare's (2018) and Sport Wales (2009) findings with regard to sport access (Chapter 7.4). The cost of transport is regularly identified as a barrier to school-based OL provision, and is clearly a central issue for provision after or beyond school (Higgins *et al*., 2006; Waite, 2010).

Capital

Unsurprisingly, money is an issue for providers, CYP and parents. For parents the cost of residentials, buying equipment and transport were all mentioned as challenges, agreeing with the findings of Sutton Trust (2014). Two parent participants highlighted the range of opportunities being offered to their children through school and how the ski trip for one of them was unaffordable, equating to a family holiday. Another parent described how they had no family holidays due to funding their son's activities with the Scouts. One possible solution would appear to be making courses free or very low cost to parents and schools, yet providers in the study who have tried this have only met with limited success suggesting other factors taking priority. The reasons could of course be entirely practical (time, resources, other commitments for example) or it may be that the OL opportunity is perceived to be less valuable as an experience. This supports the suggestion by Ford (2017)

that the sector needs to raise the value of OL amongst its potential user base (see **Knowledge** below).

11.3.3 Knowledge mechanisms

Research participants highlighted awareness of benefits and opportunities both for themselves and their children as an important factor in encouraging participation, supporting the evidence from sport and recreation (Gordon, Chester and Denton, 2015; Somerset and Hoare, 2018). Sport England (2014) suggest that engagement strategies need to involve relevant social media use, both to inform and to stay in touch. As well as a source of information (knowledge) regarding opportunities, social media that is used well can add to the parent's knowledge of what their children are doing and achieving through OL experiences, building positive values for OL amongst parents and families.

A further aspect of knowledge mentioned in relation to OL was the impact of current discourse on participation. Two participants felt there was a perception that accessing activities more technical than walking required a specialised level of expertise, skill and equipment that was only held by professionals. One provider suggested that this may be an unconscious strategy of the sector itself, inadvertently acting as a self-promotion/protection mechanism.

The lack of parental knowledge was seen to be restrictive in different ways. Reinforcing the literature outlined in Chapter 7.4, one provider felt that potential participation after initial facilitated experiences was limited by parents' perceptions of risk as well as what they felt able to do with their child (Muñoz, 2009; McManus, 2012). Another described how parents' ideas of the purpose of education (for academic achievement) meant that they did not want their child to go on a residential in the first place, echoing some of the findings of Parsons and Traunter (2020).

11.3.4 Social and institutional factors

Parents and CYP highlighted a range of personal factors that influenced whether they engaged with a new activity or not. For CYP these mirror the factors identified in relation to access to sport and included personal interest, motivation, the role of friends and social media (see, for example, Allender, Cowburn and Foster, 2006; Bailey, Cope and Pearce,

2013; Somerset and Hoare, 2018; Sport England, 2014; Sport Wales 2009). How an activity is portrayed, what the people look like in the images and the stories attached to the images were all deemed significant. Whether friends were doing something was important to some but not to others who saw the opportunity to do something else away from their peer group as a place and time where they could be themselves without judgement.

Further social factors identified by adults included a lack of confidence to travel or engage with new peers, conflicts of interest as children became more independent, and also concerns over self-image. One participant described how children and young people lived in a world where they were constantly faced with images of how they looked and questioned the effect this may have on a young person's decision to participate in an activity. An alternative perspective was provided by another young person who highlighted the role of social media (specifically Instagram) for showing images of people like her doing activities. If it looked good, she was more likely to do it herself.

The role of parents was highlighted throughout. Parents may be supporters of OL through funding and driving their children to activities, or facilitators themselves through recreational activity or as volunteer leaders. In this sense they are key stakeholders in increasing participation. Conversely, parents may inadvertently be inhibitors to participation by being unable to provide these functions despite a desire to do so, due to competing demands or social and cultural constraints.

Parents reported a wide range of activities on offer from school but noted a predominance of sport over OL. Children attending one school related how their experiences of outdoor learning activities were limited to one week a year; another described occasionally doing art and using clipboards outside when it was sunny. By comparison, children attending other schools were aware of and experienced a much wider range of opportunities, highlighting the importance of time and place in determining potential outcomes as discussed in Chapter 5 (Elder, 1994).

Getting to activities when they are offered has been discussed in terms of transport and capital above, but other factors also exist. The need for venues to be nearby to facilitate access was important for several participants. Nearby venues were also regarded as important factors on the way to longer term engagement and travelling further afield as they enabled confidence to be built in familiar locations. One provider described how creating a

visually appealing environment that encouraged participation was important, as was ensuring that the steps to participation and longer term goals were small enough to be achievable. Related to the provision of opportunities is the capacity that organisations have to operate. The shortage of volunteers to run Scout units was highlighted by two participants, while providers face issues of personal capacity (described below).

11.3.5 Values and motivation

Evident in all the conversations that comprised this study was the underpinning role of values. The idea of values as a 'concept of the desirable with a motivating force' suggests that what is important to someone leads to behaviours that support that value.

For CYP, the participants' responses highlighted fun and doing things with friends as key motivations, and the activities were valued on that basis. There needed to be a purpose to activity which had to be engaging and meet the individual's desires. As children grow into adolescence other values become apparent, such as developing interests and CV building. OL is valued for its capacity to meet those particular goals, but may not be the desired option if it fails to meet other personal values and other activities are seen to be more appealing.

Body image and perceptions of how young people think they will be judged are also key motivators, reflecting findings by Sport Wales (2009), Allender, Cowburn and Foster (2006) and Somerset and Hoare (2018) (see Chapter 7).

Values are also significant for parents, with the role of parental interest being mentioned numerous times. Twelve participants mentioned how parent's interests often drove family activity, citing sport and music as examples. Perceptions of risk, the pressures of modern life and how the outdoors is regarded in different communities were also noted as influencing factors.

Parents who valued the outdoors all reported developing their own values either through family activity when they were young or as young adults experiencing the outdoors for themselves. As a result of the positive values they hold towards OL, they believed that such experiences were desirable for their children, a view that appeared unrelated to disposable

income levels. Valuing the outdoors themselves clearly had an impact on the opportunities that they then enabled for their children.

11.3.6 Time

Along with capital, time is identified as one of the key factors affecting access to sport (Somerset and Hoare,2018; Sport England, 2014) and outdoor recreation (Scott Porter Research & Marketing, 2011). Time appeared in responses from children and young people in this study in relation to homework and other demands on their time, and in parents' responses in relation to competing demands from work, other children and other interests. Their capacity to volunteer was highlighted in relation to the Scouts, where perceptions of required time commitments also played a part.

Time pressures also appeared in responses from providers. For sole traders a busy work schedule meant that there was a lack of time to develop further business. Geographic location set limits on how far they were prepared to travel to work in the time available, further limiting their capacity to expand. For people living in areas with little provision this has potentially significant impact in keeping opportunities low. The capacity of providers to establish further opportunities is not yet represented in the OL literature.

11.4 Chapter summary

The purpose of Study 1 was to explore my own understanding of OL and to identify the factors that influenced how people accessed OL. The conversations in Study 1 showed that OL is perceived differently in and outside the sector. Within the sector there is a much richer understanding of OL than a short definition can convey, while outside the sector there is a more general understanding that lacks nuance. This is unsurprising perhaps but has a clear implication in terms of how messages are transmitted to different audiences. Children empowered to choose engage for reasons of self-interest that appear to be based around fun and spending time with friends; young people have a wider awareness of themselves and their goals and evaluate opportunities accordingly. Parents, meanwhile, have a perspective that relates to their children's interests and opportunities and a personal one that relates to their own interests. OL is evidently a broad concept that has facilitation at its core, but what was apparent in the conversations was how difficult it was to separate OL from OR. If OL is something that only happens in facilitated (i.e. formal and non-formal education) settings

there is a risk that the activities incorporated in those experiences remain unobtainable beyond them. If the sector is to promote and increase progressive OL participation then there would seem to be a need to take positive action to broaden the scope of outcomes to include OR participation.

The different factors identified as barriers and enablers matched access mechanisms of AT and reflected the principles of LCT. Rights-based, economic mechanisms, knowledge mechanisms, and social and institutional mechanisms all featured in the responses, and the addition of time as an enabling mechanism to the AT category list was also supported. Although only a small sample, issues of time and place, identity, relationships and agency all appeared in the data, supporting the use of LCT as a guide to building a progression model.

Values and motivation were identified as significant. Personal values about the self interact with values relating to personal interests. Many of the responses supported the findings in the literature relating to voluntary participation in sport and recreation, suggesting that OL can be positioned as just another opportunity that CYP have access to and subject to the same pressures and access mechanisms found elsewhere. While this perspective may seem to demote the value of OL somewhat, it is important to view opportunities from the perspective of those engaging with it as participants, supporters and volunteers rather than just providing it.

Study 2 focuses on Copeland to assess the degree of current provision and the factors that influence provision. The role of values in developing provision is the focus of Study 3.

12 Study 2: OL Participation in Copeland

12.1 Introduction

Research question:	How do the various stakeholders value and engage with (access) outdoor learning in Copeland?
Sub-questions:	What is the level of OL provision in Copeland? What are the barriers and enablers influencing access?

The surveys carried out with primary and secondary schools, Scout leaders, youth leaders and young people through Study 2 sought to gain an understanding of how OL is perceived and accessed in Copeland. To these were added data collected from desktop (internet) research, the D of E and John Muir Award schemes.

In the results and discussion responses are anonymised and coded as follows: Primary school teachers (PT); Secondary school teachers (ST); Scout leaders (SL); youth leaders (YL); and young people (YP).

12.2 How research participants value OL

There was a high degree of support for activities in the natural environment. Figure 12.1 shows aggregated responses from primary and secondary school teachers, youth and scout leaders (n=55) rating the value of activities in the natural environment (including adventurous activities) relating to their particular contexts. School head teachers, youth workers, secondary teachers and scout leaders were asked how important activities in the natural environment were to their particular context. 100% rated them as 3/5 or above, with 64% rating them as high as possible.
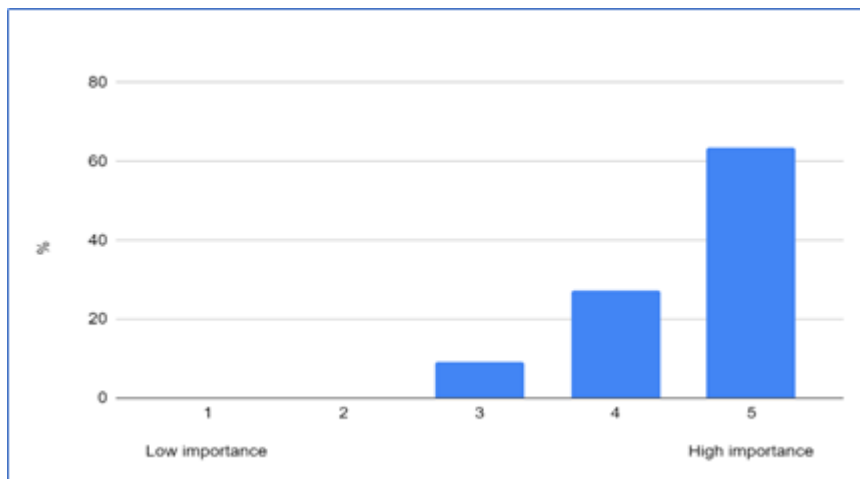
Figure 12.1. Perceptions of the importance of activities in the natural environment

Three key benefit themes emerged from the survey data: personal and social development; health and wellbeing; and understanding and appreciating the world around.

12.2.1 Personal and social development (PSD)

Aspects of PSD were a common theme amongst all the different groups surveyed. Developmental outcomes stated included social skills, self-confidence, resilience, negotiating skills, physical skills, community building, teamwork, risk management, overcoming challenge and language development. Additional benefits were recognised for children with special educational needs (SEN) and also for teachers who got to know children better, one teacher commenting that '*SEN children thrive in the outdoors - this is what we found last year with a large number of our autistic children*'.

12.2.2 Health and wellbeing

All groups of adult research participants mentioned mental and physical health as a key benefit of learning outdoors. Developing a healthy lifestyle was also mentioned.

Young people, as the intended beneficiaries of facilitated OL practice, were also surveyed to gauge their appreciation of the value of time spent in the natural environment. They regarded the natural environment as slightly more important for their mental health, 86% rating it 4 or 5 out of 5, compared with 75% for their physical health.

Young people recognised the value of spending time in the natural environment, with almost 30% reporting that it made them feel happy, 23% relaxed and 16% calm (Figure 12.2).
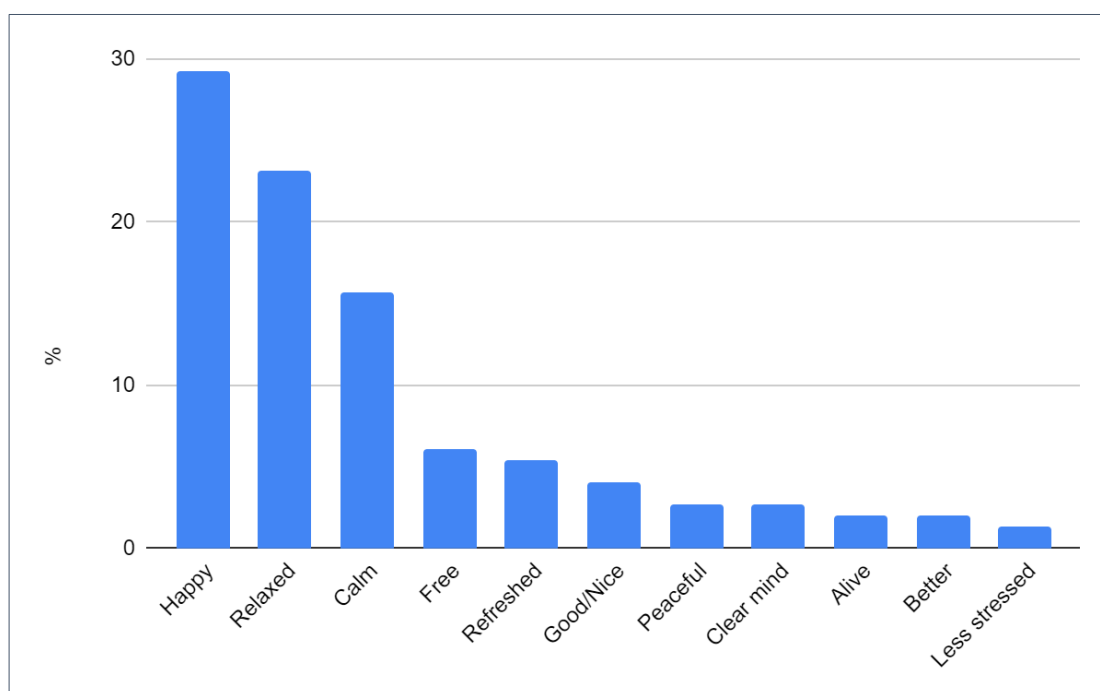
Figure 12.2. How spending time in the natural environment makes young people feel

12.2.3 Understanding and appreciating the world around them

This broad theme incorporates subthemes of environmental awareness, nature connectedness, locality awareness, and broadening horizons.

Environmental awareness and nature connectedness

Survey responses showed the importance of nature connection not just from an environmental care perspective but also from an engagement one, summarised by a youth worker:

> *We live in one of the most beautiful areas in the world so it is important to teach the current youth to appreciate it. By experiencing the natural world we learn how to protect it.* (Survey, YW)

Locality awareness and broadened horizons

A strong theme across all categories of adults surveyed was the importance of expanding horizons and becoming more aware of their locality and the opportunities for activity that exist there, yet there was a strong sense that basic experiences were not accessed by many children:

> *[OL is a] vital part as we live in an area surrounded with many vital learning opportunities - some of our children never access.* (Survey, PT)

The wider benefits of learning beyond the immediate learning environment were captured by one youth worker:

> *[It is] always good to do local things, to meet people in their area with a common interest, expand on social networks, develop social/interpersonal skills, have opportunities locally as to enrich their lives, skills development etc.* (Survey, YL)

A secondary teacher provided a slightly bleaker perspective, reflecting their perception of the reality of life for many of their students:

> *There isn't much else to do in West Cumbria, so you have to learn to make the best of what's there.* (Survey, SL)

While getting outside for learning experiences that had the potential for developing life opportunities feature highly, there were also seven responses that framed those same opportunities as alternatives to possibly less productive indoor experiences.

12.3 Discussion

The surveys asked about activities in the natural environment and outdoor adventurous activities. This was specifically to broaden the discussion from 'just' adventure activities or one particular view of OL that might exist (i.e. OAA in the curriculum or the Scouts promotion of adventure as a core part of scouting), yet elicited very similar responses. Teachers, youth and scout leaders saw equal value in both categorisations, and many of the open text answers provided were replicated under both headings. There were some notable exceptions, however, chiefly with regard to the development of risk awareness and management strategies, and the long term benefits of facing and overcoming challenge associated with participation in adventurous activities.

The category overlap that was evident in the responses demonstrated how the benefits of OL experiences can be understood as a blend of different outcomes that are occurring simultaneously, perhaps encapsulated best by the reference from one primary teacher to the development of the whole child.

One of the most interesting themes is the degree of perceived inequality in terms of access to simple outdoor experiences. Youth workers and teachers highlighted the fact that many of their children and young people did not have access to fundamental experiences such as going for a walk or visiting the beach, despite living in an area where these experiences should be relatively straightforward. Broadening horizons by giving children and young people the opportunities to experience OL activities was perceived by many as significant in terms of increasing awareness of opportunities for personal and social development as well as developing a stronger nature connection and associated pro-environmental behaviours. Helping children and young people to appreciate their surroundings in terms of what there is and what opportunities may exist for them to access outside of the school, Scout or youth group contributes to longer term physical, mental and spiritual health.

Evident in the data are implied references to the principles of time, place and identity that underpin LCT. There is a sense that being born and living in the local, post-industrial West Cumbrian area leads to a lack of appreciation of, and connection with, the local environment. Practitioners see their role as central to addressing this, emphasising the importance of relationships in developing young people's ability to benefit from opportunities in the area.

12.4 Engagement with OL

12.4.1 Formal provision

Primary Schools

OL is clearly valued by the majority of primary school head teachers in Copeland. Head teachers were asked to rank the importance of activities in the natural environment to the school curriculum (1 – not important; 5 – very important). 100% of responses (n=27) ranked 3 or above; 85% ranked either 4 or 5 out of 5. Similar responses were recorded when asked how important they felt outdoor adventurous activities were to the school curriculum. The

positive value associated with OL translated into 75% of schools using the outdoors to deliver some aspects of the curriculum, and a further 18% considering their use of OL to be 'embedded' across the curriculum in all phases.

Of the 39 primary schools in Copeland, examination of websites and Ofsted reports indicated that 13 (33%) referred to themselves as a Forest School or Beach School. In the survey, 11 schools (38%) claimed Forest or Beach school trained staff.

Primary schools made extensive use of residentials.   The majority involved Year 4 (72%), Year 5 (66%) and Year 6 (66%). 28 out of 29 schools undertook residentials with an outdoor activity focus.

As discussed previously, there is no national data for England available measuring the quantity or quality of OL in primary schools so it is difficult to benchmark Copeland against wider provision. Variations in interpretation mean that unpacking individual school data is highly problematic, but the data suggests that OL is well supported although the desire of the majority of head teachers (85%) to do more would suggest that they do not feel that what they do is enough.

As described earlier, primary school head teachers in Copeland were supportive of OL practice and expressed a desire to do more. The reality of moving from this to actual implementation is not straightforward however, and a number of access mechanisms were identified in the survey that resonate with wider research (Figure 12.3) and fall into the categories of knowledge, capital, transport and time.
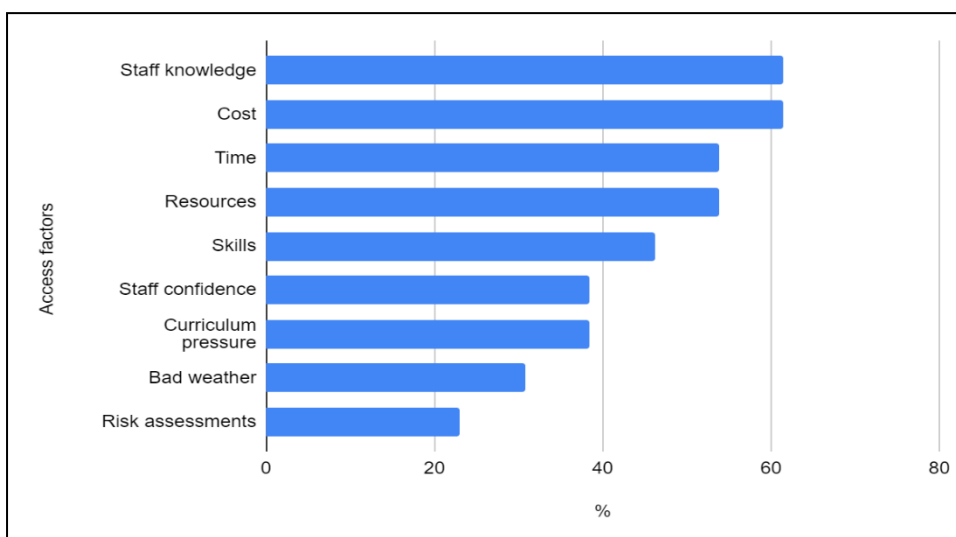
Figure 12.3. Barriers to implementing OL in primary schools

Secondary schools

Responses from both schools indicated a similar degree of provision with OAA provided once a year for years 8, 9 and 10 in an activity week. All offered D of E and residentials, although numbers were low in both schools. Curriculum provision was limited and chiefly linked to PE, Geography, Science and PSHE, a similar pattern of usage to that reported by Muskett (2019) in a survey of Welsh secondary schools. Both respondents stated that there was a desire to use the outdoors more than is done currently.

A key part of OL provision for secondary age young people is the D of E Award scheme. D of E is delivered across the district through schools and youth groups. Both schools that responded to the survey ran the D of E at Bronze and Silver level but none at Gold. Three youth groups in Copeland offer D of E, and data from the D of E Award office indicates that there were 123 Award starts in total across all levels in Copeland's four secondary schools in the academic year 2017/18. In contrast, four schools in the neighbouring Cumbria district of South Lakeland all had between 125 and 182 starts *each,* totalling 630.

In the UK in 2019 there were approximately 3.6m young people aged 15-19 (ONS, 2021), the age range that covers Bronze, Silver and Gold participation in school. Across the UK in 2019 there were 295,000 Award starts at all levels, representing 8.2% of that age group. In Cumbria in 2017/18 there were 2,021 award starts across the 15-19 population totalling

24,872 (Cumbria Observatory, 2021), 8.1% of the age group and very close to the national average. In Copeland however, 123 Award starts out of a 15-19 population of 3297 represents only 1.2%. The neighbouring district of South Lakeland's 630 Award starts represents 12%, significantly higher than the national average. The discrepancy between the two districts is significant and indicates potential barriers to provision in Copeland. It is of interest to note that the relative poverty levels in the two districts are significantly different as well: the average Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score in Copeland is 25.0, well above the county average of 21.3 and ranking 85th most deprived out of 317 districts nationally, while South Lakeland, one of the least deprived areas in the UK is 12.5, ranking 250th (Cumbria County Council, 2019). IMD is a measure of relative deprivation and is organised across seven domains: income deprivation; employment deprivation; health deprivation and disability; education, skills and training deprivation; crime; barriers to housing and services; and living environment deprivation. Analysis of individual domains highlights specific local needs caused by lack of resources, so while such a discrepancy appears to be significant, IMD data needs to be treated with caution as aggregated scores at district level can mask more localised differences.

Table 12.1. D of E Award starts 2017/18

Area	Average score IMD	15-19 population	Award starts	Awards starts as percentage of population
UK		3.66m	295,000	8.2%
Cumbria	21.3	24,872	2021	8.1%
Copeland	25.0	3297	123	1.2%
South Lakeland	12.5	5350	630	12%

Although the numbers accessing D of E in Copeland are low, the young people surveyed showed an encouraging degree of interest in the next levels of the award. A further group of students indicated that they would be interested in starting the Bronze level which suggests that they are not currently doing it. Converting this interest into participation would increase the participation percentage in Copeland to 4.3%; doubling the current number of participants would equate to the national average. The data suggests that there is

considerable untapped interest in the D of E scheme in Copeland that merits further investigation.

In the secondary schools surveyed the key challenges facing implementation of OL were seen as curriculum pressure, funding for specialized equipment and to buy in external outdoor provision, transport, and staff capacity. As with primary schools, many factors are interlinked. Health and safety concerns for example, lead to a rigorous approval system for off-site activities. This in turn demands time and knowledge to complete the relevant risk assessments and paperwork, additional staffing costs to reach required ratios and cover for staff who are out of school.

12.4.2 Non-formal provision

OL providers

Cumbria has a reputation for outdoor activity, largely due to its association with the Lake District where a major marketing initiative by the LDNP from 2009-2018 promoted it as the Adventure Capital of the UK (Cumbria Tourism, 2010). Despite this, Copeland is very poorly served with OL providers when compared with other parts of Cumbria. There are two outdoor education centres in Copeland, one (Outward Bound, Eskdale) focusing purely on apprentices and corporate adult provision. One of the youth groups, the Whitehaven Harbour Youth Project, has adventurous activity provision as a distinct strand of its work. Cumbria Council's outdoor learning service, Cumbria Outdoors, provides residential and peripatetic services to the schools and adult services in the District. The relationship between providers and the location of their market is not straightforward however: there is not necessarily a great benefit to schools in having nearby provision and desktop analysis of Evolve data shows that the majority of residentials undertaken by primary schools take place outside the district. Although apparently not an issue for schools, the lack of providers in the area may have a longer term effect, reinforcing the 'otherness' of the outdoors as a lifestyle and source of employment.

Cumbria Youth Network (CYN)

Copeland has nine youth groups run by eight different organisations. They are all part of the Copeland Youth Network (CYN), which has a development officer funded by Copeland

Community Fund and Cumbria Community Foundation. The survey targeted managers and youth leaders in the CYN and was completed online. Nine responses were received, the majority of whom had been youth workers for over ten years.

Provision of outdoor activity experiences is mixed across the nine different youth groups. Four undertook outdoor-focused residentials, and six used external providers to deliver activities. Only three groups provided self-led outdoor activities. At a personal level, five of the nine respondents never led outdoor activities and a further three only occasionally. Activities led by those that did ranged from walking, trips to the park and litter picks to Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions. Those that engaged with outdoor learning experience through trips and visits used providers in the locality. 90% of leaders expressed a desire to use the outdoors more than they currently do as part of their youth work.

Youth groups had much in common with schools. Time and cost were the seen as the main barriers to increasing OL provision, along with lack of resources, health and safety concerns, knowledge, skills and fear of litigation. Leaders identified training and funding as enabling factors, and there was a suggestion that having more staff willing to take part would make OL provision easier. One youth worker suggested that more locally available resources would enable the group to take part in activities, reflecting the local reality of a limited outdoor sector.

The difference between schools and youth provision was alluded to by one leader when they said that sometimes there was just a lack of interest. Youth groups' programmes are participant rather than adult led, so young people's motivation to participate is critical in deciding what activities are pursued. The same is true in secondary school contexts where extra-curricular activities and opportunities are offered. When young people in Whitehaven and Millom were surveyed they identified cost as a factor when choosing what to do, but it came third in their list of priorities after whether an activity looked interesting or whether their friends were doing it.

Scouts and Girlguides

At the time of the survey (2019) there were eight Scout groups in Copeland, with 408 Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, Explorers and adult network members, supported by 62 leaders.

Approximately 20% of Copeland Scouts were female, less than the national average of 27% (Scouts, 2020). Girlguides operate in the district but group information is not available in the public domain and the Girlguides did not respond to requests to participate in the research. However, data from the Young People surveyed revealed that although 9% were members of Scouts, only 1% were in the Girlguides.

Membership of the Scouts in Copeland is slightly less than national levels, shown in Table 12.2, which utilises available population data as the closest match to the Scout age groups. Of the 408 Scouts, 130 are Beavers (6-8 years old), 120 Cub Scouts (8-10 ½ years old), 122 Scouts (10 ½ - 14 years old), 30 Explorer Scouts (14-18 years old) and 6 adult network members (18-25 years old).

Table 12.2. Scout Association membership in Copeland (2019)

Age range	UK Population	UK scout numbers	Scouts as percentage of eligible population	Copeland population	Copeland scout numbers	Scouts as percentage of eligible population
5-19	11,760,686	474,807	4%	10714	408	3.8%
15-19	3,656,968	44,032	1.2%	3297	30	1%

The significant drop in membership at 14 years old reflects drop off in other areas of interest. MENE data shows that the frequency of time spent outside falls progressively through adolescence (Natural England, 2019a), and a similar drop off in sport participation has been identified (see, for example, Eime *et al.*, 2016, and Connolly *et al.*, 2020).

Facilitated outdoor activity for personal and social development is a core part of Scouting culture (Scouts, 2021c) and leaders are subject to a rigorous approval system to enable them to deliver adventurous activities. The survey targeted volunteer Scout leaders and was completed online. 17 responses were received. All respondents made use of the local environment close to the scout base (100% of leaders), with camp fire activities (82%), environmental activities (59%), and pioneering (using poles and rope lashings to create structures) (53%) being the most popular activities. Outdoor adventurous activities were

provided by 41% of leaders, international camps by 29%, the latter two categories requiring permits. Results indicated that leaders take younger groups outdoors less frequently than older groups (Figure 12.4), indicating a variability in the provision available to Scouts depending on their leaders. Not all Scouts appear to access the same opportunities, challenging the assumption that being in the Scouts automatically leads to a high degree of engagement with OL related activity.
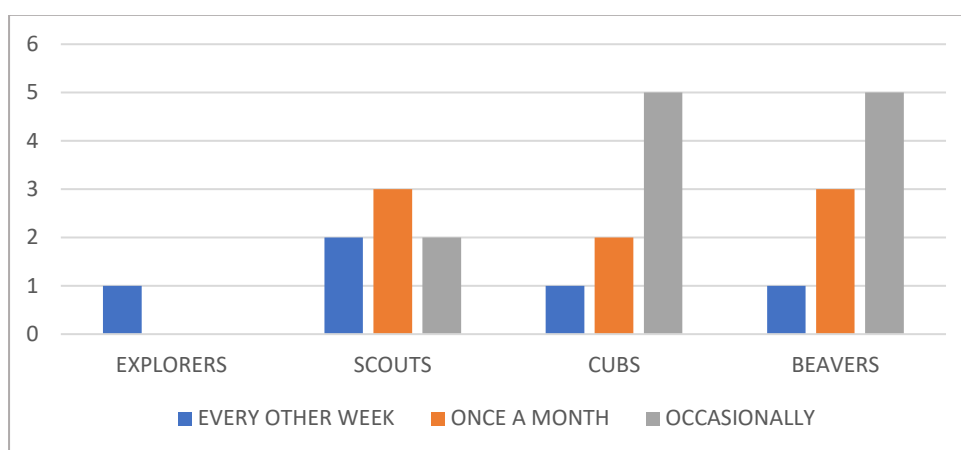
Figure 12.4. How often do Scout leaders take groups into the outdoors?

Scouting is a specific form of youth provision, differentiated according to one scout leader in the survey by the emphasis on adventure as a core value. Delivery by scout leaders of adventurous activities requires accreditation through the Scout permit system and was identified as a key barrier to provision by a number of respondents. The time required to achieve the required level of competency was seen as especially difficult to overcome when all their time was already given voluntarily, resulting in limited numbers of qualified leaders. The shortage of voluntary leaders was a further barrier to provision. Leaders working with younger groups of Beavers and Cubs highlighted bad weather and the location of meeting places in areas that were felt to be unsafe as additional barriers.

The John Muir Award

The JMA in Cumbria is organised by provider organisations under the guidance of a dedicated Award manager. Data provided by him shows that 60 providers in Cumbria deliver the JMA. In 2017, 1165 people were registered on the scheme with 506 Discovery, 95 Explorer, 22 Conserver awards completed. The majority of these (n=315) were completed by Year 6 primary school pupils either through school or on visits to residential centres. 187

awards were achieved by secondary students in Years 7-11. In Copeland 5 primary and 2 secondary schools engaged with the JMA, totalling 66 registrations on the Discovery award. Only 5.6 % of Award registrations were from Copeland residents (13.6% of the Cumbria total population). By contrast, South Lakeland schools accounted for 38% of Award registrations, again emphasising the regional variations present in adjacent districts in the same county.

12.5 Young people's participation

The survey of young people sought to gather data relating to their engagement with recreational activity as well as engagement with non-formal OL opportunities described earlier.

Beyond school, the data shows that far from being inactive a significant majority of young people are accessing the natural environment on a regular basis. 89% of Millom YP and 76% of Whitehaven YP surveyed are spending leisure time in the natural environment at least two or three times a month, 65% spent leisure time in the natural environment at least once a week, with a further 18% spending time there two or three times a month. Nationally for this age group, MENE data shows 69% spending time outside at least once a week but 65% in the most deprived areas, a figure consistent with the lower IMD scores for Copeland described previously. Over half of the young people surveyed (54%) had visited the Lake District National Park more than 5 times in the last 12 months, the majority of visits being to a lake (72%). The main reasons given were getting fresh air and spending time with family and friends (Table 12.3).

Table 122.3. Reasons for spending time in the natural environment

Rank	Whitehaven (n=35)		Millom (n=107)	
1	Spend time with family	70%	Fresh air	67%
2	Spend time with friends	62%	Spend time with friends	63%
3	Fresh air	57%	Spend time with family	58%
4	Relax and unwind	54%	Take part in physical exercise	54%
5	Have fun	46%	Have fun	42%

86% of young people indicated that given opportunities they would consider participating in regular OL /OR activity (Figure 12.5).
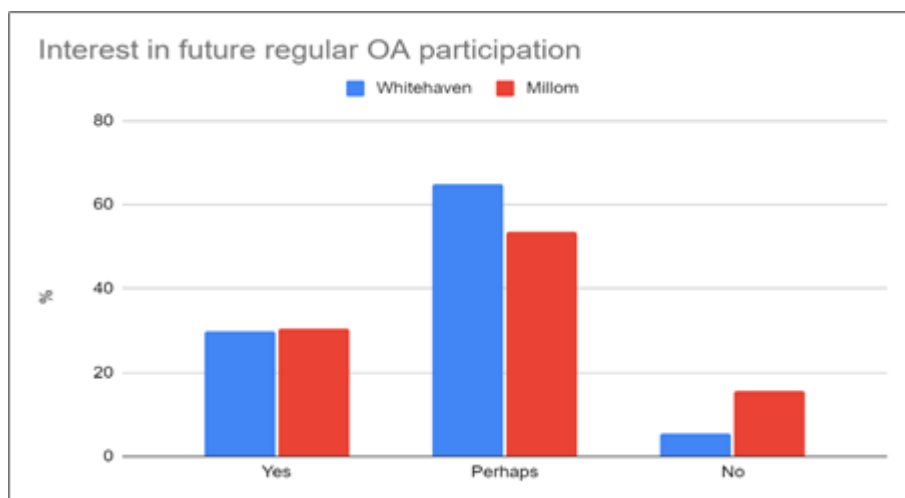
Figure 12.5. Interest in taking part in regular organised outdoor activities

Confirming the findings from Study 1, the five key factors affecting engagement were whether an opportunity looked interesting or exciting, whether friends were doing it as well, how they would get there and back, cost and whether they had enough time (Figure 12.6).
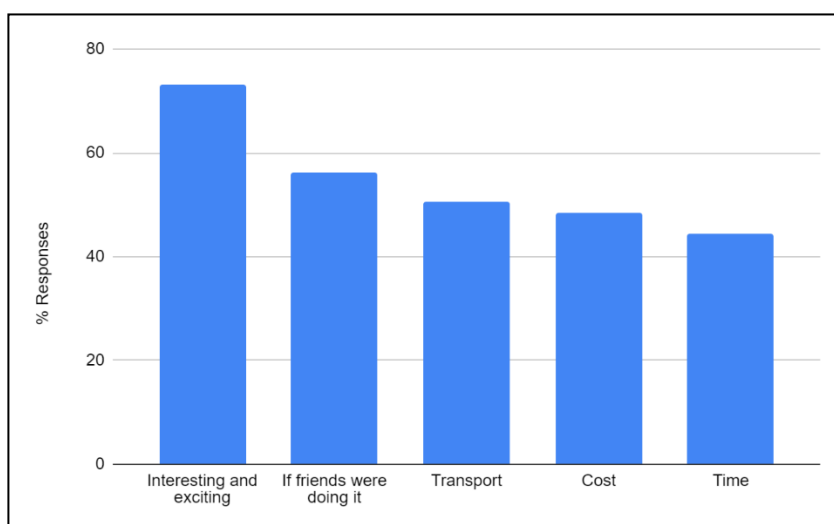
Figure 12.6. Factors affecting participation in new opportunities

Again, supporting findings from Study 1, the relative importance of activities with parents and friends compared with those organised through school or other non-formal provision can clearly be seen. Figure 12.7 shows how land activities (walking, cycling, climbing etc.) and

water activities (canoeing, kayaking, swimming, paddle boarding) are accessed predominantly with family and friends rather than through school or other organisations.
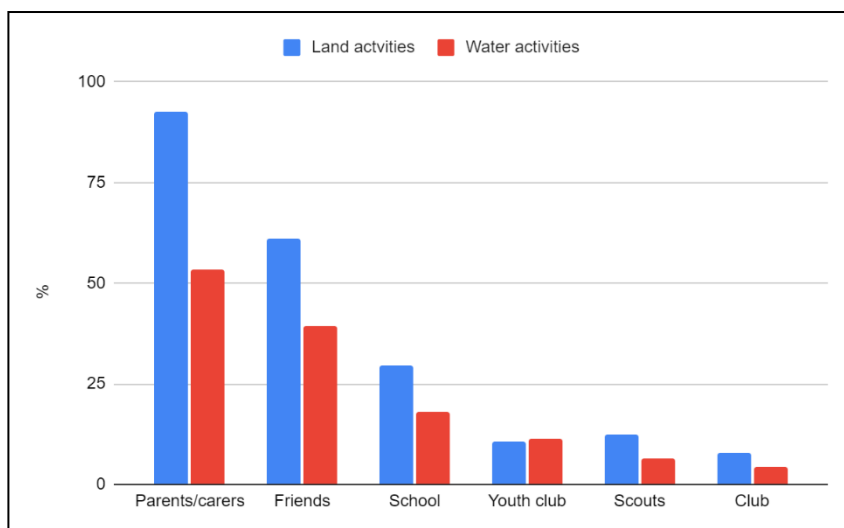
Figure 12.7. Who young people access outdoor activities with

Engagement with outdoor related clubs and youth groups is low, with 69% of Whitehaven YP and 84% of Millom young people surveyed not being a member of any clubs or youth groups.

12.6 Discussion and chapter summary

Study 2 sought to shed light the level of OL provision in Copeland, how it is valued, and the factors affecting access in the District.

The surveys asked about activities in the natural environment and outdoor adventurous activities. This was specifically to broaden the discussion from 'just' adventure activities or one particular view of OL that might exist (i.e. OAA in the curriculum or the Scouts promotion of adventure as a core part of scouting), yet elicited very similar responses. Teachers, youth and scout leaders saw equal value in 'activities in the natural environment', which could include non-adventurous activity, and OAA, although the latter was associated with specific benefits related to learning about risk and overcoming challenge.

Many responses demonstrated how the benefits of OL experiences can be understood as a blend of different outcomes that are occurring simultaneously, perhaps encapsulated best

by the reference from one primary teacher to its purpose being the development of the whole child. A positive change in confidence, for example, can manifest as improved social and communication skills which could lead in turn to a better interview performance and enhanced career prospects. Wellbeing development is in turn a positive outcome. Similarly, understanding risk can lead to informed and positive choices about behaviours, not just in the outdoors but also in social situations, resulting in improved mental and physical health and overall wellbeing. The introduction to possible lifetime activities encourages healthy lifestyles which have potentially long term impacts beyond the experience itself.

One of the most interesting themes is the degree of perceived inequality in terms of access to simple outdoor experiences. Youth workers and teachers highlighted the fact that many of their children and young people did not have access to fundamental experiences such as going for a walk or visiting the beach, despite living in an area where these experiences should be relatively straightforward. Broadening horizons by giving children and young people the opportunities to experience OL activities was perceived by many as significant in terms of increasing awareness of opportunities for personal and social development as well as developing a stronger nature connection and associated pro-environmental behaviours. Schools appear to be key providers of initial experiences that engage CYP with the outdoors, but it is questionable that this on its own will make a difference. As Study 1 showed, there is also a need to engage with CYP on their terms and to provide opportunities in a way that enable progressive involvement. The lack of relevance of the term 'OL' to young people suggests also that activity opportunities are presented in terms of outcomes and benefits relevant to the young people rather than making a distinction between OL and OR. Schools and youth organisations have a potential role in facilitating and encouraging these basic experiences, although this may create a challenge in terms of how children perceive the outdoors: depending on the context, going for a walk can be a simple pleasure or it can be a highly focused exercise with numerous potential learning outcomes. The facilitator, be they a teacher, youth worker or other responsible adult, sets the parameters. Helping children and young people to appreciate their surroundings in terms of what there is and what opportunities may exist for them to access outside of the school, Scout or youth group contributes to longer term physical, mental and spiritual health.

At first glance, the data suggest that young people have a range of opportunities to access and experience OL that reflects the broader national picture. 75% of primary schools claim at

least some use of the outdoors to deliver aspects of the curriculum and outdoor-focused residentials are organised by the majority of primary schools. At secondary school level, the D of E Award and OAA opportunities are offered to pupils alongside more formal curricular subjects such as Geography. Outside school, the John Muir Award, Scouts and Girlguides provide opportunities for young people to access OL through non-formal pathways. Closer analysis, however, reveals that while there may be opportunities, actual participation in formal and non-formal provision is lower than in other areas.

Across the various OL stakeholder groups there are several themes that are common to all, cost, safety and transport being the most significant. School teachers, youth workers, families and young people also claim time pressures as a significant barrier, although it is perceived differently in each case. For young people it can relate to their personal timetable and competing demands; for parents it relates to organising activities, juggling competing family demands and their own schedules; for teachers it is connected with curriculum pressure, the need for training and preparation. It is not a barrier to everyone however, supporting the idea that perhaps it is more a matter of values than time itself. The challenge to increasing participation would seem to be one of increasing the perceived value of the outdoors (and hence OL) such that the outdoors is valued in its own right as an inherent good that people want to access. Given such a motivation to engage the potential barriers become things that can be willingly approached rather than seen as reasons not to do something.

One primary head teacher, however, acknowledged the desire for more OL but recognised where they were currently:

> *We are open to using the outdoors as much as possible, but maybe it's just an option that gets forgotten about sometimes. We are good at organising trips and have got to a point with our curriculum development that we have certain places that we know we'll be visiting at set times of the year. An area I don't think we exploit enough is our own school grounds.*

Another summarised the reality succinctly, suggesting that OL was *'one possible development amongst many competing pressures'.*

If engaging with the natural environment is accepted as beneficial from a human and environmental perspective, the evidence supports the idea that there is a continuum from facilitated OL approaches through to non-facilitated OR. Schools and youth groups appear to have an important role in providing opportunities for CYP to gain first-hand knowledge of the outdoors as a medium for health, wellbeing and nature connection, yet many consider themselves limited by a range of well-rehearsed constraints. The fragmentary provision of OL in Copeland illustrates the need for a more coherent approach that acknowledges and addresses the access mechanisms identified in AT and links providers and opportunities.

The Pilot Study identified five key stakeholder groups in OL provision. Children and young people (CYP) parents and providers' views were explored in Studies 1 and 2. Enablers - the teachers, youth leaders and scout leaders - who are directly involved with facilitating OL experiences for young people featured in Study 2, the resultant data forming a rich description of access to OL in Copeland. Study 3 focuses on the remaining group, the 'gatekeepers'.

13　Study 3: How can /do social and institutional factors influence access to OL in Copeland?

13.1 Introduction

Research question:	How does context affect the value that TOPC Gatekeepers attach to concepts and practices of outdoor learning in local communities in Copeland?
Sub-question:	How do these values impact on the potential progression model?

Study 3 involved interviews with 12 people were either directly or indirectly related to the Outdoor Partnership (Cumbria) (TOPC). Participants represented a diverse group of Stakeholder bodies represented in the TOPC programme and, as such, brought a wider set of perspectives to the field than is often found in OL research. Copeland Council, for example, has one representative Stakeholder on TOPC but a number of different officers whose work (in tourism and community regeneration, for example) could be related to the goals of TOPC. The interview participants, as well as having their own personal lived experiences, social identity and values, thus represented the institutions and organisations that constitute the wider network of provision and can offer an insight into the social and institutional aspects of access suggested by Access Theory.

The interviewees were invited to take part based on their roles within Copeland. Although there was a connection through TOPC, the roles were diverse and included senior school leaders, council officers, sports and outdoor activity development officers representing Active Cumbria, the Sports partnership, youth leaders, outdoor practitioners, club volunteers, and representatives of the Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners, the body that manages the harbour area in Whitehaven. Six participants were female, six male. All were white. Three were born and raised near Whitehaven.

Interviewees were promised anonymity if their data was used in this and subsequent reports. The small size of the TOPC Stakeholder group, however, means that it is potentially possible to identify respondents through their roles. In order to reduce the risk to an acceptable level and to maintain anonymity all names have been changed to gender-neutral

ones and 'their'/'they' used instead of 'his'/'her'. Role descriptions have been kept as generic as possible.

The interviews had three main lines of enquiry that sought to shed light on: (a) how Stakeholders value the outdoors; (b) the relationship between these personal values and their impact on the goals of TOPC, i.e. to increase participation in outdoor learning and recreation; and (c) their perceptions of the social and institutional factors affecting provision and their potential role in changing existing levels of access. The Stakeholder's professional roles meant that they had a perspective on the needs and priorities in their communities as well as an appreciation of some of the lived experiences of the children, young people and adults living in Copeland.

13.2 Interview results and analysis

The results from the interviews are presented below with an accompanying analysis. They begin with an exploration of the value individuals attach to the outdoors and how those values were generated. Turning the view outwards, the next section explores what participants perceive to be the key social and institutional factors affecting access.

13.2.1 How enablers value the outdoors

The first stage was to establish how individual participants valued the outdoors. Acknowledging the link through TOPC for some of them, it was perhaps unsurprising to find that there was a high degree of connection. However, a closer look at the make-up of the group and the diversity of roles suggests that there is greater significance to this finding that at first glance. All twelve of the interviewees, no matter what their role, placed significant value on the outdoors, albeit for different reasons. Personal benefits were broadly categorised as connecting with nature, and promoting mental and physical health.

When questioned about their personal relationship with the outdoors the most common responses related to the impact on their emotional state and mental health. Happiness, freedom, and the ability to de-stress were given as personal benefits. For Sandy, there were additional feelings of self-worth and renewal:

It makes me feel quite happy. It makes me feel quite grounded, it's quite a
comfortable point of view. I'm quite comfortable in the outdoors, I feel quite safe
there. I feel like, it just brings lots of good things, it gives you confidence, it gives you
self-esteem. (Sandy)

Another response acknowledged the physical and mental health benefits and also how
participation in kayaking and hillwalking journeys led to different perspectives:

I enjoy the physical exercise, helps me keep reasonably fit. It makes me feel positive,
certainly gets me out…standing on top of a mountain on a sunny day looking out
across the lakes is an awesome feeling even if you can't see much. If it's a bad day it's
still good to be on top of a mountain somewhere. There's something about being on
top of a hill or a mountain and then it gives you a different perspective, a sense of
achievement and physical adrenaline and physical exertion that helps to keep you fit
and keep your heart pumping… (Jordan)

The links between the natural environment and positive wellbeing were highlighted by
Charlie:

Just being outside means starting to connect… I want to hear what nature is saying,
you know, the birds singing all this sort of stuff rather than being, sort of, if you like,
in a human. (Charlie)

Changes to values through increasing age were apparent for Taylor, as they shifted from a
life of active adventure to a more sedate lifestyle:

I'm much older now so I'm not quite as adventurous as I used to be … I do enjoy the
space and walks and the tranquillity and the communing with nature. (Taylor)

Although an environmental connection was important for Charlie and Taylor, for three
others it was what took place in the environment that was more significant:

I think, to go there walking or following, I've done that with my little girls before,
went to the Gruffalo trail, I think when you get there you want to do something. Go
to Keswick and stuff go on the lake is part of that kind of experience. (Billy)

For me it could be very much a gentle walk or playing outside, dens, things like that.
It doesn't have to be at professional athlete level, that you're free climbing or you're
doing the tour of Britain. It can be something much, much softer because for me

outdoor it's all about mindfulness and well-being. It's about that sense of freedom,
freeing yourself from your built environment. It's a bit of a break from the norm, it's
being able to breathe. (George)

I… think of going to the outdoors to do, well almost a traditional outdoor activity, so
I'm thinking more of going climbing, going walking, going to the lake and paddling or
something like that. (Rowan)

Not all relationships are grounded in the first person. One respondent who did not have a
particularly strong personal connection with the outdoors nevertheless still valued the
outdoors for what it gave their children:

I do enjoy going out, when I get there I do actually enjoy it and the kids love it so it's a
good activity for them and I want them to go out a bit more … cos its lovely, it is
really pretty its really nice so, and as a parent you're always looking for something to
do especially free stuff to do. (Billy)

Family connections and a desire to pass on values were apparent for two interviewees who
were parents:

And taking my children with me, I want them to feel all that too, I want them to feel
like they can go anywhere and do anything they want. (Sandy)

The feelings associated with taking others into outdoor settings were acknowledged by
Rowan, an outdoor practitioner:

I like being out there…even if it's sometimes just going back to the same place, which
I do lots of … but it's taking different people to those places sometimes and therefore
just seeing their reactions and being able to do things with them, so… and quite a bit
of it is well, what can we teach this group or show this group or even this one or two
people, what can they learn from being out here and experiencing it. (Rowan)

All interviewees professed a connection with the outdoors. In general this was through an
activity focus although it was noticeable that older participants had a much stronger
emphasis on nature connection. The benefits claimed were very much in line with the
current discourse surrounding OL, i.e. health and wellbeing and nature connection, although
they were achieved through personal rather than facilitated engagement. An exception to
this is the role parents play in taking their own children outdoors where they act as
facilitators.

The range of activity that participants referred to is broad. For seven of the twelve interviewees, traditional outdoor pursuits such as climbing, hill walking and kayaking are the focus, while the remaining five take a much broader view incorporating forest bathing, den building or following the Gruffalo Trail, a popular children's story-based trail. Significant here is the breadth of perceptions of 'what counts' as engagement in the outdoors and serves as a warning against narrowing any definitions. Although they all value it in one way or another, the outdoors clearly means different things to different people. Too narrow a focus risks alienating sections of the population.

Apparent through the interview responses was the high value that participants attached to the outdoors. Values are 'enduring, often culturally-defined, beliefs about what is good or bad and what is important in life', that 'develop through a process of exploration and experimentation, where young people make sense of their experiences and refine what they believe in' (Nagaoka *et al.*, 2015, p. 4). What experiences did the participants have that led to their valuing the outdoors?

13.2.2 Childhood experiences and influences

Interview participants had some very different experiences. For Sandy and Alex, the route to the outdoors stemmed from not fitting in and outdoor activities providing an alternative to more mainstream sport:

> *I always felt like, maybe I don't fit in at school, like in PE, I wasn't particularly good at PE but I could do Duke of Edinburgh…I fit into that more than I did in the team sports.* (Sandy)

> *I suppose my own relationship with the outdoors has come from a very unsporting childhood with being that person in school who was the last person to be picked for the team you know that awful 'pick your classmates that you want to be on your team' and there's me like already 2 foot taller than everybody else and a whole foot narrower than everybody else with buckteeth and no sporting prowess whatsoever.* (Alex)

Beyond school, the role of parents and family is clearly significant:

> *It's broader than schools. I think it's society, I think it's… I guess part of it is who your parents are, friends with…which circles your parents move in, I think that probably*

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> *plays a big part in it. Your parents' confidence. If your parents aren't going to be into*
> *it or their parents or their family or their social group aren't going to be into the*
> *outdoors then it's going to be quite hard for you maybe to get into the outdoors.*
> (Sandy)

This was echoed by three others:

> *I was very privileged. My dad… was in the Navy in the war and he loved sailing. His*
> *kids were taught to swim before they could walk and he took us sailing in dinghies in*
> *the south Lakes.* (Stevie)

> *A lot of it through my parents, my family growing up, we were always out walking*
> *and just being outside and we would go camping, we would take the windsurfer*
> *down to the lake with ill-fitting buoyancy aids on, or we will just go off and play and*
> *explore and have freedom to develop our own skills and to work out how we feel with*
> *it all.* (Sandy)

> *My dad had work for the Ordnance Survey and taught me to map read at quite an*
> *early age. So from that sort of age of 11 or 12 I was out walking with mates in the*
> *Peak District because I could read a map. So they sort of encouraged me and were*
> *quite happy for me to go off into the Peak District at that sort of age and learnt to*
> *map read by getting lost…* (Eddie)

The privileged upbringing reflected in strong parental support and opportunity contrasts with the three locally born participants. For local participant Billy, who reported above visiting the outdoors for their children's benefit, the outdoors did not really feature at all:

> *I never went [to the hills of the Lake District] as a child, so that could be it. My*
> *parents never took me anywhere like that…. My dad was a fisherman so he's very*
> *coastal so I probably spent a bit more time round the Harbour and stuff like that as*
> *opposed to going into the fells.* (Billy)

Drew's entertainment was made from the local environment:

> *[I was] brought up on the Mirehouse council estate, always playing outside… right*
> *opposite my house is a, we used to call it the ghyll, woods, little woods, beck, ravine,*
> *well, not a proper ravine - we thought it was a ravine, we thought it was absolutely*

brilliant, building camps all that sort of stuff that maybe kids don't do anymore.
(Drew)

The theme of independent exploration while growing up in a Cumbrian industrial community is graphically illustrated in Taylor's account, highlighting the role that societal and peer group expectations play:

Folk in my peer group certainly didn't go out for a walk to enjoy nature in the widest sense - sniffing the flowers and admiring butterflies and all that stuff. You'd have been treated very differently in the working class Cleator Moor area where I was from. Okay if you kill things, go for a dog walk and play in the woods, that was outdoors for me, I guess, and it wasn't until I saw a much bigger picture later on that I changed from that, but nothing wrong with what we were doing at the time, I guess. (Taylor)

Although Taylor is describing a childhood from 50 years ago, the importance of fitting in is still an issue. Rowan works with uniformed groups and described how members keep their membership a secret to avoid unwelcome comments:

Certainly in the air cadet kids there is a lot of kids who when you say to them do you tell your friends, Oh no, maybe, not because they're bullied but because they are made fun of because they go there… …A lot of young people are quite secretive sometimes about some of the things that they do in their lives. They talk about some things but a club they go to for one hour or two hours a week, they don't discuss that with certain people, I think. (Rowan)

Not everyone had a childhood infused with outdoor experiences however, and for Lee it took a move to the area to create the opportunities for outdoor participation:

I never particularly went outdoors till I moved here… I grew up in the south-east [of England], if you did anything on the weekend you probably popped into [the] town centre and went shopping you know. It wasn't an outdoor thing, whereas living up here it's absolutely part of our lifestyle, so that was what changed really in terms of moving here. (Lee)

Alex also did not really engage with the outdoors until into adulthood:

I was 20 and I chose to go to a local climbing wall, for reasons I can't remember now, and that began entire new relationship for me with nature and the outdoors… I could

tell you the exact point that it happened and suddenly the rain had a purpose

because when it rained the rivers were up, snow had a purpose because when it

snowed, how amazing, we could go out and play in the snow and find some ice. The

whole natural cycle of the world and that connection to all those things had a

purpose. (Alex)

As the responses show, there appears to be a strong connection between participants' early experiences of the outdoors and subsequent adult values. The routes to those values are varied however, with three identifiable themes appearing: strong family engagement; independent exploration; and adult transformation.

For two participants the outdoors provided an alternative to traditional sport where they felt they did not 'fit in'. Being able to carry a rucksack and undertake the expedition side of the D of E was achievable for Sandy, while Alex discovered indoor climbing and subsequently a pathway to the outdoors. The theme of not fitting in is repeated by Taylor when describing growing up in Cleator Moor, although from a different perspective. In this case, the pressure to conform meant that straying outside peer group expectations would have led to exclusion from the group. There is a sense that masculine activities were OK, but anything connected with appreciating nature was not. Sniffing the flowers and admiring butterflies could clearly have led to trouble in 'working class Cleator Moor'.

Even when children and young people join non-formal organisations, such as the Air Cadets or Scouts, there is a tendency to avoid discussing it in public to deflect being made fun of. Members can feel part of their club or group but could be perceived as being outside their wider peer groups. Drew described how Scouts would be laughed at for carrying a flag in uniform during town parades.

The role of parents was significant for three participants. Stevie, Sandy and Eddie all acknowledged the privilege afforded by enthusiastic and supportive families who provided opportunities or supported them to develop their own outdoor skills.

Not all children had foundational experiences, yet still developed a connection with the outdoors. Alex's initial experiences originated in London as a young adult while Lee began to participate only after moving to the area as an adult. For Billy, growing up in Whitehaven,

the outdoors was not a recreational option. Family culture did not value the outdoors (as represented by the fells) so Billy was deprived of those experiences. Having children of their own created a need to find things to do and subsequently an appreciation of the environment and local landscape.

The responses from the participants support the idea that the culture within which people grow up has an impact on their values. The Mirehouse estate in Whitehaven or 'working class Cleator Moor' provide very different circumstances and community culture compared with a privileged family upbringing with access to sailing and family outings. Identity is shaped and formed through these social and institutional forces.

13.2.3 Institutional and social factors

Local culture in this instance reflects a combination of everyday behaviours and how they relate to perceptions of and engagement with the outdoors. Seven participants described an underpinning and very localised culture that led to restricted horizons.

One youth worker described taking a group of teenagers from an area of deprivation in Whitehaven to Cockermouth, a small town 13 miles away, in the 1990s:

> *At the time I didn't think about this but it is a very different landscape and a very different culture there, and we just took them to play games. It was actually a church group I was working with… and we took them to another church group in Cockermouth and I couldn't believe the sense of alienation of the group I took … they couldn't engage, they couldn't interact with those other young people and when I tried to challenge that the answer I got was, 'Well, we're from Woodhouse': that was their reply: 'we are from Woodhouse' [a street in Whitehaven].* (Taylor)

The localised community culture and the challenges of achieving cross community initiatives were illustrated by one participant:

> *In the community in Millom there is a bridge in the middle of the town and on one side it's called Newtown and the other side is called Holborne Hill and the people on one side don't like to cross that bridge… It's a physical divide and it's almost like two halves and it's a psychological thing but it's a very real thing. … A lot of people said*

to me 'You will not get people coming to your office to talk to you because they don't want to cross that bridge'. (Jordan)

Another participant who coached a boy's rugby team in Keswick described the difference between lifestyle in Whitehaven and those who lived in Keswick, 27 miles away but a town famous for its 'outdoor' culture and tourism (Visit Cumbria, 2021):

The vast majority of the lads [from Keswick] think nothing of going paddle boarding on the lake. You've got to have a paddleboard obviously to do it but they think nothing of going to the climbing wall, think nothing of going for a run up the fells - it is on your doorstep. (Drew)

The west coast, on the other hand has a

…typical working-class culture and traditional sport and rugby and football for lads, not so much cricket, girls…are into netball…But there's other things on our doorstep that maybe we need to market a bit better. We've got to say to people, not just tourists but our local people, this is what you can do within 10 minutes of your door - you're in the countryside, you're overlooking the Irish Sea or whatever. We're not doing it well enough at the moment. (Drew)

The outdoors is seen as something for other people:

The residents … do not necessarily engage with the landscape. They feel almost, it's for other people and not for them because they live in it or next to it and there is a kind of, there is a lack of engagement from some communities along the coast with the natural landscape… (Jordan)

It's perceived as an elite pastime. Again, if you look at the demographic of people involved in the outdoor sector, white, middle-class, mainly male, so it's all those perceptions - kids from Mirehouse don't become climbing instructors, kids from Mirehouse don't become canoe instructors etc., because you need a canoe. (Drew)

From the people who are the generation older than me all the way down to the young people who are born in Mirehouse and Greenbank and Sandwith they do not

see the coast as being an area of beauty. They do not know how to play with it,
they...seldom think of going to the beach. (Stevie)

The outdoors, then, is somewhere near where you live rather than a resource, resulting in a narrow set of experiences related to the outdoors:

Some people I took to Ennerdale Lake, a group, and one lad lived 3 miles away, had been brought up by his grandparents …but its 3 miles from the water, he'd never been, he was a 17-year-old boy who'd never been 3 miles to the lake side and he didn't know where he was. (Taylor)

I was a lead worker on that one [NCS], and I worked with some young people , I think there was 10 young people all together and I think about eight of those had never been outdoors ever, and that was a group from south Whitehaven as well. (Billy)

The local identity associated with the west coast of Cumbria is evidently strong. The repeated affirmation that 'we're from Woodhouse' by the young people who are struggling to engage with other young people in a neighbouring town is both a strength, in terms of collective identity, and a weakness in terms of their inability to deal with the threat of the unfamiliar or with people who they see as different or more privileged. The example from Millom, where residents won't cross a link bridge, shows similar localised identification and highlights how restrictive such identities can be.

The localised identity also incorporates an outdoor perspective. For some other young people in places away from the west coast the outdoors has a meaning and forms part of the local culture, but Drew's point that the local people are unaware of what is on their own doorstep echoes the sentiment expressed earlier by other participants. Rather than blaming the young people Drew is also taking responsibility for the situation and suggesting a role for the enablers.

The existing culture of traditional sport reflects the industrial roots of the area and an associated working class population. Engagement with outdoor activities is seen as something that other people do – often white, male and middle class. Drew and Stevie pinpoint specific areas of Whitehaven that have high levels of deprivation. In such

circumstances it is difficult for young people to relate to the people they perceive as able to take part in the activities. There is also a culture, or mindset, that does not value the countryside and coast as recreational areas resulting in a lack of experience and knowledge about local areas.

The culture is a long lasting and embedded one. One of the interviewees (Taylor) was describing experiences from 30 years ago but Billy's experience of working with a group from south Whitehaven on an NCS programme is very recent.

13.2.4 Opportunity and progression

The culture of non-valuing of the outdoors for learning and recreation is recognised as limiting by the participants. Rowan makes the link to wider issues and broadened horizons and brings in the aspect of schooling:

> *I think there is a need for young people in particular to potentially have a broader experience than just classroom based learning, and a greater appreciation of the environment, the world around them and their impact on it.* (Rowan)

There is, however, a significant gap between aspiration and actual delivery of such opportunities, as articulated by Alex:

> *If I'm 25 years old, and I lived in London at 20-however many years old, there were two massive climbing walls. I had money, I had an interest, I went to a climbing wall, I signed up for a course. Da-daa. Pathway created. There just isn't that in Whitehaven. You know people go to the Lake District because it's - they go to the National Park because it's obvious and it has some of that infrastructure in place.* (Alex)

The Lake District National Park provides a focal point for activity but at the same time reinforces the otherness of the outdoors:

> *Around here they have the opportunity to go to the national park which offers them a complete myriad of things and as I say, the nearest bit of the national park is literally 30 minutes, less than that from Whitehaven. So they have that right there but it's being able to go there and being able to do something there and I think that's the barrier: can they physically get there so what are the public transport things, do they*

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have a car, etc., but then also for a lot of people it's well, why would I go there? What
am I going to do? (Rowan)

The legitimate right to be there does not necessarily translate into activity, due to a lack of knowledge and skill. There appears to be a gap in the learning journey from activity introduction to being able to capitalise on the initial enthusiasm. Billy highlighted the challenge from a youth work perspective, drawing attention to the lack of local opportunity and the perception that other areas have a better offer:

> *I think what we do as youth workers is provide the opportunity to try something but*
> *then that young person really thrives at it and wants to continue it, that's where we*
> *stop and that's where the signposting becomes difficult. I think this area of West*
> *Cumbria, I may be wrong, but to me it's not standing out as somewhere to signpost*
> *them [to] in this area. If we were in Keswick or Penrith or somewhere I think I'm sure*
> *there'd be a lot more kind of places to signpost.* (Billy)

Signposting to future opportunities is a critical part of any progression model, and having limited opportunities to which to direct people obviously creates a challenge. Eddie talked about how children would go on a Year 7 residential and then have no progression opportunities beyond that:

> *The kids get the chance to try canoeing sailing, whatever, and then… we don't*
> *necessarily, other than a bit of canoeing in activity week or mountain biking, we*
> *don't really do anything after that. And I think with these things you need to, they*
> *need to happen more, little and often, if you see what I mean, in order to be able to*
> *develop the skills and the confidence and so on.* (Eddie)

Other aspects of provision do exist beyond school but are not necessarily linked. Charlie talked about how children would experience water sport activities through school residentials but a lack of knowledge held back potential for connection and progression:

> *One of the other problems is that, with a lot of outdoor centres which inevitably are*
> *based in the Lakes rather than out on the West Coast, is that they do a lot of intro*
> *sessions but nobody really knows what they're doing, if you like, from the club's point*
> *of view.* (Charlie)

The desire for progressive opportunities is supported by Drew who sees one-off opportunities as unproductive:

Just doing it once in Year 6 at primary school isn't enough. My love was through the

Scouts. Nearly every weekend I was learning something different every weekend.

(Drew)

13.2.5 Values into practice

The degree of connection with the outdoors impacts on work. For those working with young people the outdoors is recognised as a valuable vehicle for development, but personal levels of experience and confidence influence the degree to which they utilise the outdoors. Eddie uses outdoor activities to develop personal and social skills in a school setting, and to foster environmental connection:

Within our values we talk about some of those things around trying to help students build confidence and the outdoor activity links directly to those… What I want students to get an experience of is an enjoyment of the outdoors through an adventurous activity and also to gain confidence and experience of accessing the outdoors… But also to have an appreciation of the environment and the world in which they live. (Eddie)

Rowan, an outdoor practitioner and youth worker, values providing young people with opportunities for challenging experiences,

It is about being able to offer people an opportunity to go and do something in the great outdoors that they maybe don't have access to because they don't have the knowledge or the equipment… (Rowan)

For Billy, a youth worker, it is harder, acknowledging the personal challenges inherent in helping young people to realise their own goals. Billy's response shows the tension that exists between personal experience, local culture, confidence, job role and aspirations.

I have a fear of water so I don't tend to [do those activities]… and that kind of probably, me as a youth worker, kind of comes across to young people. So it's not… on my top list of activities to do with young people so I tend not to, if I do do it then I tend to go with the nervous young person, the one that isn't going to capsize the canoe or anything, I have a big fear. Walking wise, I don't go out really, I go on the little trails and stuff with my kids and stuff … I don't know if it's a west Cumbrian

thing, we tended not to… cos it is beautiful over this end really, so we stay, well I do,

tend to stay where I am, stay local. (Billy)

Four other participants also translated their values into their fields of work. Jordan, George and Lee all saw the visitor economy as closely related to the local outdoor environment, and the need for the local population to value the area themselves was seen as essential if they were to be able to welcome visitors in. Drew saw the outdoors as providing an alternative to traditional sport and a way of increasing physical activity and tackling the health agenda.

13.2.6 The role of key adults

Moving from the cultural situation that exists currently to one of progressive OL/OR opportunities is not straightforward. Alex highlighted the personal challenge that young people face and the need for trusting relationships to overcome very established ways of thinking and doing:

> *It's a very big ask to then meet your average 17-year-old and go here is this thing*
> *that you need to try and they have no reference point for it whatsoever, no reference*
> *to point to, to tell them it's likely to be a good experience…that's where the long-*
> *term relationship things come in because we are unpicking a very entrenched set of*
> *experiences.* (Alex)

Sandy elaborated on some of the issues:

> *If you've never been to a canoe club how would you walk into a canoe club? Because*
> *there is 1 million barriers before you even got to that point. A friend might say come*
> *to this canoe club with me, and you will go along. But if you don't speak the language*
> *it's going to be quite daunting. You might not know what kit to take, you've got to*
> *have that friend to go come with me in the first place before you'd even go through*
> *the door.* (Sandy)

Simply 'signposting' someone to a club is not necessarily enough, as the social capital held by the individual may not be enough to enable access. Alex summarised the differences between those with high and low social capital:

> *Even calling it small steps is unfair really because again straightaway I have made*
> *some assumptions that it's a small step there might a frigging massive step for*
> *someone. Like, you know, small steps for me but huge steps for someone else.* (Alex)

One group of people who have influence are parents. For Charlie, club engagement

> *varies very much on the parents and if you like that socio-economic background, very much so in that some kids, they are just restricted, 'well we don't do that sort of thing', and others just dive in and take it for granted.* (Charlie)

In a school setting, Eddie was very aware of the impact that active parents had:

> *I have some children who are really into it anyway, and that's often because the parents are encouraging them to get involved in the outdoors, but there are some students who it's not even on their radar, they wouldn't even consider it as an activity… parents aren't encouraging it they've got no prior understanding of it or experience of it.* (Eddie)

A broader perspective was offered by Lee:

> *If you're in the community that isn't going out on the hill and your friends aren't then you don't necessarily tend to. That's not your experience. it's only if you come across someone that does that that maybe introduces you that helps you know that that's an option unless you come across it like I say and then you're fairly determined you want to pursue it.* (Lee)

Eddie highlighted the social aspect of participation and the importance of family and friends:

> *Who are you going to experience the outdoors with? That's the question. If from an early age, if your parents are taking you into the outdoors then I guess you are more likely to continue with that later on in life because you know what you get out of it I suppose, more than, perhaps, if you don't get those opportunities. And if it's not your parents it's your mates isn't it?* (Eddie)

Billy also talked about the importance of family and community involvement:

> *I'll talk about the group in South Whitehaven cos I know them. Everyone is family orientated and they want to do as much as they can for their families… If you've got family onside there's a lot of good community projects that encourage family…They don't tend to go on the fells, they tend to go to caravan sites, but the turnout for that is absolutely fantastic because families do want to give their children a really good well rounded childhood, but they have no access to get there. Some families are really good and encourage and come along and do everything because south Whitehaven, if anything, has a really good community support network.* (Billy)

Families play an important role, especially with younger children, in south Whitehaven. Billy mentioned the need for parents to take part as well:

> *Young people… very much, erm, vote with their feet. If they like it they'll come, if they don't they'll walk out. Our 8 to 11 group, which is our future young people, is very much family, so they're the ones who are going to say get yourself to the youth club, do this, do that, and I think that's where you need the family side of it to go on the, like, activities as a family. I think the community groups, they are very much, if you've got children going then you need to go with them.* (Billy)

It's not just the parents and carers that have influence however. Billy describes how key people with standing in the community rather than professionals have the trust of local residents and can encourage participation in new projects:

> *I know some people, me mam knows a lot of people and [x] who works at Egremont, she knows a lot of people, she's been tagging - me Mam's not on facebook- she's been tagging people that she knows with kids in that age group, cos she knows who they are, and Mam's been walking the dog and telling people about it as well who've got kids in that age group, so…once we get up and running I know for a fact that the community will be 100% behind us.* (Billy)

One particular resident […] is described by Billy:

> *I love […] to bits but she's very loud, she swears a lot, she's a caretaker and manages the [local] community centre. I've seen her in her pyjamas and dressing gown more times than I'd care to mention but she is the heart of the community as well… I've known [her] since I was a child anyway, so, and that does go a long way in an area like south Whitehaven. People parachuting in and doing something and parachuting back out again doesn't go down well.* (Billy)

13.2.7 A sense of purpose?

Care is needed to understand the best ways to achieve societal goals, and Billy's reference to 'parachuting in' serves perhaps as both a reminder and a warning. The sense of a community taking ownership and control over what it does highlights the need to be clear about what is trying to be achieved as well as the means to achieve it. For Alex,

> *I think it comes down to a total appreciation of individuals freedom of choice, a total appreciation of the real opportunities that they may or may not have available to*

them and are starting from a point of zero judgement and zero … say zero
expectation but I don't mean that in a hopeless kind of way but I mean a completely
open mind about whether an individual might choose to take it because any time we
come with any preconceived ideas about what success is we automatically create the
opposite which is failure, and I think that's something the Outdoor Partnership
shouldn't do, nor any partnership for that matter. (Alex)

As a youth worker, Billy sees success as young people being in charge of their lives:

I can't say what I want them to do, I want them to tell me what they want to do and
to take it from there. For me it's making sure they have the opportunities, a range of
opportunities available so if they want to do outdoors and I'm not providing that
then that's a failure on my part. (Billy)

No participants identified a particular activity that should take priority. Rather, there was a
feeling that choice was more important, and the capacity to enact those choices. Engaging
with the outdoors was one option amongst many:

It's the ability to go somewhere and take part in an activity, and as I say, I think they
all have value, and what's important is that there's that range, so that people can
pick and choose because not everybody wants to play sport, not everybody views the
mountains and the lakes as a place that they are happy in or anything, and some
people don't like going to watch a play or a concert or a pantomime… (Rowan)

I think that's what's important [is] having more options, people being able to see
going outdoors in an informal leisure setting as easy to do as maybe going to netball
match. (Lee)

I think it has to be what works for you and I think if we say that there are certain
experiences that people should have then we automatically devalue anything that's
less than that or that we might consider to be less than that. [If] there's somebody
who just loves to walk on the coastal path every weekend and gets a great deal from
that experience then who are we to say that they haven't had everything they should
have had in the outdoors. (Alex)

Alex summarises:

We can provide opportunities for people to have their own journeys. (Alex)

13.3 Discussion

Through the interviews in Study 3, I sought to understand how social and contextual factors influenced the values of a group of people I term 'gatekeepers'. The interviews explored access to the outdoors for OL and OR in the local area in terms of the experiences and values held by this group. The following discussion focuses on social identity and the roles of others in facilitating access and draws on additional relevant literature not previously introduced in the thesis.

13.3.1 Social identity

For ten of the interviewees a direct link was evident between their adult values and their childhood or early experiences, the outdoors forming an identifiable part of their lives and thus their individual identity. Krapp (2005, p. 383) suggests that long term interests begin with multiple interactions between the person and object, potentially leading to 'longer lasting domain-specific situational interest and later in a relatively stable individual interest of high personal relevance.' Interest sparked in childhood has, for the majority of interviewees, led to long term interests, and further support is given to Krapp's suggestion by Billy who did not have those experiences and did not develop the associated personal values. All participants engaged outside work on a regular basis, some for personal reasons and some, like Billy, mainly for family reasons. Evident in the conversations were different social identities and differing levels of cultural background and privilege that led to these experiences.

Ribot and Peluso (2003) consider the membership of different social categories or groups as having significance in terms of access to benefits. None of the participants gave an indication of having restricted access as a result of being part of a particular demographic group, yet there was evidence of different cultural backgrounds influencing the experiences that they had as younger people. Privilege arising from parental support was the most apparent for Sandy and Stevie, although this did not translate into a superior valuing of the outdoors when compared with less privileged upbringings. Taylor and Drew for example, growing up in Cleator Moor and Whitehaven, developed very strong relationships with the outdoors through a combination of independent exploration and participation in organised outdoor activity. The most noticeable lack of personal connection was that of Billy, whose parents did not value the outdoors. This relationship has continued into adulthood although subsequent

parenthood has led to engagement for the children's benefit. In contrast, Lee and Alex, who also did not have that childhood connection, had transformative experiences (attending a climbing wall and relocating) that led to sustained personal engagement.

Gordon, Chester and Denton (2015) identify six underlying motivations for participating in outdoor activity which form the basis of outdoor identities: to spend time with family; to have fun with friends; to enjoy the natural environment; as an alternative to traditional sport; for fresh air and to enjoy the weather; and to relax and de-stress. All of these were evident in the participants' interview responses and highlight the need to be alert to the different reasons people will have to (potentially) participate.

Of greatest significance, however, is the value placed on the outdoors by all participants, no matter what their degree of personal involvement. Ashforth and Mael (1989, p. 25) suggest that 'individuals tend to choose activities congruent with salient aspects of their identities, and they support the institutions embodying those identities'. This is evident through the support being given to TOPC as Stakeholders.

The importance of family support in promoting children's engagement with the outdoors cannot be underestimated. By providing or facilitating access to OL/OR opportunities, parents and carers help children and young people to have new experiences that broaden horizons (Sigelman and Rider, 2015). It is tempting to assume that financial capital plays an important role in facilitating experiences but the experiences of Taylor and Drew counter this. More important seems to be the encouragement to engage which stems from parents' own appreciation, itself dependent on their own experiences. Interviews in Study 1 with people with low levels of disposable income supported this, parents describing a value to being in the outdoors that led to recreational time being spent outside at low cost or free venues. Gordon, Chester and Denton (2015, p. 21) identify a mutually reinforcing relationship between adult and child participation stating that the 'parents of children who are active outdoors are twice as likely to become active themselves. Similarly, the children of parents who are active outdoors are twice as likely to become active themselves.' Finding ways to encourage parent engagement would appear to be a priority.

Children are shaped by the people around them, their experiences and how they make meaning of those experiences, suggesting the importance of creating developmental

experiences to provide those opportunities (Nagaoka *et al.*, 2015). Parental influences are clearly significant but only part of the picture, operating alongside formal and non-formal settings. The Foundations for Young Adult Success is a developmental framework for young people that aims to help young people to 'fulfil individual goals and have the agency and competencies to influence the world around them' (Nagaoka *et al.*, 2015, p.1). A product of the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR), it draws on research and practice from a range of formal and non-formal contexts to propose a model (Figure 13.1) that combines foundational components (the development of self-regulation, knowledge and skills, mindsets and values) with key factors of agency, competencies and integrated identity. The model provides a way of visualising the different stages of development and suggests when different foci come into play at different times. For practitioners – and parents - it can serve as a guide to the underlying purpose behind educational activity programmes at certain stages of childhood and adolescence. Developmental activities provide the means to achieve the outcomes identified in the model through opportunities for action and reflection. For Nagaoka *et al.* (2015), the role of adults to enable and encourage reflection is key. They suggest that it is 'strong, supportive and sustained relationships with caring adults' (p. 5) that have most impact. Where these opportunities are missing, or where children have few opportunities to have new experiences, the chances of integrating novel experiences into their identity is considerably less. Children who grow up in circumstances that mirror the conventions and behaviours present in schools and places of work will find it easier to access opportunities in these institutions. Those that do not have to learn how to 'navigate other social contexts – and have to integrate more disparate identities to be on equal footing with children who were born into the dominant social culture' (p. 56).

In Copeland the interviewees acknowledged a lack of development opportunities and a consequent inability to progress skills and knowledge. School opportunities were identified as being isolated rather than progressive. The potential roles that schools, outdoor education centres and other organisations can play in developing the networks that promote social capital (Beames and Atencio, 2008) are consequently underdeveloped.
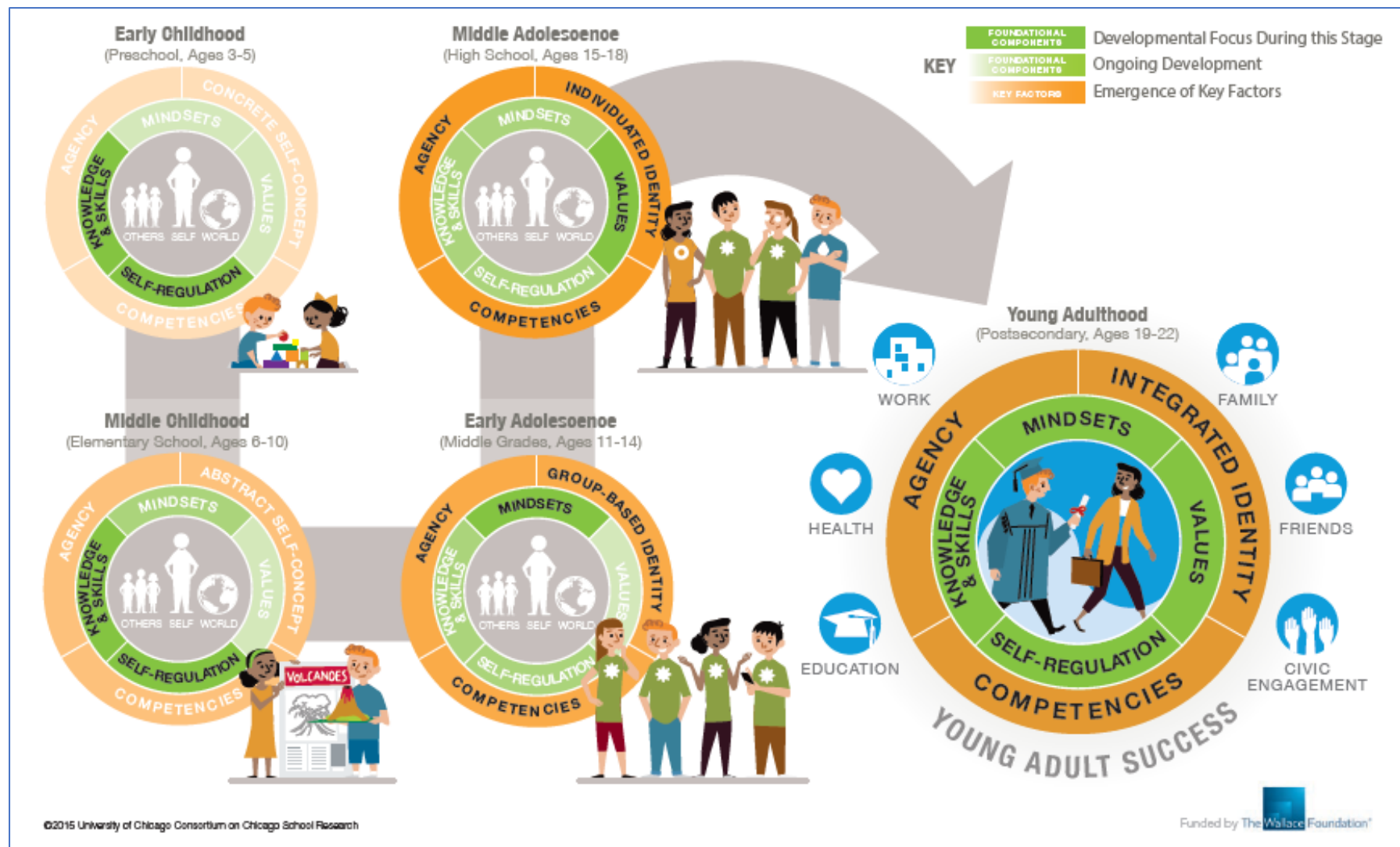
Figure 13.1. Foundations for Young Adult Success (Nagaoka *et al.*, 2015)

The lack of provision has other negative impacts and highlights the interdependency of the various providers and participants. A thriving outdoor provider network employs staff and creates visible pathways to both engagement and employment, with OL/OR businesses providing employment for seasonal and freelance staff and contributing to the local economy. They also provide more opportunities for schools to access day provision, as there is a practical limit to the distance participants will travel to access day activities. Providers will also only travel a certain distance to deliver at the customer's location. Access to opportunities is thus reduced for children and young people where there are few providers and leads to a situation where there is low participation and low provision, both potentially contributing to each other.

The dominant culture, 'the community as experienced by its members' (Cohen, 1985, quoted in Jenkins, 2014, p. 138), through experiences and social interactions, plays a critical role in shaping young people's attitudes and values. In Copeland, the industrial heritage has left a post-industrial legacy of entrenched attitudes that support certain institutions, or patterns of behaviour. Drew's description of traditional sporting culture and Taylor's account of growing up in 'working class Cleator Moor' resonate with Malcolm Chapman's description of walking from the Lake District into Cleator Moor. Wearing hill walking kit that would have been unremarked in a Lake District town such as Keswick, he felt very much an outsider, the Lake District representing privileged leisure while Cleator Moor was 'a desolate and unregarded landscape of industry declining, industry departed and high unemployment.' (Chapman 1993, quoted in Urry, 1995, p. 207). It is easy to see how young people travelling in the opposite direction, from the west coast to the Lake District towns, come to regard them and the culture they represent as 'other'.

Rather than resulting from particular categorisations such as ethnicity, religion or gender, the dominant perceptions of the interviewees around social identity focus on mindset as related to culture. The feeling that the outdoors is for other people who hold different values and privileges acts as a distinct barrier to access. Particular localities - Mirehouse, Sandwith, Woodhouse and Cleator Moor - are mentioned several times, but there is a wider coastal community alluded to as well that shares similar views. Copeland is a district that has two distinct ends marked by the towns of Whitehaven and Millom, over twenty miles apart. The identities associated with each town and the places in between are unique, and it is important that interventions take these local contexts into account. Understanding local

geographies, as Jordan pointed out when describing the Millom community, will have an impact on their success or otherwise.

13.3.2 Accessing through others: power and authority

Structures are 'all the factors that control what we do. They include norms, rules, laws, discourses and cultures' (Maynard and Stuart, 2018, p. 78), and are thus at the heart of access to OL/OR. At each level of structural relationship different people, organisations and institutions hold varying degrees of power. Parents and peer group leaders, for example, are sources of motivation and enablement (and power), but, as described by Billy, there are also community leaders, both formal and informal, who through personality, position or informal authority granted by their peers, have influence amongst their communities. To these can be added the other enablers and gatekeepers identified in this project. As well as the local culture within which people live and grow, the formulation of young people's identities and their subsequent success as adults depends on the development of strong relationships (Nagaoka *et al.*, 2015). These relationships are interwoven with the social identities that contribute to and support the structures surrounding people's lives. Social network theory, however, suggests that while strong ties are essential for community development, they are often between people and groups of similarity (Granovetter, 1973). As a result new ideas and perspectives are restricted and the ties are self-limiting and confining. Green and White (2007) suggest that the strong ties to family and friends create a sense of place attachment that influences their choices and decisions about education, training and employment and is thus a source of weakness.

The evidence from the young people of Whitehaven unwilling to engage with people in the neighbouring town reflects such a position and can be applied also to engagement with optional OL activities. It is the development of weak ties to a broader set of acquaintances that provides the social capital to enable increased access (Loynes, 2010), ties that can be developed through the experiences that broaden horizons advocated by the Stakeholders.

The role of adults in positions of relative power in determining actions for CYPF is significant. The interviews in Study 3 revealed the Stakeholders beliefs and values surrounding access to the outdoors and what CYPF should and should not be able to do or experience, but an alternative perspective takes the view of the CYPF themselves, who, outside the formal and non-formal opportunities for OL, need to know what, where and how they can access OL/OR

opportunities. The lack of awareness of opportunities and provision highlighted through the interviews and surveys could indicate a lack of interest or motivation to find out, or be the result of a series of barriers that reflect a blend of different rights-based and structural access mechanisms. For the latter, there would appear to be a need for an accessible institution working on behalf of people with less power that helps to facilitate the removal of these barriers and subsequent access to opportunities, a strategy that has been shown to work for people accessing social benefits (Hartworth, Richards and Convery, 2020).

The disadvantaged are only so in relation to the advantaged, yet many issues of inequality of access are framed as problems of the former. Nixon, 2019 (pp. 5-6), using the analogy of a coin where those with privilege are on the top side and those with disadvantage are on the bottom, suggests that this leads to 'a moral imperative for those on the top of the coin to be guided by an altruistic urge to save or fix people on the bottom of the coin', a strategy that reinforces, rather than dismantles, the coin itself while maintaining the imbalance of power. In the field of OL this has been evident since the early 20th century when concerns over health led to specific interventions including, amongst others, the development of the Scouting movement. Young people have been seen to be in need of saving and the discourse has continued to strengthen. The privileged position on top of the coin is apparent in categorisations such as NEET, marginalised, or 'hard to reach' that are 'derived from particular ideological representations of them as dysfunctional and in urgent need of expert intervention to return them to normality' (Wallace and Coburn, 2018, p. 140). The sector is (unintentionally) complicit in maintaining the system of inequality when providers, seeking business to maintain their provision, access funding to work with these groups. Kerwin-Nye (2019) speaking as a member of such a community but also acknowledging her role in a charity seeking to influence change, challenges this approach. She suggests that, 'these families aren't hard to reach. They lean over the fence and say hello to each other. They speak to each other in the street. They come around when someone is in trouble. They are easy to reach. When we in the charity sector say hard to reach what we really mean is that they don't come to us. They don't engage on our terms. They don't reach us.' She goes on to suggest that for those seeking to effect change there needs to be more support for local leadership and rather than outreach workers, a greater emphasis on 'infill', i.e. workers who are connected to the communities in which they work. Further, by enabling greater access to funds held by charities and public bodies the available resources can be redistributed to where they are most needed.

TOPC is, at first glance, a top-down approach. An organisation from outside the area has identified another area that is deserving of the funds it has access to, with the aim of improving the lives of the people living there. The seven year funding leaves the potential for a project that is 'parachuted in and parachutes out' when the funding ceases. However, the way that the initiative is being introduced and developed reflects a much more consultative approach where the available support is there to learn from and enhance what is going on already, leading to a hybrid top down/bottom up approach (Manzini, 2014). By being aware of the multiple factors affecting access and incorporating planning to address those into any programme the emphasis moves from 'we will do this for you' to 'you can choose to do this if you wish'. TOPC avoids the 'top down trap' by engaging Stakeholders to represent their communities and act as a steering group for the Partnership.

Prior to Ribot and Peluso (2003), Hustedde and Ganowicz (2002, p. 4) stated that, 'power refers to relationships with those who control resources such as land, labor, capital, and knowledge or those who have greater access to those resources than others'. The Stakeholders interviewed in this study hold some of those powers and privileges through access to resources of knowledge, funding, community links and workforces. As such they can act as 'junctures in the web of powers' that grant, control and maintain access to OL/OR experiences.

Given the currently disaggregated model of OL provision, there is no clear local-level authority with which to engage. Authority is context or setting specific and consequently narrow in scope. For young people, authority rests with adults - parents and carers, teachers, youth leaders etc. For families, community leaders are a route for some, but for those that exist in greater isolation either because their family unit is more self-contained or because they are geographically or technologically isolated, the route to authority depends on the interconnected access mechanisms of social identity, economics, knowledge and technology.

Paradoxically, while consumers may not have power (constituted through the various access mechanisms) to access opportunities, it is the power they hold that governs the provision of those opportunities. For providers, the market economy characterised by neoliberal ideology and practice places the power very much in the hands of the consumer. As a potential or actual customer, they decide who they use to provide the programme they want at a price they are willing to pay. Government law and policies provide the rigid framework within

which this economy operates, leaving the provider at the end of the chain of influence. Non-statutory provision of OL means that no provider is protected or favoured leaving a sector that is dominated by a reactive customer led culture. Providers may therefore be the key to enabling access by developing ways to support access for others.

Access to authority has the potential to alter access to opportunity. Authority, in the shape of institutions that can influence how people gain, control and maintain access, must first be recognised. It seems likely that the people with the requisite authority within those institutions may be unaware that they have a particular power, and perhaps do not recognise the benefits associated with the change that is being requested. Without this knowledge it is arguable whether anything will change as initiatives that have more clearly articulated benefits will inevitably take priority.

13.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has explored issues of identity, social relations and access to authority through a set of interviews with a group of people I have termed 'gatekeepers'. By investigating their attitudes to the outdoors and how they arrived at their values I have sought to understand the role that those values could play in achieving the goals of improved access to the outdoors.

Social identity, negotiated social relationships and access to authority all play significant roles for participants and providers alike. Social identity, through the groups and categories that people are members of, leads to privilege - unasked for or undeserved advantage -or oppression - unasked for or undeserved disadvantage (Nixon, 2019). Many different categorisations come together in a single person leading to some experiencing multiple aspects of disadvantage while some experience the opposite.

Reliance on key adults means that children and young people need to develop the social skills that enables them to access OL and OR opportunities. The capacity to form social relationships both within and beyond immediate networks constitutes the development of social capital, and is also highly relevant to practitioners, providers and those seeking to influence at a policy level who require skills beyond the traditional delivery ones.

Institutions and organisations interact at local, regional and national level, defining the complex landscape of provision. Access to people who can instigate or support programmes at a local level or effect change at a policy level plays a key role in shaping this picture, but such access is inequitable and often reflects privilege. This is apparent in the debates related to land access but less identifiable at a community level where social identity and culture can create environments where the outdoors is not valued and the pathways to access do not exist.

The interviews in Study 3 demonstrated the high value placed on the outdoors by all Stakeholders. Given that this was not a requirement for membership of the Stakeholder group this is significant, as adults have been shown to support initiatives that link to their values. There is a possibility, of course, that the name and mission of TOPC attracts people who already hold similar values to at least find out more, but this emphasises the advantage of fostering those values across society. Childhood experiences were significant for many of the interviewees and led to ongoing participation as adults. There was a strong appreciation for the benefits that can accrue from time spent there, both educationally and recreationally, but there was an equally strong appreciation of the barriers that prevented CYPF from accessing those benefits, often articulated through the local culture and mindset. The role of adults as potential and actual enablers was found to be highly significant within the web of powers that influence access. Changing the mindset was regarded as a key challenge, along with providing the enabling conditions that will facilitate increased access.

Opportunities for progressive outdoor experiences were regarded as essential but are currently very limited. Lack of progressive OL/OR opportunities mean that networks, knowledge and skills do not grow, and the social capital to enable more opportunities for OL/OR to be accessed remains underdeveloped. Changing the mindset requires not only the provision of opportunities but tackling the other structural and relational factors that affect access. At a systemic level it also means addressing the root causes of the inequality. If there is to be systemic change then it needs to involve the communities that will benefit from the start, suggesting a shift of power from those with privilege to those without and investment in the people who can effect change – infill rather than outreach. Transferring power from the privileged few to the disadvantaged implies the development of autonomy, or, in other words, the goal of real choices and the ability to access them. The means of achieving these

goals, through an understanding of progression leading to autonomous participation in the outdoors via an ecosystem approach to delivery are the subject of the next chapters.

13.5 Summary of Part 3

Through the pilot study and three focused studies that derived from it, the research has supported and extended knowledge of how OL is understood and engaged with across a range of stakeholder groups.

Study 1 highlighted the various conceptions of OL inside and outside the sector. The findings supported benefits of OL as reported in the literature, although they were related in many instances to OR rather than OL. It seems reasonable to assume that the distinction between OL and OR will be equally vague for other non-specialists and emphasises the need for messaging from the sector to its various audiences to be clear and specific. It also suggests a closer relationship between OL and OR than previously acknowledged. If participation in outdoor activities for personal, social and environmental benefits beyond school is largely voluntary then the sector has a role to play in facilitating that long-term engagement.

The use of AT as a lens through which to examine participation in Study 1 was effective. As well as supporting the findings from the literature related to access factors, AT provided a way of focusing on specific groups of factors that can otherwise be ignored. With the addition of 'time' and a reframing of market access to provision of opportunities, the framework is helpful for analysing the mechanisms that facilitate gaining, controlling and maintaining access to OL/OR.

Study 2 narrowed the focus to Copeland and showed considerable support for OL through formal and non-formal provision, although participation levels are low in general, especially so when compared with a neighbouring district and correspond to their respective IMD scores. Teachers and youth leaders valued the potential benefits of OL for young people but identified a range of barriers that made implementing new practice difficult.

Young people surveyed were very aware of the value of the outdoors for their physical and mental health, and a significant number of those surveyed claimed to take part in regular outdoor activity with their families. This was a somewhat surprising result given the

teachers' and youth leaders' perceptions that the opposite was true, and suggests the importance of finding out and connecting with whatever previous experience CYPF have actually got.

Study 3 explored issues of identity, social relations and access to authority through a set of interviews with a group of people I have termed 'gatekeepers'. The findings showed the importance of childhood and early adulthood experiences for developing adult values related to the outdoors for this group. The study highlighted the impact of custom and practice found in the local culture that valued traditional sport over perceived middle class outdoor activities. The strength of local community ties was shown to be a significant limiting factor in CYP's engagement with the outdoors, although paradoxically the strength of these ties may provide a means to engage local communities in participation. In a situation where ties are so strong, it is the relationships with people in authority (i.e. community leaders or influencers) that is perhaps the key to engagement.

Through a lens of Access Theory the data from the three studies demonstrates an appreciation of the outdoors for learning, development and recreation from multiple stakeholder groups. The research participants told me that they valued the outdoors for a variety of reasons that match those promoted by the sector including health, wellbeing, socialisation and connecting with nature. They also confirmed from different perspectives that access to those opportunities was difficult for a variety of reasons.

The research showed that the benefits pathway associated with access to the outdoors is far from complete, with sections of the population lacking in certain privileges and capabilities that enable equitable access. The data highlights the impact of the interconnecting access mechanisms and the need for enablers and gatekeepers to use their positions and privileges to influence and improve access. In order to move forwards, to challenge the status quo, it therefore becomes necessary to focus on those groups who hold the power to effect change and identify a strategy that can develop participants' capabilities to access opportunities.

Opportunities for progressive outdoor experiences in Copeland are limited. Through sensitive and respectful engagement with stakeholders in the local community initiatives such as TOPC, grounded in the local context, provide a route to participation. Although there is clearly an essential role for facilitated OL, both as a means of enabling initial experiences and as a means of meeting identified developmental goals, it is what happens after those

interventions that demands further attention. Given the focus on voluntary participation

from adolescence onwards, consideration needs to be given to the development of people's

autonomous skills to be able to achieve this through choice. While individual in focus,

however, autonomy does not have to be individualistic or self-centred, and, as the strength

of community ties evident in Copeland have shown, may be highly social in context. Part 4

explores the concept of autonomy and its application to participation in OL/OR through an

ecosystem delivery model.

Part 4: Developing the Combined Progression model

14 Autonomy and progression

14.1 Introduction

As I showed in **Chapter 6** numerous benefits can be attached to OL, some described as outcomes, some as longer term impacts. Data from Studies 2 and 3 highlighted that access to progressive OL/OR opportunities that involve more than one-off experiences was regarded as essential but in Copeland is inequitable. Specifically, Study 3 highlighted the belief among the TOPC Stakeholders that a desirable goal would be for people to have the capability to choose whether to engage with the outdoors for whatever reasons (i.e. benefits) were appropriate to them. I concluded that in order to challenge this inequality it is necessary to transfer power from those with privilege to those without, framing this process as developing autonomy.

The theoretical Autonomy Progression Model developed in this chapter is therefore inductive. I explore the idea of autonomy from human needs and agency perspectives, proposing it as an overarching process goal for OL that can serve as a 'golden thread' linking disparate experiences and isolated providers. Through application to the field of OL, the discussion draws on and extends the work of Castillo (2009) and Maynard and Stuart (2018) to develop the idea of an Autonomy-Progression model, an original development of previous progression models described in **Chapter 5.**

14.2 Understanding 'autonomy'

Autonomy is a complex concept but, when applied at an individual level, is generally accepted to mean the ability to direct oneself when different options are available (Hurka, 2011; Christman, 2020), exercised in the aspects of life that have value to the individual (Doyal and Gough, 1991). Autonomy is not the same as independence (Ryan and Deci, 2000) as one can choose to ask for help or guidance. Choosing to ask for help is very different to a dependency situation where there is no choice, either due to structures, oppression or forces outside one's control, such as ill health (Castillo and Rosaura, 2009). The autonomous person has a desire to achieve a particular goal and decides between at least two options, consciously rejecting some and realising others. There is therefore a critical need for the person to have the necessary information and capabilities to make a reasoned and informed choice (Hurka, 2011).

Nedelsky (1989) insists that the feeling of autonomy, the self-perception that one is autonomous, is necessary for understanding the relationships that make autonomy possible:

> To be autonomous a person must feel a sense of her own power (which does not mean power over others), and that feeling is only possible within a structure of relationships conducive to autonomy. But it is also the case that if we lose our feeling of being autonomous, we lose our capacity to be so. Autonomy is a capacity that exists only in the context of social relations that support it and only in conjunction with the internal sense of being autonomous. (Nedelsky, 1989, pp. 24-25)

How someone feels about their degree of autonomy places that person's perspective at the centre of the process of empowerment. Autonomy can be aided by others but ultimately comes from within. To achieve autonomy, to effectively participate in social life and engage with the physical world, requires the capability to make choices and then enact those choices, a capability referred to as agency (Castillo, 2009; Maynard and Stuart, 2018).

Autonomy and agency are often used interchangeably but, agreeing with Castillo (2009), I make the distinction that autonomy is a *product* of agency. Castillo (2009) positions autonomy as the combination of agency (an internal capability) and enabling structures (discussed further in section 14.2.2), granting equal importance to both. Drawing on the Theory of Human Need (Doyal and Gough, 1991), Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000; 2006) and Capability Theory (Nessbaum, 2000) she summarises that autonomy is a basic human need that is required for full social participation, but that personal and contextual factors (e.g. motivation, perception of events and contexts) influence the degree of autonomy felt or held. Castillo draws on Nessbaum's idea of autonomy as a 'combined capability', consisting of internal capabilities (e.g. the ability to choose and evaluate, the ability to reflect and plan and the ability to form relationships), and external capabilities, which are the social conditions that enable the internal capabilities to be realised (Figure 14.1). Basic and critical autonomy refer to Doyal and Gough's 'levels of autonomy'. The basic level relates to *freedom of agency* and is the ability to participate in life at any level involving critical reflection. *Critical autonomy* involves engaging with the political process and requires both freedom of agency and the political freedom to agree to or actually change the rules of a culture.

At a practical level, Castillo adds a third dimension to autonomy with the necessary requirement for entitlements, understood as the resources accessible to a person that they can reach through the market or otherwise. In the sense of this thesis the resources are the opportunities and benefits associated with OL, and, in line with Access Theory, are based on legal rights and social legitimization. As the application of AT to OL participation in Copeland has shown, access to resources through various AT mechanisms constrains or enables people differently depending on individual context and circumstance, leading to inequitable access.
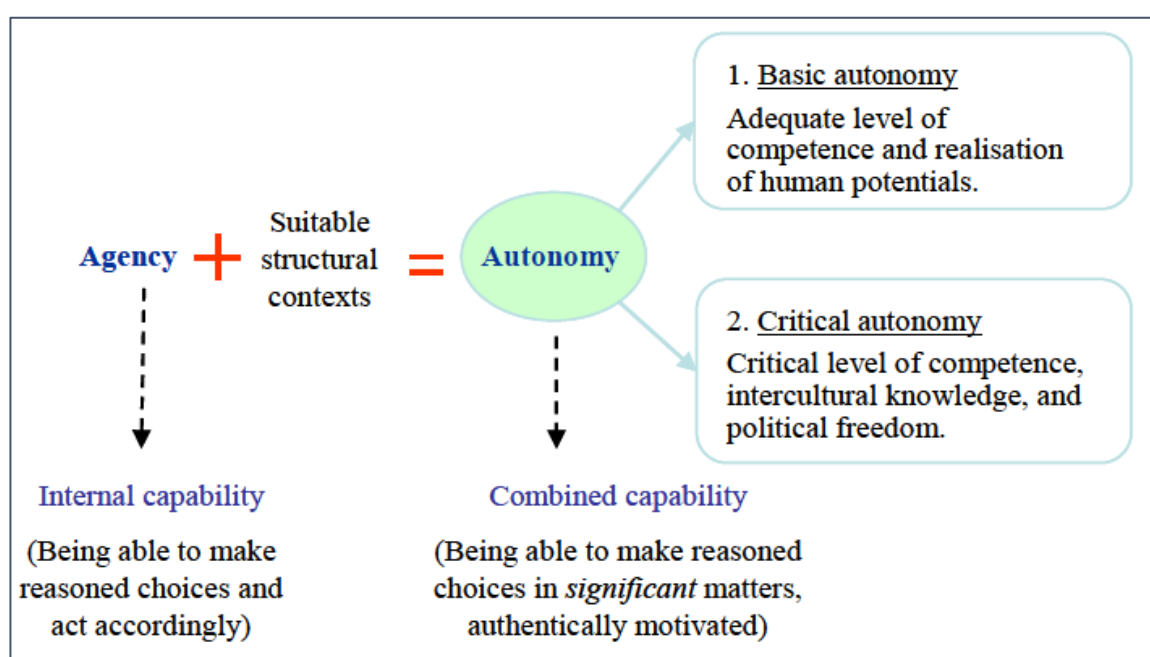
Figure 14.1. Autonomy as a combined capability and the layers of autonomy (Castillo, 2009, p.8)

Castillo's framing of autonomy provides a helpful foundation for understanding how it can be developed by paying attention to agency and structures. Castillo defines agency as a capability determined by internal contexts (personal and cultural), personal competence and 'orientations of control' relating to motivation, but stops short of explaining how these can be achieved. For this it is helpful to turn to Maynard and Stuart's work on empowerment and agency.

The Wellbeing and Social Justice Model (Maynard and Stuart, 2018) brings together key aspects of agency, structure, wellbeing and social justice. The model emphasises empowerment as the process by which people achieve agency, itself building on a process of self-awareness. Agency therefore encompasses 'the awareness, choices and actions of an individual' (p. 87) and the process of developing these capabilities is central to developing agency and consequently autonomy. The inclusion of awareness as a first stage of the empowerment process adds a critical dimension to Castillo's recognition of choice and action.

My interpretation of this is that awareness is both inward and outward looking. It relates to awareness of self and how one fits into the structures that shape everyday life. Awareness therefore includes the aspects of self-awareness and emotional management necessary to function effectively in society, as well as an appreciation of personal strengths and areas of development. Looking outwards means having an appreciation of the different structures which constrain or enable choices, the ways to navigate them, and of the choices or opportunities that are actually available. Applying to the field of OL/OR, broadening the range of experiences an individual has increases awareness of self, others and the wider environment in which a person operates and can lead to a greater appreciation of the possible choices available.

Choosing is a definite act itself. The autonomous individual, as outlined earlier, makes a choice between multiple options, rejecting some at the expense of others. It is a conscious process involving reflection, intent and commitment to a course of action. In the act of choosing, an individual will weigh up their understanding of the possible consequences and make decisions based on how the outcome will help them to meet their goals. They need to be able to draw on their knowledge of previous events and outcomes and plan ahead to envisage the outcomes of their choice. Implicit in this account is Dewey's (1938) idea of continuity and hence progression.

The third stage is being able to act, a process that requires the application of personal power and self-governance. An individual who has the capability to act and does so is displaying agency and, given consistent application of their agency, will be autonomous in that particular domain. In this sense, agency is individualistic but it can also be collective when a number of people act together to effect change in their surrounding structures.

Someone with a high level of agency is likely to be able to access OL opportunities (and societal structures) with a greater degree of success than someone without. They will have a greater degree of autonomy to choose their own courses of action and as a result they are more likely to experience positive wellbeing and to be a more effective contributor to society and social justice (Maynard and Stuart, 2018). For those with less capability to choose, the development of agency and hence autonomy through application of progressive OL awareness, choice and action cycles provides a practical means of developing progression within the disaggregated model of OL provision that currently exists. In Figure 14.2, I extend Maynard and Stuart's (2018) model articulating this process, situating Castillo's conception of autonomy in the interrelated frameworks of structure, agency, social justice and wellbeing. As Hurka (2011, p. 152) puts it, autonomy 'realizes the goods of agency and, more deeply, relation to the world in one special area'. In effect, I suggest that agency is the *operationalisation* of autonomy.
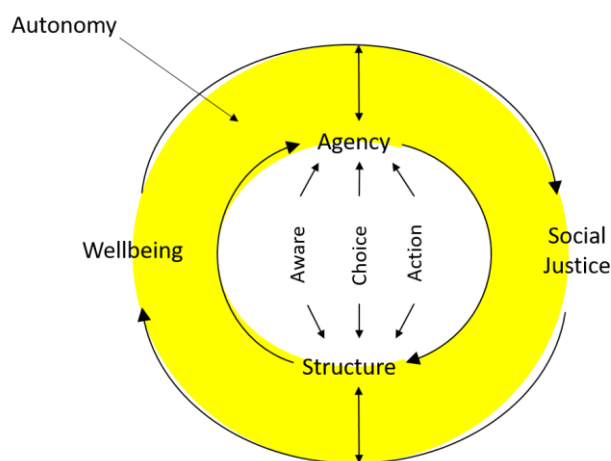
Figure 14.2. Autonomy and agency (after Maynard and Stuart, 2018)

14.3 Application

To be autonomous in the minimal sense 'is to have the ability to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it' (Doyal and Gough, 1991, p. 53). This entails developing agency by formulating aims and beliefs about how to achieve them, along with the ability to evaluate success. It is a clear precondition for regarding oneself - or being regarded by anyone else – as being able to do, and to be held responsible for doing, anything. Ryan and Deci (2000) suggest that autonomous participation occurs when

participants value the activities sufficiently to find them intrinsically interesting or exciting enough to want to engage and choose to bring a positive attitude to them, a position supported by data from the young people in Studies 1 and 2. Engagement is not simply a case of valuing an activity sufficiently, however, as the importance of social conditions in which people operate and grow is also critical to whether or not people can (or will) be engaged or otherwise with their community and beyond (Green and White, 2007). There is a difference between the desire to be or do something and the genuine opportunity to achieve it. Real choices, or 'freedoms' (Robeyns, 2017), rely on the provision of opportunities and enabling social conditions.

Developing agency is an iterative process that builds upon past experiences and understandings (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Biesta and Tedder, 2007). Agency also incorporates a projective element, 'the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action' (Embrayer and Mische, 1998, p. 971) and a practical-evaluative element, or 'the capacity...to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possibilities of action' (ibid).   Agency is 'something that is achieved through the active engagement of individuals with aspects of their contexts-for-action' (Biesta and Tedder, 2007, p. 132), when actors 'continuously engage patterns and repertoires from the past, project hypothetical pathways forward in time, and adjust their actions to the exigencies of emerging situations.' (Embrayer and Mische, 1998, p. 1012).

Emirbayer and Mische's analysis emphasizes that different contextual and social factors, or structures, will exert an influence at different points in time across the life-course. Structural contexts are the multi-level relationships and contexts within which people live that govern their entitlements. They exist at household, community, regional, national and international levels, and comprise political, social and associational relations in formal, non-formal and informal settings (Maynard and Stuart, 2018). Giddens (1984) structuration theory positions structures as the components of life that include all our relationships with the human and non-human world and that constrain or enable the freedoms we have to be the people we want to be. Structures influence the degree to which people can act, and the degree of agency that a person is able to enact is closely related to their relationships with these structures, their motivations and their values. Agency must therefore be understood in terms of the life course and how the structures change temporally, influencing the degree of agency that a person has at any point in time (Biesta and Tedder, 2007). Thus, structural

contexts, and hence individual settings, influence autonomy, highlighting the need for positive structures (i.e. relational access mechanisms) to be in place as part of the empowerment process (Castillo, 2009).

Structures are created by people (Bandura, 2016), so it follows that people can change them but to do so may be beyond the reach of an individual. Bandura (2018) recognises that where people do not have the power to change their social conditions they rely on 'socially mediated proxy agency', or, in other words, the help of others. Hartworth, Richards and Convery (2020) reached an identical conclusion but through a lens of entitlement and capability, observing project workers who had strong entitlements and capabilities accessing welfare benefits on the behalf of beneficiaries who lacked the capabilities to access them independently. In terms of developing opportunities for engagement with OL across communities this is a critical point as it suggests that if the initial experiences are suitably autonomy-developing and structurally supported (by the 'gatekeepers') then it is possible to develop the wider community agency necessary to grow participation from within. In other words, a cultural shift regarding how OL/OR is perceived and accessed becomes possible.

14.3.1 Agency and autonomy in outdoor learning programmes

OL approaches can provide a vehicle for the development of agency and autonomy that may be relevant in a specific domain or transferable to wider personal and social development (Loynes, 2010; Fiennes *et al*., 2015). Supporting student autonomy contributes to academic and developmental outcomes in formal education settings (Reeve, 2002), but specific treatment of autonomy in outdoor learning is relatively limited, references tending towards autonomy in a programme rather than as an outcome. In an outdoor adventure context, Beames and Brown (2016) and Sibthorp *et al.* (2008) advocate autonomy supportive teaching which involves giving meaningful choice to students, being clear about the relevance of the content or experience, and being able to empathise with their students about the challenges they may face in engaging with and applying their learning. Sibthorp *et al.* (2008) found that self-led expeditions where students had meaningful involvement enabled them to experience autonomy, as a result of which they were found to develop their sense of ownership and responsibility for the programmes. Such developmental outcomes are linked to how students perceive autonomy: where autonomy is authentic there are greater benefits, allowing students to be 'intrinsically-motivated, perceive themselves to be

in control of their decision-making, [and] take responsibility for the outcomes of their actions' (Fazey and Fazey, 2001, pp. 345-346).

Where participants can exercise choice in the content of a programme or the choice of a leader, examples of what Stefanou *et al.* (2004) in a classroom context describe as organizational and procedural autonomy, experiences *may* be sufficiently meaningful to influence deeper motivation or engagement. Sibthorp *et al*. (2008) found that autonomous participation by students within an outdoor leadership programme led to longer term engagement as autonomous participants post-course. Trainee leaders moving from learner dependence to independent participation with full decision-making control is an important step on the way to autonomous participation; the programme is designed to achieve that goal. The key insight here, however, is the significance of the context of the programme and the motivations of the students, where there was specific intent to develop long term participation.

For other programmes, with different goals, there is debate about whether programme-specific autonomy translates to other contexts, as recognition needs to be given to the idea that a residential (or expedition) is a 'liminal space', which is 'physically, psychologically, and socially separate from one's daily life norms and structures' (Povilaitis, Sibthorp and Warner, 2021, p. 3). Practitioners modelling autonomy-supportive practices, through careful facilitation and agreement at the start of the day about how choice will be enacted, can lead to successful outcomes that impact on participants own hopes and aspirations (Bandura, 2018). Post experience reviewing, intended to bring out the learning that could be applied back at home, can help students to appreciate how they could do similar things themselves, but there is a danger that by focusing on the process it may inadvertently support a perception of the instructor as a key part of the experience (Beames and Brown, 2016).

Beames and Brown (2016) are unconvinced with traditional thinking that supports the transfer of learning from experiences in such a situation to 'real life'. Instead, they propose the development of adventurous activities that are more accessible (closer, cheaper, lower skill requirements), advocating using such activities to develop learner's autonomy and agency by making them more relevant to everyday life. This is not to say, though, that residentials cannot develop aspects of autonomy. Loynes, Dudman and Hedges (2020), for example, found evidence of a positive change in internal locus of control measures for Year 6

pupils attending an outdoor-focused residential, despite this not being a stated goal for the visit. Both approaches have value, and it may be that a blend of both will yield the best results, but in order to maximise the opportunities for long term autonomy development, practitioner attitudes, knowledge and skills may need to develop concurrently with the participants' (Beames and Brown, 2016). This is a significant task, as it potentially challenges strong perceptions of practice and behaviour norms embedded within the 'culturally dense' OL sector (Waite, 2013).

The role of the enablers – the teachers, youth leaders, providers and facilitators – is critical. As well as through self-reflection (Moon, 2004) and knowledge gained through social interaction (Bandura, 1977), the degree to which a person achieves a level of understanding depends on the people who are in the role of teacher (formal or otherwise), the relevance of what is learnt, and the method by which they learn it. Applying Maynard and Stuart's Awareness-Choice-Action model (Figure 14.2) to facilitated practice led by enablers, it is the conversations they have, the experiences they facilitate and the opportunities and support that they signpost that help to promote agency, and thus autonomy (Maynard and Stuart, 2018). They must recognise what they can contribute towards these goals and be able to leave participants with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to further develop their agency and hence autonomy. Doing so has the potential to create a 'golden thread' that links experiences for the individual.

Such development depends on initial engagement of course, and any intention to offer a progressive set of experiences must allow for and promote these opportunities. As the evidence in Study 3 showed, the role of schools and youth groups in introducing CYP to the outdoors and potential activities would appear to be critical. Facilitated experience whether local or otherwise can lead to participants raised awareness of what could be, but the structures within which they live act as constraints that hinder subsequent participation. The corresponding opportunity relies on providers and practitioners understanding the constraints and working with them to not only show what could be possible but by aiding them to actually access them. Individual and community autonomy can be assisted (or hindered) by changing the social structures or contexts within which a person operates (Maynard and Stuart, 2018). For the 'Gatekeepers' interviewed in Study 3, it is the provision (and funding) of alternative experiences that broaden the horizons of CYP and contribute to this agenda.

14.4 Critiques

Autonomy, the capacity to make meaningful choices through a process of rational reflection, seems to offer a viable goal for OL practitioners to work towards. Two significant challenges exist, however. The first is the charge that positions autonomy as an overly anthropocentric, self-centred approach to life, driven by individual wants that are opposed to community and environmental relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Nedelsky (1989, p. 10), writing from a feminist perspective, rejects this view of liberal individualism and places human relations as central to identity. In terms of autonomy, the challenge is 'to understand what social forms, relationships, and personal practices foster that capacity', a challenge based on a concept of the person as only constituted by relations with others. The development of one's values, and through them one's own purpose in life, through social interaction, societal influences and personal experience is an essential part of the development of autonomy (ibid). The account of autonomy used in my thesis relates 'to the feeling of volition that can accompany any act, whether dependent or independent, collectivist or individualist' (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 74).

Any attempt at need satisfaction must be future focused and therefore consider the environment. If we believe a form of life to be good, then its story should continue, only possible with a direct connection to the future and the planet (Doyal and Gough, 1991). Autonomy as a goal of OL cannot be focused purely in the here and now, and neither can it be solely human-centric. The anthropocentric view must be situated in the wider context of 21st Century challenges (c.f. Hannon, 2017), implying that any programmes that are designed or actions that are taken by facilitators of OL must be framed with the health of the planet in mind.

The second challenge is the tension between paternalism and freedom of choice. An autonomous decision is rational, well-informed and taken voluntarily, and is thus 'the property of individuals' decisions that makes them immune to paternalistic interference' (Kious, 2015, p. 1), while paternalism is understood as the interference in personal lives by outside agencies (e.g. government). Paternalistic action opposes individual desire (as may be seen in the tension between parents' and children's wishes) and can be either coercive, in the interest of longer term better living, or libertarian, which helps people do what is best for them by making the 'right' choice easier (Conly, 2012).

Can there be true autonomy if this is the case? Autonomy is the enactment of agency, which is an intrinsically generated act; true agency would only be evident if the individual originated the need for the support structures themselves, and to achieve this they have to be aware of the need (and the benefits), be aware of the opportunities, and have the motivation and capability to act. There is therefore a tension between individual autonomy and government goals that I suggest requires a degree of compromise and a pragmatic approach to enaction. If one of the key goals of a progression model is to enable providers to be able to contribute to cross-governmental policy priorities (Hunt, 2017), there is an implicit acceptance of the government stance and thus any associated paternalism. This situates OL within a generally conformist perspective, but does not preclude other, more subversive perspectives. The entitlement of people in a democracy is to challenge government, a process to which OL, through developing the higher level of autonomy can contribute.

14.5 Autonomy and human development

In his model of outdoor learning progression, Loynes (2019) suggests human development (HD) as an appropriate goal for lifelong learning. Keenan, Evans and Crowley (2016, p. 5) adopting a psychological approach, define development as the 'patterns of change over time' that occur in the biological, social, emotional and cognitive domains, while for Sigelman and Rider (2015, p. 28) it is the broader 'systematic changes and continuities over the life span, involving gains, losses, and neutral changes in physical, cognitive, and psychosocial functioning...[that take] place in an historical, cultural, and subcultural context'. Human development from this perspective has high relevance to outdoor learning, and the attainment of physical, emotional, cognitive and social development outcomes are prominent foci of research in OL (Fiennes *et al.*, 2015) and practice (EOC, 2015). Study 3 richly illustrated the transformative potential of OL experiences in childhood and early adulthood, which led to lifelong autonomous relationships with the outdoors.

A radically different view positions HD as a way of conceptualizing the expansion of the freedoms that people have access to and as an alternative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of wellbeing (United Nations, no date; Sen, 1999). From this perspective any development that promotes agency and the expansion of people's opportunities to lead the lives that they value can be equated to positive human development. A reduction of opportunities or restrictions caused by oppression or restrictive social structures can

therefore lead to 'negative development'. Human development 'is about expanding the richness of human life...[by] creating fair opportunities and choices for all people' (United Nations, n.d.), and involves foundational and contextual aspects. Foundational aspects include being healthy, being knowledgeable and having access to resources for a decent standard of living; contextual aspects include enabling participation in political and community life, supporting human rights and environmental sustainability (ibid).

The centrality of the natural environment in OL suggests that progression in OL is not just an increasingly complex and sequential accumulation of different skills / knowledge / attitudes / behaviours. It is also about the development of an ongoing and deepening emotional connection with the environment, a process that begins with exploring and playing in nature in the early years and continues in the guise of recreation or more targeted experiences throughout adulthood (Natural Resources Wales, 2021). The knowledge and skills associated with effective and competent engagement with the outdoors can be learnt without that emotional connection, but there is a strong argument that an emotional connection lends meaning and purpose to any outdoor activity (Mullins, 2011).

Nature connection has been suggested by Richardson *et al.* (2020) and others as a basic psychological human need that contributes to wellbeing and can lead to levels of engagement that foster pro-environmental behaviours. With the demand for climate change action, environmental conservation and biodiversity protection, nature connection is a tempting goal for outdoor educators. However, as the MENE data shows, there is a clear gap between a pro-environmental attitude and pro-environmental behaviours (Natural England, 2020b). What seems to be missing is the drive (motivation) or support to do something that goes beyond behaviours that have been legislated for and the supporting systems put in place (e.g. domestic recycling). Self-generated behaviours, driven by a belief that they are worthwhile and of intrinsic value are autonomous behaviours that can be fostered by outdoor learning practitioners (Prince, 2017).

An approach that emphasises the expansion of opportunities to lead a flourishing life would seem to offer an appropriate goal for OL if framed by an accompanying awareness of responsibility. Human development from this perspective is about improvements in people's lives, the quality of which relates to wellbeing (Gasper, 2005). Supporting autonomy by developing agency, therefore, leads to positive human development. However, the different

accounts of HD create a potential problem when using it as a linking goal for OL, especially if a preferred outcome is a simple model that is understandable at all levels of practice (Hunt, 2017). For CYP, whose focus is often the activity and self-interest rather than more complex interpretations of development, it is simply too complex. Autonomy, on the other hand, allows for providers to work towards whatever is appropriate as a next step. As Castillo (2009, p. 13) says, 'Human development is a process, not a fixed destination with a pre-determined path. Human beings are in continuous pursuit of exercising their potentials and they do this in different ways in specific contexts.' Autonomy is part of that process, expanding people's opportunities to participate in social life and supporting the development of nature connectedness, health and wellbeing.

As the above discussion shows, an individual's capacity to make meaningful choices through a process of rational reflection enables them to access the activities and experiences that matter to them, whether outdoor related or not. The individual is the connecting thread in any progression model, so it is a logical step to suggest the role of policy makers, providers and practitioners should be to help them access the next step appropriate to their journey. Long term engagement with the outdoors has potential personal, social, societal and global benefits that can be realised through the development of autonomy, but the critical point is that the choices an individual makes are *their* choices. They may choose to engage with the outdoors further for a variety of reasons or they may choose to use their capacity for agency to address a different aspect of their lives.

Castillo (2009, p. 7) summarises that

> autonomy is promoted when the individuals perceive that they have or had options
> – if they freely committed to a cause in the past. It is necessary that they have
> covered their intermediate basic needs (i.e., to feel socially competent),
> developed social networks, experienced choice in previous occasions (so that they
> became aware of their own skills), and interacted in autonomy-supporting contexts.
> Autonomy is more than being in control, it is to be leading one's life. Thus, people
> may explore their potentials and pursue goals coherent with their true self, even
> pushing toward the change of current cultural rules.

Developing autonomy is therefore proposed as the underlying 'thread' that can be used to link OL experiences in a coherent progression that can be understood by all. The proposal recognises the paradox that the outdoors is an important place where people can experience and develop autonomy, but that people need autonomy to underpin access to the outdoors

in the first place. Overcoming this challenge is the focus of the ecosystem delivery model that is the focus of **Chapter 15**.

14.6 Developing the Autonomy Progression Model

This section details the development of my Autonomy Progression Model (APM), an original contribution to knowledge arising from this thesis (Figure 14.3).
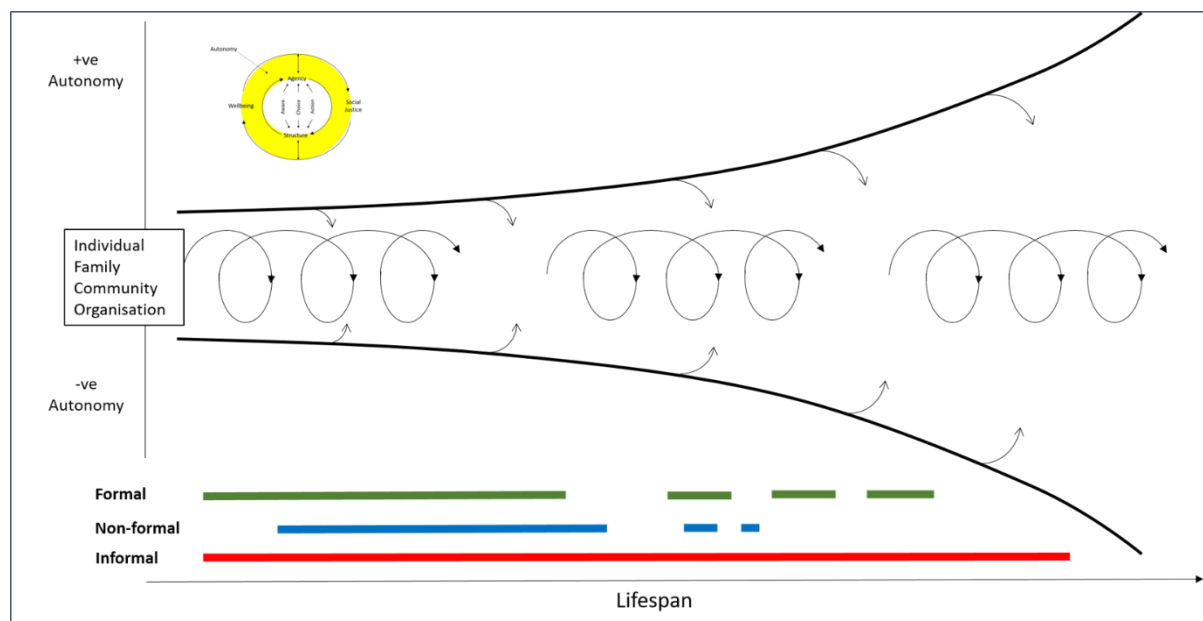
Figure 14.3. The Autonomy Progression Model

The structure of the model provides a visual representation of the way that outdoor learning opportunities in the formal, non-formal and informal settings can contribute to autonomy over the course of childhood and early adulthood. The structure of the model draws on Pretty *et al.*, (2009) and Loynes (2019). In order to achieve greater clarity around an overarching purpose for OL that can serve as a link between potentially unconnected experiences I have proposed autonomy rather than human development as an appropriate goal for three key reasons.

Firstly, autonomy is fundamentally concerned with the power to enact choice through agency. Agency leads to autonomy which leads to greater agency in other domains. Secondly, increased autonomy, through the development of agency, is regarded as a basic human need and key constituent of wellbeing. The rational enactment of informed choices

enables people to have greater control over their own lives and to be effective contributors to society. Thirdly, autonomy should be recognisable to practitioners as something that they can contribute to through their practice without compromising their own values or delivery. The notion of autonomy provides a bridge between progression theory and practice.

The positive and negative trajectories illustrated by the curved lines are theoretical outliers. Reality means that individuals' personal lines are likely to be anything but smooth and will involve positive and negative slopes at different times. Progression and potential engagement with facilitated outdoor learning does not end as a young person becomes a mature adult, so a concept of progression should allow for the whole lifespan.

Engagement with OL provision can happen for a variety of reasons and can lead to a wide variety of individual choices. Participation may originate from a positive, healthy perspective, but could equally be health or social engagement-based interventions that have their basis in, for example, individual or group dysfunction. In the model these are represented by the arrows flowing inwards from the ideal trajectory lines. Each intervention is the ACA model, represented by a spiral that links to both previous and future experience.

Formal, non-formal and informal opportunities are shown across the life course. Formal opportunities exist beyond school, college and university through later engagement with adult education and institutes such as the University of the Third Age. Similarly, non-formal interventions may take place with adults in a variety of situations and informal opportunities happen across the whole life course.

14.7 Implications for practice

The APM provides a multilevel framework for progression, acknowledging the different perspectives of the individual, the provider/practitioner and the system. While there are a number of benefits (table 14.1), the APM on its own only provides a way of understanding the goal. It must therefore be supported by both a higher-level policy framework (such as that proposed by Malone and Waite, 2016) and a delivery model. Taken together the three aspects constitute a workable progression model.

A critical issue raised by the model relates to the earliest experience. If the ACA spiral links to previous experience, how does the initial experience happen? As suggested above, the role of statutory provision would seem to be significant in offering opportunities and providing links for future ones, but there is also scope for initiatives that encourage adult/family engagement. Access Theory offers a lens through which to assess the barriers that might exist and to understand the structures to put in place that can facilitate access in both domains, thus encouraging progressive participation.

For the model to be of value it needs to be applied to practice. On its own it is likely to remain an abstract concept so needs an associated delivery model to make it meaningful. The development of this is the subject of the next chapter. The model also needs introducing to a wider audience in order to explain the reasoning behind it, through workshops and journal articles. As an explanatory tool it provides the justification for the delivery model; without it, there may well be no motivation to change.

Table 14.1. Summary of benefits of the Autonomy Progression Model

System level	• The APM provides continuity by encouraging autonomous participation • Provides a coherent thread to link disparate provision – the link in all experiences is the individual. • Provides a link between providers that can be mutually beneficial • Links facilitated practice with recreation, formal/nonformal/informal • Removes the artificial barriers to OL as 'other' • Congruent with national educational purposes and agendas
Provider level	• Is relatable and implementable for providers and a bridge to higher level goals • Individual progressions have a shared goal of autonomy which moves the participant on. applies to activity coaching, residentials, education, participation • Commensurate with D of E, JMA, technical skills, education, youth work, health, environmental action
Individual level	• Acknowledges the centrality of the individual-relation-to others/environment in the process • Facilitates navigation of structures • Provides signposted ways forwards that meet their goals • Is not prescriptive in terms of outcomes or impact

14.8 Chapter summary

This section has outlined the development of the Autonomy Progression Model (APM). I have proposed autonomy as an underlying thread that can link various outdoor learning interventions in a variety of contexts. Autonomy is regarded as the capacity to make meaningful and rational choices and is the result of applying agency that is developed through a process of awareness raising, understanding of choices and deliberate action.

The model takes a life course perspective, assuming that interventions will contribute to an individual's capacity to choose and act upon their knowledge of available options, the structures within which they live and the freedoms they have to genuinely realise their opportunities. The model is designed to sit alongside an articulation of policy level challenges and provider-focused opportunity and outcome materials.

The APM prompts several questions. For practitioners and providers, how does their practice contribute to autonomy? What additional knowledge and skills are needed for practitioners to develop their participants' agency and autonomy? How do practitioners link experience beyond their own interventions? From a participant perspective, what support systems and structures need to be in place to enable them to be able to link progressive OL experiences that develop autonomy? No single provider will be the sole source of OL interventions across a lifespan, so how can provision be connected for best advantage? Linking the various providers with a common purpose suggests a degree of interdependence between them, an idea similar to the underlying principles of an ecosystem, and the goal of autonomy offers a value proposition, 'the promised benefit that the target of the effort is to receive' (Adner, 2017, p. 43), that can provide the link. The next section explores the concept of the ecosystem as a delivery model in the context of outdoor learning provision across the lifespan.

15 Ecosystems

In previous chapters I have shown how access to OL opportunities is influenced by a wide range of social, economic and cultural factors. Chapter 14 developed the idea of autonomy as a linking 'thread' for OL, but the disaggregated model of OL provision highlights the difficulties that stakeholders may face in creating and supporting the onward cycle of access to further opportunities. The idea of a joined-up offer, supported in the case study evidence, would appear to benefit from a systems approach.   In this chapter I develop the idea of an OL ecosystem as a solution to tackling the inequitable state of access to OL and then test it in practice. The proposed ecosystem model accounts for the institutional and relational factors highlighted through the lens of Access Theory and is supported by a design process aimed at helping practitioners implement such a system.

After discussing the justification for such an approach I explore the idea of systems approaches and then human ecosystems. Broadening the discussion to incorporate social innovation leads to the development of a social innovation ecosystem (SIES) approach. I then draw on the literature to create an SIES design process to guide the development of ecosystems in practice. A mini case study of TOPC illustrates the value of the process as a design/evaluation tool and an assessment of the operational and social challenges associated with its implementation.

15.1 Introduction

The challenges facing individuals and organisations who are keen to implement OL programmes are compounded by the disaggregated state of the OL sector, leading to a piecemeal approach with little join up (Lovell, Depledge and Maxwell, 2018). Any notion of progression would seem to indicate a more cohesive offer, where practitioners, providers and institutions work together to overcome the difficulties leading to increased access. Does the partnership solution offered through schemes such as TOP provide a way forward? A review of the connections between health and the natural environment (Lovell, Depledge and Maxwell, 2018) concluded that positive perceptions of the natural environment and subsequent engagement is more likely if access to and use of the natural environment is 'easy, safe and enjoyable', and built into everyday activities, and they suggest that this is more likely to be achieved through a 'whole systems approach' (p. 14). Health focused

projects, like many OL interventions (Fiennes *et al.*, 2015) suffer from a lack of evaluations, potentially leading to the hard-won knowledge gained from the project not being shared at best, and lost completely at worst. Given the increasing amount of evidence supporting interventions that increase access to the natural environment, such as the MENE survey (Natural England, 2020b) this lack of evaluation may be detrimental to scaffolded progress.

In their review, Lovell, Depledge and Maxwell (2018) identify a number of systemic factors that act as facilitators to provision. Relationships with funders, cultural discourse, strategic links and the 'perceived legitimacy' of initiatives relate to the wider picture beyond the operational barriers and enablers more commonly associated with engagement. These resonate with the aspects of Access Theory discussed previously, although the idea of a whole systems approach is not expanded further.

Despite the OL sector not having a clear focus within Government strategy in England, the situation in sport and health provision is somewhat more developed. The value of partnerships (defined by Corbin, Jones and Barry (2016, p. 5) as 'collaborative working relationships where partners can achieve more than they can on their own') between people and/or organisations is widely recognised as an effective strategy for meeting the goals of increasing physical activity, enhancing mental and physical health and growing civic engagement (Casey, Payne and Eime, 2009). In England, 43 Active Partnerships have been established that aim to 'create the conditions for an active nation', one of which, Active Cumbria, is a Stakeholder in TOPC. The partnerships advocate a 'collaborative whole system approach', acknowledging that participation levels are influenced by a wide range of societal needs and factors (Active Partnerships, no date). Although more focused on traditional routes to physical activity through sport, there is an appreciation of outdoor activities as a means to getting people active which are represented through club links (Active Cumbria, 2021). The system-wide strategy reflects the recommendations of Casey *et al.* (2009) that effective partnerships should link health, sport and community sectors and that formalized approaches have a greater chance of success.

15.2 Systems

A system consists of 'any group of interacting, interrelated or interdependent parts that form a complex and unified whole that has a specific purpose' (Kim, 1999, p. 2), all of which must

be present for the system to transform 'inputs into outputs through activities performed by agents or actors interacting with an environment' (Granstrand and Holgersson, 2020, p. 2).

Using examples of containerisation, education and social media, Leadbeater (2013) suggests that the goal of systems innovation is to create experiences that are repeatable, reliable and often standardised. While standardisation may be a goal of technical innovation, reference to it in the context of outdoor learning quickly leads to the emotive debate surrounding the commodification and commercialisation of outdoor education, adventure and learning (Loynes, 1998, 2002, 2013; Cooper, 2018; Leather, 2018) and the language used to describe the field. However, this may be an issue of interpretation. Rather than standardisation of the product itself, the higher level aspiration of a systems approach to provision could generate a replicable model for increasing opportunities for participants in multiple areas without compromising the freedom of individual providers or the needs and wants of users.

Systems thinking is 'a set of synergistic analytic skills used to improve the capability of identifying and understanding systems, predicting their behaviors, and devising modifications to them in order to produce desired effects' (Arnold and Wade, 2015, p. 675). Reynolds (2011), inadvertently providing justification for a systems approach to the field of OL, suggests that systems thinking in practice

> involves stepping back from messy situations of complexity, change, and uncertainty, and clarifying key interrelationships and perspectives on the situation. It further requires engaging with multiple often contrasting perspectives amongst stakeholders involved with and affected by the situation so as to best direct responsible joined-up thinking with action to bring about morally justifiable improvements.' (Reynolds, 2011, p. 40)

While systems thinking has attracted limited attention in academic discourse, it is more widespread in popular literature. In their study of popular systems-thinking literature applied to human-based systems, Buckle Henning and Chen (2012) identified a number of key characteristics that needed to be understood if systems thinking was to be effectively enacted. They surmised that: systems are purposeful; that members of a system require one another to achieve their goals (interdependence); that people exist in relationship; and the way a system is organised arises from interactions among its members. Underlying these criteria are several 'core tenets': an emphasis on holism; an appreciation that many interacting variables can contribute to a specific outcome; and recognition that change, both predictable and unpredictable, is constant (Lezak and Thibodeau, 2016, p. 144). Given the

challenges affecting access to OL, the need to address the system of inequality, the range of actors present in the current field of OL, the post-Covid state of flux the field finds itself in and the potential for change, a systems approach appears worthy of further exploration.

15.2.1 How systems work

One accessible way of thinking about systems is through the idea of system dynamics. Systems maintain stability through feedback and can be categorised as either reinforcing or balancing processes (Kim, 1999; Buckle Henning and Chen, 2012). At a simple level, a reinforcing system is a positive (virtuous) cycle that produces desirable behaviours. In terms of OL participation this could represent increased opportunities leading to an increase in the number of people taking part who use word of mouth to encourage more people to engage, which increases the demand for opportunities leading to more participants and so on. However, this type of system is ultimately unsustainable as there cannot be an infinite increase in the number of participants and there is a practical limit to what can be offered.

A balancing system, on the other hand, relies on an identified desirable level of achievement or performance. The gap between that and the actual (current) level is identified and corrective actions are applied to increase the performance towards the desired level. As the gap between actual and desired reduces, so the corrective actions become less and the system settles at that level. This system can be seen as self-limiting unless the desired performance level is regularly reassessed. Key performance indicators (KPIs) are an example of desirable levels, gap analyses identify actual performance and action plans indicate corrective actions (Kim, 1999). Systems that are imagined in this way of course are idealised social constructions, and rarely mirror the reality of life, being 'rife with dichotomies and tensions' (Buckle Henning and Chen, 2012, p. 474). The dynamics of a system are often complex and causes and effects are rarely simple pathways but the result of a blend of interrelated factors (Lezak and Thibodeau, 2016). Application to increased participation in OL opportunities suggests the need for agreement between stakeholders of suitable targets. In terms of a theory of change, targets such as these would be the aimed-for outputs of a particular project. Measures of OL engagement, such as time spent learning outside the classroom (Mannion, Mattu and Wilson, 2015) already exist as potential KPIs.

Accepting that a system approach is a potential way forward by which more people can access the benefits of the outdoors and in turn have greater positive influence on their own and the wider environment perhaps necessitates a call for a truce between the proponents

of the 'industry' view and those who favour the 'movement/field' approach. A possible way to achieve this could be through the adoption of the concepts and language of an ecosystem model.

15.3 The human ecosystem concept

Adner (2017, p. 40) defines an ecosystem as 'the alignment structure of the multilateral set of partners that need to interact for a focal value proposition to materialize'. Activity, like energy in a bio-ecological ecosystem, flows between the members. This definition is useful as the constituent parts highlight what is necessary for an ecosystem to be functional and why it is an appropriate term for describing the provision of OL beyond a single specific setting. *Alignment* refers to the mutual agreement amongst members regarding how they fit into the ecosystem. Not all actors will have the same end goals in mind but they must be content with their position in achieving the ecosystem goal. An ecosystem is *multilateral* in that it has multiple partners and relationships which interconnect them beyond simple bilateral relationships. For Adner, the set of partners he describes have a shared role in creating the overall goal and all are essential for achieving it. At the heart of Adner's description of an ecosystem lies the *value proposition*, 'the promised benefit that the target of the effort is to receive' (2017, p. 43). The emphasis on the end goal, or the benefit, suggests that partners have to agree a basic minimum of coordination to achieve it, and it is this goal that sets the internal boundary for the ecosystem, a crucial part of ecosystem design (Valkokari, 2015).

Use of the ecosystem as an underlying concept has an inherent attraction and is growing in popularity (Oh *et al.*, 2016). The term is not without its critics, however. Oh *et al.* (2016, p. 2) highlight the terms mimetic quality as a distinguishing feature and point out that while that may be good enough for public engagement it is inadequate for research purposes; the trend towards bio-mimicry might be laudable but risks inaccuracies when comparing the natural world with a designed one. Their concern is that a bio-ecological ecosystem exists already whereas a human one is designed and both therefore cannot be equated. Ritala and Almpanopoulou (2017) support Oh's assertion that the term is used without consensus and thus can confuse scholarly discourse, but suggest that the eco prefix adds value as it signifies the interdependence of actors. Hecht and Crowley (2020) go further and believe that there is greater benefit to be had by being more attuned to ecosystem structures and concepts. I

would suggest that the use of the term also serves another purpose within the OL sector by drawing on the environmental connection to establish the concept in the minds of practitioners.

The use of the natural world as an analogy offers insights. No two ecological ecosystems are ever the same, and neither are human ecosystems; local variation and adaption are intrinsic to any ecosystem. Hecht and Crowley (2020) purposely use ideas from adaptive management in the field of restoration ecology for their analysis of learning ecosystems, pointing out that humans are part of all ecosystems, whether biological or otherwise, and thus influence ecosystem's health. Drawing on concepts such as ecotones, keystone and indicator species allows for a deeper understanding of the relationships that characterise human ecosystems. I will return to these ideas later.

15.4 Different types of human ecosystem

The concept of ecosystems applied to the socio-economic environment rather than the bio-ecological one has gained popularity over recent years (Jacobides, Cennamo and Gawer, 2018). Generally referring to a group of interacting and interdependent organisations, ecosystem categories are nonetheless subject to debate and disagreement. Jacobides, Cennamo and Gawer (2018) identify three types of socio-economic ecosystems – business, innovation and platform: business ecosystems whose focus is on a firm and its environment; innovation ecosystems, whose focus is on a new innovation; and platform ecosystems where a single organisation acts as a hub for other actors to both generate their own innovation and to access each other's customers. Central to all the models is a lead organisation or individual who 'sets a system-level goal, defines the hierarchical differentiation of members' roles, and establishes standards and interfaces' (Jacobides *et al.*, 2018, pp. 2258-2259). Valkokari (2015) agrees with the categories of business and innovation, but defines a third one as knowledge, whose chief goal is the creation and dissemination of new knowledge.

Although there are examples of partnership models (TOP, for example), the designed ecosystem concept is not easy to identify in the OL sector. The concept of innovation, however, is not alien to the sector, as conference presentations to the AHOEC and BAPA have sought to introduce the idea (Ford, 2014). There is as yet very little evidence of any collective direction of travel. One OL sector example where ecosystem elements are in

evidence is the knowledge ecosystem that exists through the IOL-hosted 'research hubs'. Although not established with an ecosystem model in mind, the cooperation and sharing of ideas is at least indicative of a desire to create interdependent relationships based around the generation and sharing of knowledge (IOL, 2018b). There is potential to explore a more structured approach to the hubs using this model.

Where the ecosystem idea may appear to resonate in the OL sector is at the broadest level, demonstrated through the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. To take a very narrow example, the pandemic led to policy implementation at government level that has had a dramatic effect on society and, more specifically, the OL sector. DfE guidance (IOL, 2020) prevented schools from undertaking residential visits to Outdoor Education Centres which faced closure as a result of a loss of business, in turn impacting the supply chain that supports them. The children who normally benefit from the residentials lost the opportunities for new experiences and the associated benefits that derives from them. Schools could, however, still access the outdoors so there were opportunities for providers of OL to engage in different ways, and the promotion of the outdoors for exercise and health has led to further opportunities for providers to engage with families. The interdependence of the different elements, schools, providers, the environment, the supply chain, government, health and many more is clearly apparent. However, although the system described appears to be aligned with the bio-ecological model of an ecosystem through interdependency, it does not share the same attributes as a human ecosystem: there is no unifying *articulated* value proposition linking the various elements, leaving the human elements focused on fighting for their own survival. It is also apparent that the government, a part of the system, is not acting with the other members, raising the issue of non-alignment (Adner, 2017). What could be a functioning ecosystem is instead confirmed as an 'overlapping patchwork of interests.' (Fiennes *et al.*, 2015, p. 11)

15.5 Innovation ecosystems and education: Learning Ecosystems

Given its focus on creating value for the end-user, the idea of an innovation ecosystem appears to offer a potential structure for delivering a progressive model of outdoor learning, and demand for innovation within education and learning is growing (Leadbeater and Wong, 2010; Ford, 2014). Granstrand and Holgersson (2020, p. 3) suggest that well performing innovation ecosystems can lead to 'dynamic balancing of value creation through "growing

the pie" across complements, complementors, collaborating competitors, and consumers, and value sharing ("slicing the pie") among them' (ibid, p. 8), echoing Ford's (2014) call for the OL sector to do just that. Ford's message was very much one of working together for the common benefit of all, but although there is little sectorial evidence of progress towards this goal, current efforts to bring together sector organisations (AHOEC, BAPA, IOL and the Outdoor Council) under one banner offer some potential.

In the wider education sector, interest in the application of ecosystem models is growing. Hannon *et al.* (2019) identify three different types of ecosystems within the education sphere, two of which - knowledge and innovation - mirror those found in the field of business. The third type, learning ecosystems, consist of 'interdependent combinations of different species of providers and organisations playing different roles with learners in differing relationships to them over time and in differing mixes' (Hannon, Patton and Temperley, 2011, p. 2). It is the intersection between learners, settings and the community and culture where learning occurs (National Research Council, 2015). Learning ecosystems (LES) must therefore include all the various political, structural and socio-economic forces that exist alongside the various providers and organisations within it and that influence a community. Hannon *et al.* (2019) suggest that the role of innovation ecosystems in the context of education is to bring about change at a system level whereas learning ecosystems focus on the delivery of learning experiences. Understanding the purpose behind the ecosystem is therefore critical in establishing the most appropriate type of ecosystem, and although the conceptual parts of all ecosystems are similar, differing purposes will lead to very different KPIs when evaluating their success.

Learning ecosystems (LES) acknowledge the way that learning happens across multiple domains, social settings and time frames and include people, venues, programmes, resources and institutions such as social services and culture (Hecht and Crowley 2020). As LES seek to expand the boundaries of education beyond the formal provision found in schools, their focus is necessarily education based and exclusively on the delivery of learning experiences (Hannon, *et al.*, 2019).

Inequitable access to OL (and OR), however, provides a broader social challenge involving structural and institutional change. While the idea of an ecosystem focused on OL is attractive I suggest it is too narrow with regard to the challenge of dismantling the 'coin of inequality' (Nixon, 2019) represented by inequitable access to OL opportunities and

discussed in **Chapter 13**. There is little point in an ecosystem model that assumes participation if CYPF cannot access a start point or baseline provision. An alternative lens is provided by the idea of social innovation.

15.6 Social Innovation

A social innovation (SI) is a distinct type of innovation that is context specific and can be defined as encompassing 'new solutions (products, services, models, markets, process etc.) that simultaneously meet a social need (more effectively than existing solutions) and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources' (The Young Foundation, 2012, p. 18). An SI involves improving the access to resources and hence benefits, and changing the power relations that influence that access. A further common feature is that an SI has the potential to develop the capabilities (freedoms) that people have to access the opportunities. People are conceptualised as having agency and thus are able to develop their own solutions and pathways (ibid). They are thus involved as assets and in the creation of assets. Given my goal for developing new ways of increasing participation while maintaining a pragmatic approach to applying theory into practice, this thesis adopts a straightforward definition that summarises SI succinctly as 'a process of changing social relations, involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and knowing' (Pel *et al.,* 2020, p. 314).

Practices change through repetition, and imitation is the key mechanism by which social practices are reproduced and transformed (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017). Within the OL sector this process has been apparent with the shift of adventure experiences from small-scale outdoor education providers to commodified mass-market activity providers. High ropes challenge courses, for example, were initially introduced as developmental tools and are now mass-market recreation activities. In a similar way, social change emphasises that imitation of a *social* invention leads to a change of practice. This theoretical lens highlights and justifies the need for providing the opportunity to engage progressively rather than just through a series of 'tasters'.

Social initiatives work in conjunction with other developments and innovations to create change. Infrastructure initiatives such as the creation of a new cycle path, for example, enable the social practice of cycling for education, recreation and health to happen. The invention of the electric bicycle, itself imitated and developed by multiple manufacturers, is

taken up by entrepreneurs and institutions and adds a further layer of complexity. Some of these actors, such as bicycle retailers, are driven by profit (business innovation), some, such as the district council, are driven by the end goal of improved wellbeing (social innovation). Increased opportunity and ease of access increases the chances of participation and the potential to effect long lasting behaviour change, promoting agency and autonomy. There is a continuous process of social innovation driven by innovation (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017). The path to wellbeing is thus a complex interaction of invention, innovation and structural change.

While the importance of SI for addressing societal social, environmental, political, and economic goals is increasingly recognised, key challenges remain at a local level to both develop cross-sectorial collaboration and to co-create a local agenda (Domanski, Howaldt and Kaletka, 2020). I propose a potentially effective way to achieve this is through the creation of a social innovation ecosystem. The next section examines the structure of such systems.

15.7 Social Innovation Ecosystems (SIES)

The ecosystem concept applied to SI acknowledges the context – the structures, the institutions and the culture within which the SI exists. Ecosystems thus hold both the supporting factors that will help achieve the goals and the obstructive influences that can potentially hinder progress. The ecosystem that is context-sensitive needs to be able to 'identify, analyse and connect' both drivers and barriers that might be encountered (Kaletka, Markmann and Pelka, 2016, p. 85). Drawing on Adner (2017) and Pel *et al.* (2020), I define an SIES as *the alignment structure of the multilateral set of partners that need to interact for a new focal value proposition to materialize, one that focuses on a process of changing social relations involving new ways of doing, organizing, framing and knowing*.

As the goal of this thesis is to move from theory to practice, the next section focuses on the design of an SIES. To achieve this I first outline two frameworks from the literature that support an analysis of SIES. I then draw on these and other concepts introduced earlier in the chapter to develop an original design process applicable to SIES in the field of OL/OR. These criteria are then applied to practice in order to evaluate TOPC as a potentially evolving SIES.

15.8 Designing SIES

The first issue to consider is one of purpose. As with the business and innovation ecosystems, SIES are populated with multiple actors and organisations Pel *et al.*, (2020) propose a typology (table 15.1) that can inform distinct approaches to SIES. The typology is based on three distinct empowerment processes: local embedding; translocal connectivity and discursive resonance. *Local embedding* accounts for local need and relevance, critical mass (i.e. the critical engagement with the SI necessary to enable success), and the provision of accommodation and resources (for example, office space, IT infrastructure and meeting spaces). *Translocal connectivity* refers to the connections that SIs have beyond their immediate locality that contribute to their goals. *Discursive resonance* goes beyond the two previous aspects to involve the sharing of SI concepts and practices to gain societal and political authority. Promotion through websites, newsletters and social media all contribute to the wider public discourse and awareness.

The typology serves as a heuristic that enables SIES to be designed or evaluated, reflecting ambitions and needs at local level where there will be differences in engagement, empowerment processes, interaction and geographic scope. Pel *et al.* suggest that SIES can position themselves in their local environments with insight into what may be required to achieve outcomes associated with a different category.

Table 15.1. Typology of social innovation ecosystems (based on Pel *et al.*, 2020)

Type	Local embeddedness	Translocal connectivity	Discursive resonance
A. *Coral Reef* High levels of empowerment across all three dimensions	Strong local support leads to the development of organisational models, practice formats, know-how and legitimacy.	Strong identity, political voice and knowledge base. Uptake of models, practices and evidence in wider society.	Strong connections with national agendas and policy leading to the development of a brand associated with the SI and wide engagement with actors.
B. *Badger Castle* Low levels of empowerment across all three dimensions	Low embeddedness due to lack of resources and supportive alliances, or purposive design as a result of a desire for seclusion.	Low, sometimes reflecting a desire for independence, flexibility and seclusion.	Low, with relatively few actors engaged with beyond the SI group, either deliberately or out of necessity.
C. *Fish Pond* Empowerment primarily through strong local embedding	Strong through legitimacy, locally developed critical mass, provision of material and resources and institutional anchorage.	Moderate, reflecting the close proximity of the network to the SI. Key actors are NGOs, citizens, local government, and civil society organisations	Weak or strong. Local and national policies are relevant.
D. *Fungi Strand* High empowerment through translocal connectivity but with low local embedding.	Low, due to a focus on wider impact beyond the immediate SI area via national and international institutions and organisations.	Strong, through translocal critical mass, collective voice and identity and facilitation of knowledge sharing	Strong, seeking to increase the circulation of organisational models, practices and knowledge
E. *Seeds Flight* Empowers chiefly through high discursive resonance	Negligible	Negligible	Pivotal, involving authoritative actors and organisations mediating and spreading organisational models, practice and knowledge society wide through communication infrastructures.

An alternative way of viewing SIES is provided by Kaletka *et al.* (2016) who propose the Onion Model (Figure 15.1) as a way of identifying the different contexts of social innovation ecosystems: roles, functions, structures and norms. The *context of roles* identifies the roles of stakeholders, their socio-demographic background and their competences and motivations. The *context of functions* ascertains the activities undertaken by the stakeholders, how they are interlinked, governance structure and management procedures, and issues of scaling. The *context of structures* asks which institutions and structures influence the function and roles. It includes technological, political and financial constraints. The *context of norms* includes the laws, standards, cultural expectations, norms and ethical assumptions that influence innovation. The onion can be 'sliced' from outside layer to the inner core, reflecting constraints and barriers, or from the centre outwards reflecting social

change through increasingly embedded (i.e. institutionalised) practices. The Onion Model improves understanding of the various factors that support or hinder an SIES and resonates with Access Theory's access mechanisms (**Chapter 6**).
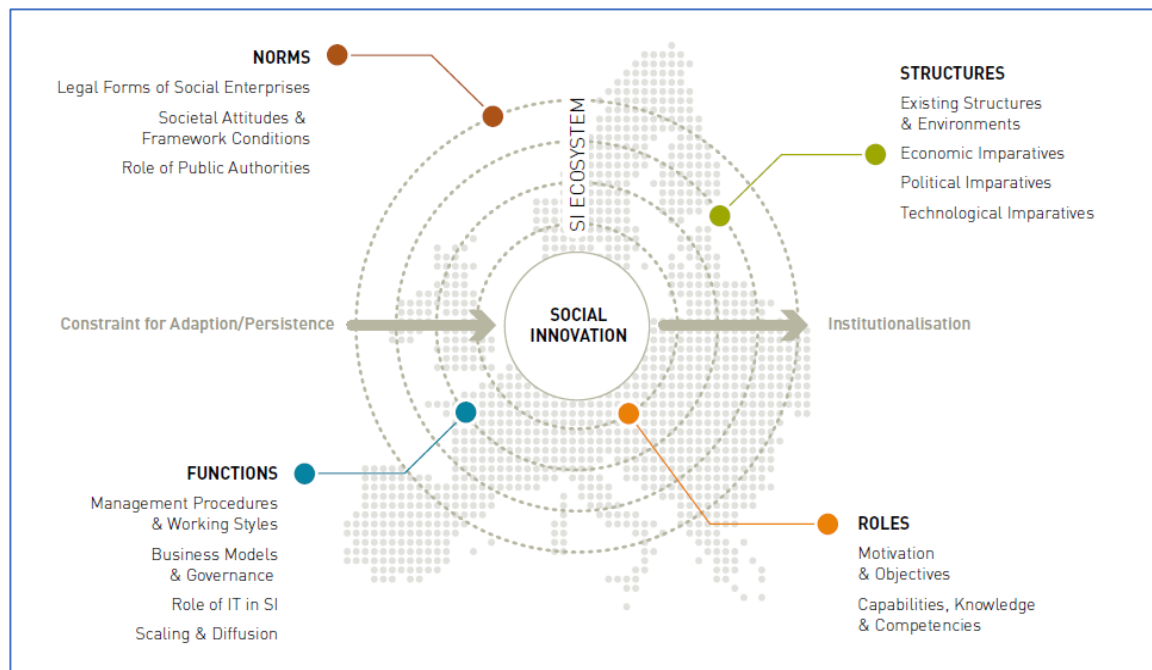
Figure 15.1. The Onion Model (Pelka and Markmann, 2015 in Kaletka *et al.*, 2016, p.13)

15.9 Designing an SIES to address inequitable access to OL

The different perspectives on ecosystems and SIES outlined above highlight the conditions necessary for an effective SIES. Drawing these together I propose a set of design criteria that can be applied in different settings that aim to address the issue of inequitable access to the benefits afforded through OL/OR. The process also draws on the European SIMPACT research project *Guide to Identifying Drivers and Barriers for Social Innovation* (Pelka and Markmann, 2015).

Drawing on the above literature, four key stages can be applied to ecosystem design:

1. Identify an (eco)system approach as a potentially effective solution to an identified problem;
2. Design the (eco)system, accounting for the different factors at work;
3. Identify criteria and methods to monitor and manage the effectiveness of the ecosystem;

4. Establish the ecosystem in the wider translocal sector, and produce and share knowledge.

Stage 1. *Identifying an ecosystem approach as a potentially effective solution*

A critical question for ecosystem design is whether the invoking of the concept contributes to the desired outcomes or is more effective than existing models of frameworks. In other words, can they be achieved in a different way that is more effective? For the potential stakeholders in an ecosystem there has to be a reason to join. Stakeholders are autonomous entities whose performance is tied to the overall performance of the ecosystem (Jacobides, Cennamo and Gawer, 2018); if the key defining aspect of an ecosystem is the interdependence of the stakeholders, how do the aims of the partner overlap with the goals of the SI?

Not all interventions require or will benefit from an ecosystems approach, and solutions may already be in play. Small scale interventions that have specific goals, for example a school working with a residential provider, may only require two organisations to collaborate. An ecosystem approach brings together multiple actors and by so doing helps them to meet their organisational goals as well as the overall desired goal. The type of ecosystem (Pel *et al.*, 2020) will depend on the nature of the overall aim, which will lead in turn to context-specific evaluation criteria.

Underlying the SI ecosystem concept are core principles that influence the subsequent design (after Pol and Ville, 2009; Reynolds, 2011; National Research Council, 2015; Adner, 2017; Jacobides, Cennamo and Gawer, 2018; Pel *et al.*, 2020):

1. The innovation is intentional (i.e. has a clear purpose) and aims to change something for the better;
2. An understanding of the context (structural and institutional factors) for innovation at local, regional and national scales is necessary;
3. The SIES must be locally embedded and have enough scope to achieve a critical mass of engagement;
4. The innovation aims to make best use of existing resources (people, systems, money and things) and secure resources for future activities, enhancing existing provision rather than competing with it;

5. All partners are treated as equals;

6. Members of the ecosystem require one another to achieve their goals (interdependence);

7. A focal organisation, hub or leader is necessary to coordinate, facilitate relationships and set standards (KPIs);

8. Resources and accommodation (institutional anchorage) are required to facilitate the SIES;

9. External funding is highly advantageous for an ecosystem to be effective.

Stage 2. *Designing the ecosystem*

The ten aspects listed below reflect the contexts of roles, functions, structures and norms that influence an SIES (Kaletka, Markmann and Pelka, 2016) and the SIES typology proposed by Pel *et al.* (2020). They also draw on findings from the thesis research studies, Access Theory (Ribot and Peluso, 2003) and theory of change ideas. The stages are presented sequentially but it is acknowledged that they may happen simultaneously or across extended periods of time. It is suggested, however, that the value proposition is determined first to ascertain agreed direction.

1. **The value proposition** is 'the promised benefit that the target of the effort is to receive' (Adner, 2017, p. 43). This reflects the gap between the existing and desired situations, and is usually well articulated as it relates closely to funding requirements. Generation Green (GG), for example, aims to 'connect young people to nature, create and save jobs, and build an aspirant workforce for a green recovery' (YHA, 2021). Partners have to agree a basic minimum of coordination to achieve the goal, and it is this goal that sets the internal boundary for the ecosystem.

2. Identification of **funding streams**. The reliability of funding is one of the biggest challenges that social innovators face (Pelka and Markham, 2015). Multiple sources of funding reduce risk and increase sustainability. Funding sources for OL initiatives include the National Lottery, BBC Children in Need, Sport England, Government (e.g. Defra, DfE), Natural England, grant-giving trusts, and private philanthropy (IOL, 2021g).

3. **Identification and recruitment** of the actors. Terstriep (2020) identifies four categories of actors in SI: developers, who translate knowledge about the situation into action with

the goal of improving it; promoters, who provide infrastructure, access to funding, resources, and link to other policy and programmes; supporters, who are the facilitators and gatekeepers to other social institutions that assist the 'spread and diffusion' of social innovations; and knowledge providers who provide relevant knowledge to support the innovation, such as academia. Recognising and supporting groups who in turn support disadvantaged communities encourages the legitimisation, or social acceptance, of SI (Pelka and Markmann, 2015).

The scale of the SIES is significant. For a large project, involving organisations with a nationwide remit (e.g. Generation Green or Nature Friendly Schools) partners may have the capacity to adopt multiple roles. For smaller projects, it may be necessary to clearly identify the relevant categories and recruit accordingly.

4. The **position of the beneficiaries** in the ecosystem is debatable. Ecosystem models tend to follow the model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and place them at the centre of an increasingly wide set of influences, perpetuating the idea that inequity can be addressed through a focus on the individual rather than the structures surrounding them (Hecht and Crowley, 2020). Borrowing from ecology, Hecht and Crowley (2020) point out that bio-ecosystems do not have a centre and that all elements of the system are both influenced by and influence the system. In the human world, Structuration Theory provides a theoretical framework that explains how social systems and social structures are 'iteratively and reciprocally created by agents who are both constrained and empowered by institutions' (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014, p. 47). In human ecosystems, organisations co-evolve as practices change. All the members of the ecosystem are, in fact, the beneficiaries. Figure 15.2, an original contribution to the literature, develops my disaggregated model of OL provision in **Chapter 4** (Figure 4.1) to represent an ecosystem. The focus of the SIES, the disadvantaged groups not benefiting fairly from the affordances of the outdoors, are an equal player. The central position instead is represented by the focal organisation / hub, not to represent a hierarchical position, but rather to signify the coordination role they hold. The idea as applied to the OL sector is still new and such roles are as yet rare in practice.

5. Critical at this stage is **partner alignment** (Adner, 2017), the mutual agreement of how they fit into, and what they can offer, the ecosystem. An understanding of partner goals, their resources, motivations and challenges is necessary at this stage. Casey, Payne and

Eime (2009) suggest that in order to formalise their commitments partners should both articulate and document their roles and responsibilities. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is one way of providing a means of securing this commitment (e.g. Youth Justice Board, 2008; Youth Justice Board, 2008).
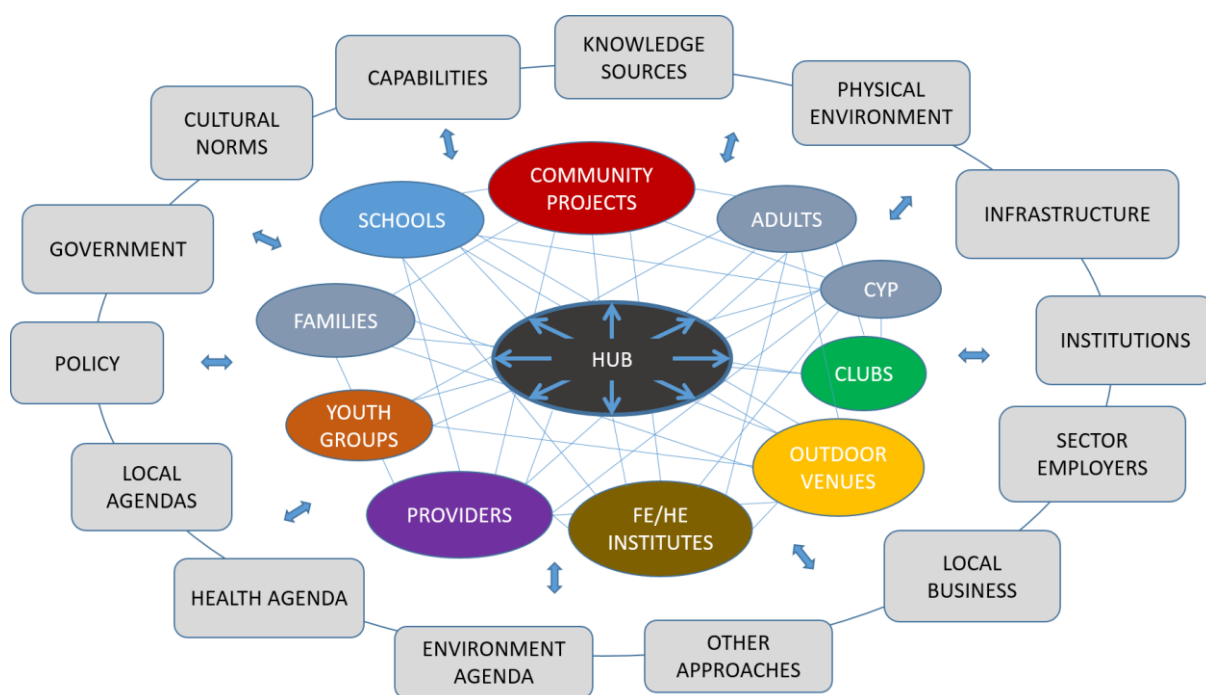
Figure 15.2. The OL Ecosystem Model (OLES)

6. Through **research**, gather an understanding of the factors influencing access in the local area using an Access Theory lens. The existing landscape is critical for developing a locally targeted SI that meets specific needs and engages the target population. An intervention in Copeland may be very different to one in another part of the country subject to different socio-cultural factors. This research should also pay attention to existing institutions, or 'how things are done'. Volunteers, for example, a core part of the OL/OR sector, are often seen as a significant economic resource, but need managing.

7. By **establishing contacts** and **building relationships (and trust)** with local providers, funders, enablers and community groups, understand the full range of potential resources available. For OL stakeholders this means engaging with the wider sector and seeking opportunities for progression and connection.

8. Develop a meta-level **theory of change** for the SI and support programme-specific ToC development. The theory of change helps to identify desired impacts and outcomes and provides a framework for evaluation (see **Chapter 6**).

9. Establish a form of **governance** that facilitates the goals of the SIES being met. This may not happen immediately depending on the initial form of the SIES.

10. Develop a **communication system** (social media, websites, newsletters) to engage with stakeholders intra- and translocally.

Stage 3. *Monitoring and managing the ecosystem*

The literature on evaluating ecosystem effectiveness is sparse, Pelka and Markmann (2015) commenting that evaluations are rarely carried out. Theory of change methodology suggests that outcomes and impact should be measurable (Noble, 2019), and these and the outputs (i.e. the products, services or facilities that result from an organisation or project's activities (Harries *et al.*, 2014)) will provide evidence for the effectiveness of individual programmes and, more widely, the ecosystem. Critical in such an assessment of the ecosystem itself is an appreciation of what has been achieved that would otherwise not have been without the ecosystem. A further assessment of ecosystem effectiveness can be achieved by assessing how ecosystem generated programmes have helped individual partners achieve their own organisational goals. If the ecosystem is functioning as a true ecosystem then interdependence means that partners will be able to achieve less without the ecosystem than with. True interdependence would signify that the collapse of one organisation would have serious consequences for others in the system, although it is unlikely that many, if any, commit to this degree.

An alternative yet supporting way of looking at ecosystem management is proposed by Hecht and Crowley (2020). They draw on adaptive management practices from ecological restoration to suggest that the ideas of ecotones, keystones, trophic cascades and disturbance/resilience can be used to manage and monitor ecosystem health. The concepts, described below, provide a way of looking at aspects of the ecosystem that promote its health. The overt reference to biological ecosystems reinforces the message that a healthy ecosystem is a successful one.

Ecotones

Ecotones are the 'fluid transition spaces' (Hecht and Crowley, 2020, p. 274) that comprise the boundaries between different elements of an ecosystem. In an SIES they are the transition spaces between different stakeholders. Beyond signposting, attention needs to be paid to where these ecotones are situated and how the transitions can be facilitated, which may require training and support. How, for example, do young people make the transition to attending a canoe club after a single school residential experience? How do families access the skills and knowledge to go for a walk in the countryside when it is regarded as only a place and space for others? Providing someone who can accompany that first visit, or putting on events in the local area that assist with the development of skills and knowledge encourage autonomy (Bandura, 2018; Hartworth, Richards and Convery, 2020). Successful management and monitoring of the boundaries between ecosystem elements can help to facilitate progressive learning pathways that have been shown to be directly related to long term interest and identity development (Hecht and Crowley, 2020).

Keystones, trophic cascades and indicator species

Hecht and Crowley (2020) propose the idea of keystone species as a management tool for ecosystems. In biological ecosystems keystone species have a significant positive impact on the health of ecosystems. The parallel role in a learning ecosystem, they suggest, is that of 'well-trained, caring, knowledgeable, and connected educators', the 'full range of adults, in and out of school, who interact with youth as part of the larger system' (p. 275). In the context of an SIES with a broader remit than just youth, this suggests an investment in the people and organisations who facilitate the OL opportunities, not least of which is the lead organisation or individual who acts in a hub or development officer role. This suggestion is supported by the findings from the research that emphasised the importance of parents as enablers. Supporting these organisations helps to build capacity through staff training and increased resources, a 'trophic cascade' of energy from the intermediaries to the program providers to the participants' (ibid, p. 276).

As practitioners and provider organisations can be regarded as keystone species, so CYPF can perhaps be regarded as indicator species. Just as the presence of certain species in biological ecosystems indicates the health of the system, Hecht and Crowley suggest that participants' engagement can be used as a 'barometer of ecosystem health'. Monitoring participation and engagement data (as described in **Chapter 4**) provides such a method.

Disturbance and resilience

Disturbances to ecosystems take the form of constant changes, often brought about by external forces. Biological ecosystems' capacity to recover from such events is a measure of their resilience (Hecht and Crowley, p. 277). In terms of an SIES, disturbances could be caused by social, political, or economic events which may have a minor or major impact on the health of the ecosystem. Most dramatically recently has been the disturbance caused by the Covid-19 pandemic which prevented people meeting outdoors for significant periods of time. The impact on the outdoor sector and people's engagement with the outdoors has been significant and may lead to a revised landscape of provision. Assessing the likely trends and local impact directs the management of the ecosystem and suggests what activities should be supported. This is no more than would happen in a business planning context, but emphasises the need for a focal organisation, hub or leader to undertake it.

Stage 4. *Network development and knowledge sharing*

Pelka and Markmann (2015) suggest that SI actors should seek to embed their initiatives into larger contexts that are better understood at policy level. Within the context of OL, the policy agendas of education, health and the environment currently dominate the discourse which, as previously discussed, has led to the suggestion of policy surfing (Allison, 2016). Significant here is that instead of policy surfing as a survival mechanism, whereby providers access funding to deliver their existing product by mapping outcomes against existing policy goals, there is a specific intent in the SIES framework to meet more distal impact goals. The shift is subtle but emphasises the importance of a theory of change.

Pel *et al.* (2020, p. 315) draw attention to the different levels of 'network constellations' that empower SIES to extend their actor networks. The local level of embeddedness means local needs are addressed, there is a critical mass of engagement, and that local institutions are acting as anchors to provide further legitimacy. At the translocal level, network engagement with other initiatives builds a broader movement that supports a more robust evidence base that can influence both policy and future fund raising, as well as providing an in-flow of knowledge that can enhance the SIES (Terstriep, Rehfeld and Kleverbeck, 2020). The wider picture of 'discursive resonance' (Pel *et al.*, 2020) involves sharing of novel ideas that may resonate elsewhere. SI are shaped by the dissemination of knowledge and its application through imitation and cooperation (Domanski, 2020). The role of academia is thus important

in facilitating the processes that help to both create and spread knowledge, with engagement through the IOL Research Hubs a potential avenue. Academic knowledge of how SIES are created, introduced, and sustained is scarce (ibid, p. 464), but analytic knowledge generated through academia has a potential contribution to make. The dissemination of that knowledge is often problematic and requires interpretation for many practitioners. The wider goal of developing access to the outdoors for learning and recreation demands an approach that builds on the knowledge generated locally.

15.10 Testing the theory: an assessment of TOPC through an SIES lens

I am grateful for the information provided through conversations with Paul Airey (TOP Chair of Trustees), Tracey Evans (TOP Chief Executive Officer), Paul Frost (TOP Trustee responsible for governance) and Claire Bryant (TOPC Development Officer) in support of this analysis.

Applying the OLES design process, Stage 1 asks designers to consider core principles. Stage 2 presents a set of OLES 'components' that should ideally be present. Stage 3 establishes monitoring and management aspects, and Stage 4 considers the wider reach of the OLES. This analysis describes how far TOPC meets the design principles and so ascertains the degree to which it can be called an ecosystem and where future developments may lie.

Stage 1: Principles

1. TOPC has a clear purpose that aims

> to inspire local people to regularly engage in healthy activities outdoors to improve their sporting, educational, social, economic and community potential. This can be achieved by bringing together key delivery agents to work collaboratively to use resources effectively for maximum impact. (Outdoor Partnership, no date)

There is a clearly defined goal to change something for the better.

2. Research completed as part of this thesis has identified the contextual factors at a local and regional and national level, detailed in Chapters 11-13, and summarised in Harvey (2020).

3. TOPC is locally embedded in Copeland. Although the population is relatively small and dispersed, there is potential to expand up the coast and further inland increasing the opportunity for projects to achieve 'critical mass'.

4. Through the Stakeholder group, TOPC has made strong connections with other local organisations including Active Cumbria, the local Council and health services. Successful applications have been made to local funders, enhancing opportunities and increasing long term sustainability.

5. The Stakeholder group treats all members as equals. No organisation is favoured over another, projects being needs-led and involving a range of partners as appropriate.

6. Members of the ecosystem require one another to achieve their goals. Clubs, providers and organisations are beginning to realise their own goals as a result of funded projects through TOPC. There is thus a growing sense of interdependence.

7. TOPC acts as the focal hub, facilitating relationships and instigating projects.

8. The District Council provides office space and a computer, facilitating local embeddedness.

9. External funding is provided through the Lottery grant and other small grants form local funders.

Stage 2: Design

If TOPC was following the SIES design process that I have proposed, what stage would the organisation be at? Stage 2 contains 9 phases, indicated in **bold** in the following account.

TOPC has a strong **value proposition** and is successfully identifying and accessing **funding** streams. **Stakeholders** have been recruited and are engaged on a regular basis through Stakeholder meetings. The Stakeholder group, described in Chapter 9, contains: developers, including the Development Officer (DO), and also the practise-focused partners; promoters, such as the Council and the project consultants who provide resources and access to national funding; supporters, the facilitators and gatekeepers to other organisations who assist the spread of the projects, such as Active Cumbria; and knowledge providers, represented by the University of Cumbria. Representation from the education, youth and health services ensures connection with disadvantaged communities. Partner alignment is addressed through the signing of a memorandum of understanding by Stakeholders that formalises their commitments to TOPC and the Stakeholders.

One gap at present is the omission of any direct representation from CYPF beneficiaries. In Wales, representation of participants is through a TOP membership scheme that enables clubs to have a vote at the Annual General Meeting. Strategy, proposed and agreed by the

Stakeholders, is thus voted on by the membership who represent the 'grass-roots' beneficiaries of the programme. This has yet to be established in Copeland.

As part of this thesis, extensive research using an Access Theory lens has been carried out to understand the factors that affect access to OL/OR in Copeland. Relationships are being developed with on an ongoing basis and are leading to successful funding applications and new initiatives, arising from critical agendas identified in the research, such as mental/physical health and employment (TOPC, 2021). TOP c**ommunicate** via Facebook and Twitter social media platforms.

Not all aspects of Stage 2 are as well developed. TOPC has yet to develop a theory of change either at a meta-level or for individual projects, although the DO has accessed training on the subject. Governance has yet to be finalised. TOPC is currently run as a part of the parent body including central funding and line management of the DO. There is a stated intent for TOPC to be an independent legal entity that has been delayed due to Covid-19.

Stage 3: Management and Monitoring

Monitoring is limited to outputs of projects in terms of numbers of participants ('indicator species'). Support for 'keystone' investment has occurred through canoe coach education and first aid training, both of which are enabling strategies that facilitate greater participation.

Stage 4: **Network development and knowledge sharing**

The DO has regular information sharing meetings with the other regional project DO's, although there is no wider sharing of knowledge beyond the Stakeholder meetings. In terms of the typology developed by Pel *et al*. (2020), the degree of local embeddedness and discursive resonance suggests that TOPC is a 'Fish pond' type of SIES. Local embeddedness is still evolving and translocal connectivity is becoming established through the relationship between TOPC and the other projects in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Discursive resonance is implicit in the projects that are being established although there is scope to make these links more overt.

In Wales, the focus on critical agendas has arguably been a key factor in the successful application by TOP that led to scaling out of the programme, the intention of which is to replicate a successful model (and value proposition) rather than to influence policy. Westley *et al*. (2014, p. 251) refer to this approach as 'polishing gemstones', the emphasis being on developing a quality programme that, in effect, can be marketed. Although the language may be disputed, this is what has happened: TOP have taken their model to significant funders and sold the idea, enabling it to be established elsewhere under strict brand guidelines. While there is no material gain, there is a conscious effort to maintain and develop the attendant intellectual property and brand which in turn can be used to leverage further funding. It is likely that TOPC successes will be used to further 'polish the gemstone'. TOP's goals have driven the degree to which they share knowledge.

The focus of SI on local problems invariably creates challenges when attempting to scale out or up. 'Scaling out' refers to 'an organization's efforts to replicate and disseminate its programs, products, ideas, or innovative approach' with a view to influencing more people over a wider geographic area. 'Scaling up', on the other hand, refers to an organisation's aims to affect *everybody* who may benefit from the innovation. The former requires implementation in a variety of different and unique contexts, whereas the latter aims to change the system that created the inequality in the first place (Westley *et al.*, 2014, p. 237). While scaling out may affect the situation at a local level it does not necessarily challenge it. To dismantle a system of inequality demands action at policy level to effect system change, a realisation that may only come about as a result of scaling up (Westley *et al.*, 2014). A necessary precondition of scaling, whether out or up, is to be clear about what the goal is.

15.11 TOPC and the Autonomy Progression Model

Through the lens of the OLES, TOPC can be regarded as a developing SIES as it meets the criteria I have set out in my design process. Neither TOPC nor the original TOP have been developed with a formalised ecosystem model in mind, yet the strength of the approach means that future delivery models similar to TOP can be designed with certain components in mind and consequently be effective more quickly. Applying the OLES framework to existing models can highlight their potential strengths and areas for development. For TOPC, governance and the development of a ToC are apparent weaknesses in the design stage.

The purpose of the OLES is to enable the delivery of activities that are linked through the Autonomy Progression Model. The research in Study 2 and 3 highlighted the importance of signposting and small progression steps that enabled participants to become aware of opportunities and to access them through building confidence and capability. Such mechanisms are the domain of the ecotones and so it would seem vital that attention is paid to these by TOPC. Developing progressive opportunities through funding and utilisation of the human resources available to the ecosystem is part of the picture, yet evidence shows that if the processes in the ecotones are ignored then they will not be accessed. This has already occurred for the 'Pathways to Employment in the Outdoors' programme which failed to recruit despite being fully funded. The reasons why are as yet unknown, but it is tempting to speculate. Could it have been seen as unobtainable or irrelevant due to cultural perceptions? Might the people who may have benefited from the course not known about it, or, if they did know, were the steps needed to access it too big? Paying attention to the ecotones appears to be critical.

15.12 Challenges

Neither TOPC nor TOP set out to dismantle any systems of inequality, although they do seek to improve the current situation. If TOP had different goals (e.g. to influence policy), a different model would apply requiring higher levels of translocal connectivity and a different communication strategy would need to be developed in order to scale up rather than out.

While the idea of an SIES that seeks to address the inequitable access to the outdoors for education and recreation appears to be desirable, if not essential, a number of challenges associated with its implementation are identifiable. These can be broadly classified as operational issues associated with the actual implementation of the project, and broader social issues associated with the perception of the project from existing institutions and organisations.

15.12.1 Operational issues

The design considerations outlined above give an indication of some of the challenges that can be faced. Lack of focus, lack of partner alignment, lack of funding, poor partner recruitment, lack of institutional support in terms of resources and a base, issues with governance, lack of contextual understanding, poor or absent leadership, and a deficiency of, or lack of access to, supporting business skills can all impact the potential for success. Responses to these issues will inevitably be local and can, I suggest, be addressed by using the OLES design process framework.

15.12.2 Social issues

Social initiatives are known to struggle against extant cultural and institutional narratives that resist or reject the proposed changes, leading to a gap between the desired, potential impact, and the actual impact (Kaletka *et al.*, 2016; Terstriep *et al.*, 2020). Silo thinking prevails as actors insist on retaining known ways of doing things. In part this may be because the new innovation is perceived as a threat to their business, where moving beyond competition to cooperation in a market economy is potentially very challenging, but may also reflect a mindset that seeks to avoid taking another actor's perspective. SIES require that actors widen or leave their own field of interest in order to create cooperative practices (Pel and Markmann, 2015). Risks associated with actor's ability to develop the skills to undertake their role in the SIES, or those associated with their willingness to contribute can also hinder progress (Adner, 2017). Positive messaging and visible benefits, coupled with access to appropriate training may break down some of these barriers.

A further challenge can be caused by exclusion during the design process resulting in actors who perceive their involvement as important feeling alienated if not invited. Promotion of certain activities could exclude other actors, and allocation of resources socially and geographically can be problematic. SI actors need to be aware and mindful of the different perspectives within the ecosystem as one actor or organisation's goal may conflict with another's. Cajaiba-Santana (2014) argues that SI will only succeed if due attention is paid to the individuals involved, not only through their values and behaviours but also through how they interact with the social systems in which they exist.

Alongside the provider and enabler actors, the target beneficiaries of the SIES may end up as more marginalised as the improvements (increased participation numbers, for example) are more easily achieved by the more agentic i.e. the least marginalised groups. As discussed in **Chapter 13**, how a marginalised group sees itself may well be different to how others see it (Kerwin-Nye, 2019) which can lead to a disjoint of how the SI is perceived, and whether a group feels 'done to' or not. There is also a chance that the innovation will fail with potentially damaging consequences, leaving people in a worse state than when they began. Far from dismantling the 'coin of inequality', the intervention may merely reinforce it.

15.13 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have suggested a new model for increasing participation in OL. The OL Ecosystem (OLES) model brings together the social and institutional elements of society with the key actors, emphasising their relationships and interdependence. The ecosystem model answers calls for a whole system approach to address inequitable access to the outdoors for educational and recreational benefits associated with health, wellbeing, educational achievement and employment, and acknowledges wider policy contexts and institutional factors.

Following a literature review that led from notions of systems through to ecosystems and then social innovation ecosystems, I proposed the idea of addressing inequitable access to OL as a social innovation, drawing on the literature to create an SIES design process to guide the development of ecosystems in practice. I then used this framework to assess TOPC from an SIES perspective.

The assessment of TOPC highlighted the potential value of the framework in steering the design of a delivery system that can help to implement the Autonomy Progression Model. Applying the framework to a new project (or a developing one as in the case of TOPC) offers opportunities to embed ecosystem characteristics from the start, rather than through evolution as happened in Wales. An ecosystem mindset, evidenced by the achievements of TOP in Wales and already in Cumbria, has the potential to achieve the goals of increasing OL participation in formal, non-formal and informal settings by acknowledging, accepting and working with the various factors that contribute to access. However, the OLES model challenges existing institutions by demanding cooperation rather than competition, as well

as a deep understanding of local context, resources and assets. As such it requires careful facilitation with demonstrable successes to achieve progress.

The Combined Progression model that I developed from the findings, consisting of the APM and the OLES and providing a practical 'blueprint' for increasing participation across the life course, is shown in Figure 15.3. The underpinning theory grounds the model in evidenced practice, addressing the issues of inequality of access and discontinuity of provision identified in the case study.
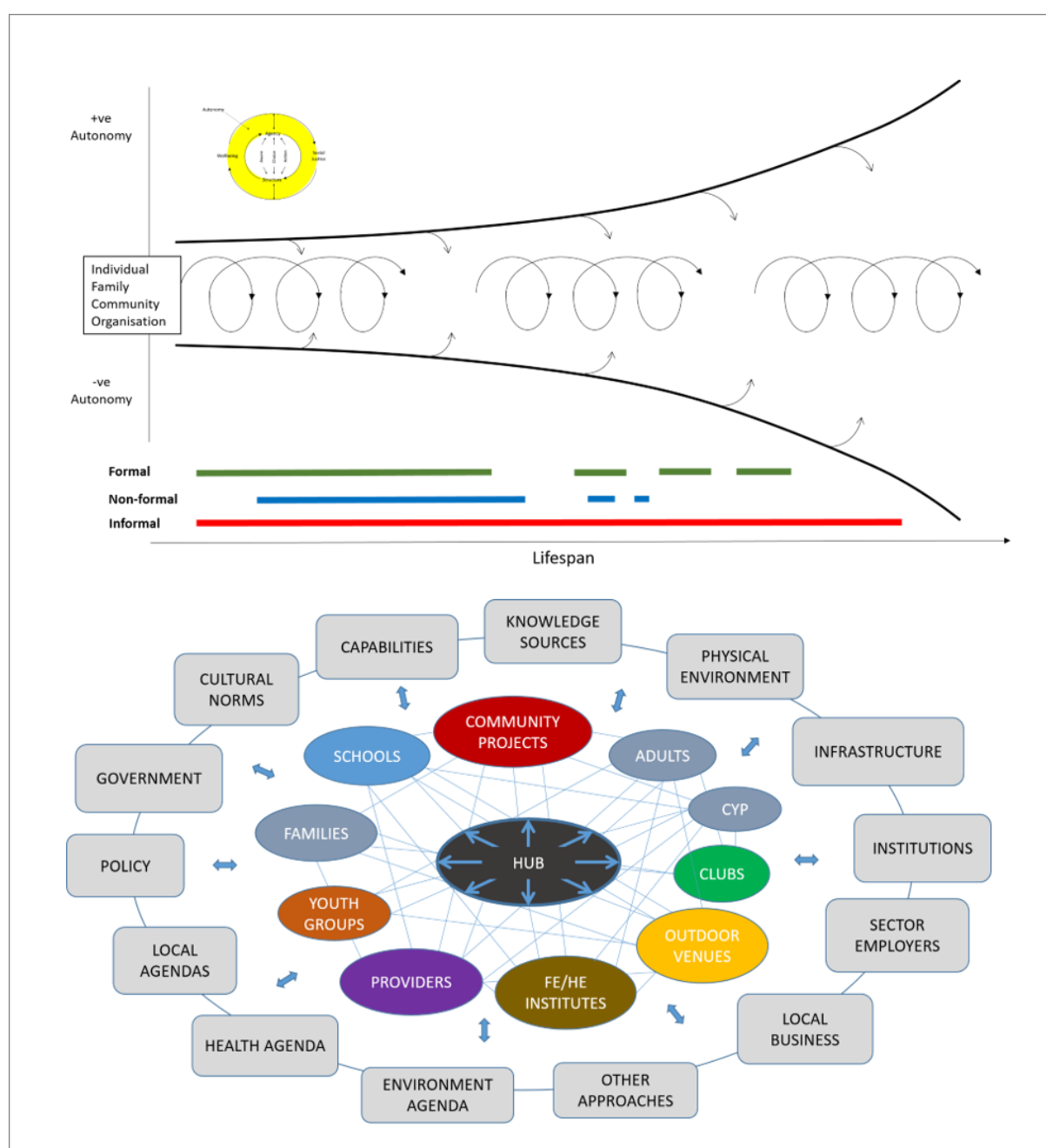

Figure 15.3. The Combined Progression model

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16 Conclusions

16.1 Introduction

This thesis is based on three key assumptions. Firstly, it takes the position that outdoor learning is of value to society and that awareness of this is growing. Government support, although limited, is clearly visible through policy documents, reviews and demonstration projects. Secondly, children should have access to progressive OL opportunities throughout childhood and into adulthood. The third assumption is that access to OL opportunities is inequitable, with participation being subject to a wide range of socio-economic, cultural and practical factors. There is thus a discontinuity between the desire and the practice. Based on these assumptions I set out to explore the provision of OL with a view to improving access for all by seeking to:

- Understand and analyse how outdoor learning is interpreted by different populations;
- Understand the current landscape of outdoor learning provision and the factors affecting access;
- Identify the current level of provision in the case study area and the challenges and opportunities that exist associated with increasing participation levels;
- Develop a workable progression model that can be applied in local contexts beyond the case study area;
- Inform a set of recommendations to IOL regarding their future products, services and processes in the context of providing an inclusive and progressive set of relevant experiences for all young people.

In this concluding chapter I summarise the research and make recommendations for the sector based on my findings. The chapter concludes with my claims to new knowledge, limitations of the study and future research directions.

16.2 Context

OL provision sits within a context of intra- and interpersonal, societal and global challenges facing children, young people and families. Individual concerns about wellbeing, physical and mental health, climate change and employability interact with personal circumstances to influence people's actions and how they engage with OL.

The OL sector has a role to play in addressing these challenges. In order to do so, and make their contribution relevant and meaningful, providers and practitioners need to understand their participants' context and how they can contribute to their individual goals.

16.3 Provision

OL is provided through a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal routes. The dominant neoliberal discourse shapes provision through market forces and notions of accountability, leading participants to be treated as consumers and customers while providers operate in a state of tension between economic viability and educational philosophy. For many, including schools, their particular USP is a route to income meaning a protectionist approach is often taken to practice and knowledge. Volunteer organisations are not exempt either, as has recently been shown by the Scouts' closure of facilities resulting from loss of income due to Covid-19 restrictions (Scouts, 2021b).

Assessing levels of provision and engagement is difficult due to the disaggregated nature of the sector and multiple methods of accounting for participation. The variation in national datasets makes comparison impossible and different interpretations of OL make surveying difficult. The existing datasets do, however, provide a replicable way to quickly assess changes in levels of provision.

16.4 Progression

Progression through access to a range of OL opportunities is called for and justified (EOC, 2015; Hunt, 2017) but difficult to enact. The OL sector reflects a multitude of approaches, philosophies, purposes and activity and has little coherence. Progression can be offered in a single context, such as schools, where the offer can be designed to fit with a particular educational goal. Such a view is evident in the Singapore model, for example, and through the concentric circle model of provision suggested by Beames, Higgins and Nicol (2012). Outside of school, where there are a wide range of opportunities for CYPF to engage, the choice is left to the individual and is subject to a wide range of factors that affect access. The 'golden thread' linking activities is the individual themselves and demands a different approach.

16.5 Benefits and access

The benefits of OL are well supported by a growing evidence base (Fiennes *et al.,* 2015) and can be assessed as direct, in terms of outcomes, or indirect, in terms of impact. The benefits pathway, the 'flow of benefits', depends on the provision of opportunity first then accessing those opportunities. Both are subject to multiple factors, the interweaving of which support or hinder access and can be categorised through the lens of Access Theory as rights based, knowledge based, economic related, and social factors.

16.6 Research findings summary

The research took a case study approach involving four studies. The research supported findings already evident in the literature and added to it with a rich understanding of the role of values and context in accessing OL. The research informed the theoretical development of the Autonomy Progression Model (APM), the OL Ecosystem (OLES) model and the associated design process. The final part of the research involved testing the design guidelines against a provision model in the research area.

The **Pilot Study** identified five key stakeholder groups in OL provision. Children and young people (CYP), parents and providers' views were explored in Studies 1 and 2. Enablers - the teachers, youth leaders and scout leaders - who are directly involved with facilitating OL experiences for young people featured in Study 2, the resultant data forming a rich description of access to OL in Copeland. Study 3 focused on the remaining group, the 'gatekeepers'.

Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to check my own understanding of OL against others and to identify the factors that influenced how people accessed OL. The key finding was that conceptions of OL outside the sector are considerably vaguer than within it, although there is also a wide range of interpretation there as well. Many of the benefits attributed to OL in the literature were understood by parents, children and young people, although they were often represented in terms of outdoor activity rather than as a facilitated learning process. The implications from this are twofold. Firstly, the different interpretations mean that any

messaging from the provider sector to its various audiences must be targeted to engage with specific motivations. Ford (2017) made a similar point referring to business sectors, but the same applies to the participant base. Secondly, if the sector is to promote progressive OL participation then there would seem to be a need to take positive action to broaden the scope of outcomes to include OR participation. Statutory provision through the education system provides one route to OL but, beyond school, all other engagement is voluntary and hence overlaps with spare or recreation time. The sector has a role to play in facilitating this voluntary access so that it becomes a multiple lifetime opportunity. The similarities with research into barriers to sport and recreation participation were apparent and the OL sector would benefit from a wider look at the strategies that have been applied in that sector. One example where this is happening already is through *This Girl's Adventure*, a project being run in Wales by TOP, (Outdoor Partnership, 2021b). The stated goals of achieving health, social and economic benefits mirror OL objectives and incorporate facilitated opportunities.

Study 1 also served to check the relevance of Access Theory (AT) as a lens through which to study the factors affecting participation in OL, and the findings supported the interpretation I had made of the literature. Technology (transport and communication), capital, knowledge, access to opportunities (market), and social identity related issues all featured in the responses. The addition of time as an enabling mechanism to the AT category list was also supported.

Study 2

Study 2 narrowed the focus to Copeland, using surveys to gain the perspectives of young people, teachers, youth leaders and scout leaders. The survey results showed considerable support for OL, with many primary schools offering some form of OL. Secondary school offers reflected the national picture with the majority being provided through one-off activity weeks and D of E. Participation levels are low for D of E, especially when compared with a neighbouring district and correspond to their respective IMD scores. OL provision in Youth groups was limited and highly dependent on particular leaders. The Scouts offered more opportunities but have low numbers. A significant number of young people regularly participated in some form of outdoor activity in their spare time. However, many adult participants noted the lack of access to what were felt to be fundamental experiences such as going for a walk or visiting the beach.

Benefits were widely understood by all the participants and mirrored those identified in the literature. Teachers, youth and Scout leaders alike recognised the role of outdoor learning in facilitating personal and social development and for positive physical and mental health, but also recognised the barriers to access with time, cost, safety and transport being common to all.

Despite the barriers there appears to be an overwhelming desire to do more: 85% of primary schools, 100% of secondary schools, 89% of youth leaders and 65% of scout leaders saying they would like to provide more OL opportunities. The implications for the sector, at least in Copeland, are significant. As Kerwin-Nye (2019) says, it does not appear that audiences are hard to reach, rather that they are not being reached, providing further support for strategies that seek to overcome this impasse and emphasising the importance of initial experiences.

Study 3

Study 3 explored issues of identity, social relations and access to authority through a set of interviews with a group of people I have termed 'gatekeepers'. By investigating their attitudes to the outdoors and how they arrived at their values I sought to understand the role that those values could play in achieving the goals of improved access to the outdoors.

A key theme amongst participants was the role of childhood or early adult experiences. Positive experiences corresponded with later engagement and an appreciation of the benefits of outdoor activity that matched those identified in the literature. There was also evidence that the opposite was true, one participant describing their adult fears associated with outdoor activity and how that influenced their participation with young people. This is an important finding as it is rare in the outdoor related literature to identify people who do not do something but provides further evidence that supports the role of positive experiences.

The impact of the local culture and associated mindset featured strongly in the interviews, with repeated reference being made to the lack of experiences that young people had and the limiting effect this had on their confidence and their social capital. The local sport based culture and the perception of the outdoors as being for other people combines to create a

culture where the outdoors is not deemed desirable or accessible. Experience, values and opportunity are related and subject to repetition unless there is a catalyst for change.

Opportunities for progressive outdoor experiences that involve more than one-off experiences were regarded as essential but are currently very limited in Copeland. There is therefore a need to develop such opportunities through initiatives like TOPC, but this must go hand in hand with an appreciation of the issues that people face in accessing them. Changing the mindset requires not only the provision of opportunities but tackling the other structural factors that affect access. Through the lens of AT, access to progressive OL experiences can be regarded as an interrelated set of mechanisms. Access to knowledge, money, time and technology are well known factors; less well appreciated but equally important are the roles of social identity, networks and the different degrees of power that people have to control access. All these factors apply to different degrees with the various stakeholder groups and, I suggest, must be considered equally when developing strategy.

16.7 A purpose for OL

The focus of this thesis has been on increasing opportunities for participation in OL, based on a belief that access to OL should not be a matter of privilege but one of informed choice. To reach this goal requires more than just the provision of opportunities, although this is an essential part of the picture. It also requires the different stakeholders of OL to work together to provide those opportunities and to enable access to them. I believe that to do this needs a sense of shared purpose and have proposed autonomy as that goal. By considering their practice with that in mind, providers can help participants to develop their skills and knowledge and hence the capability to choose, signposting them to next steps. 'Next steps' could be accessed through other facilitated experiences or through engagement with families. If the former, then providers need to know how to direct participants to those opportunities; if the latter, then parents need to have the confidence and skills necessary to navigate the structures and systems that constrain or enable access (Figure 16.1). By investing in the wider group of stakeholders, the sector can influence access to provision by raising its value and the motivation to engage with the opportunities available.
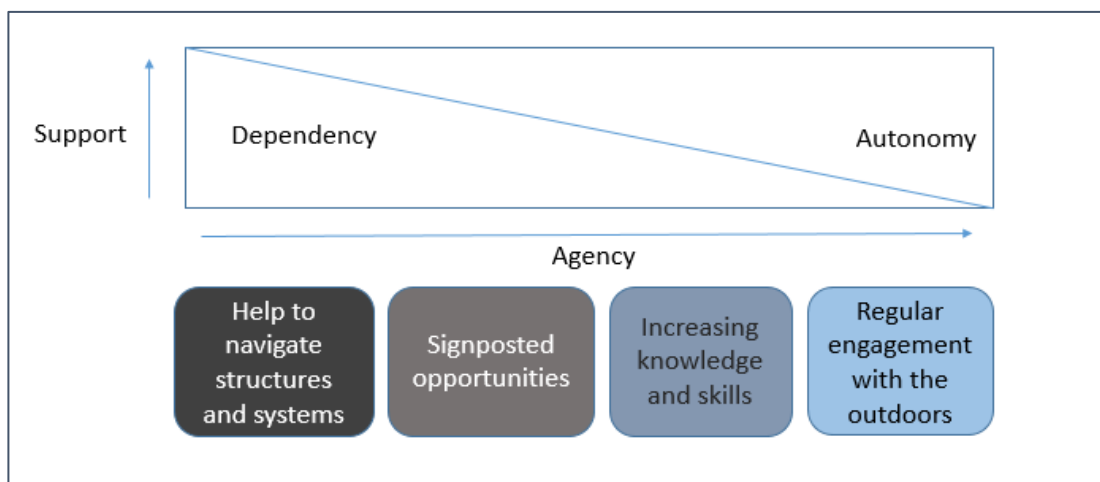
Figure 16.1. Developing autonomy (Harvey, 2022)

16.8 Contributions to Knowledge

By an original application of Access Theory through a case study approach focusing on OL stakeholders in Copeland, I have gained an in-depth understanding of the factors affecting access to OL. As a result of the research I have proposed the Combined Progression model consisting of the Autonomy Progression Mode and the Outdoor Learning Ecosystem model. Underpinning the OLES is a new design process framework, a further original contribution. Access theory provides a lens through which to analyse the factors affecting access. As a result of findings from the research I have modified the theory to add the mechanism of 'Time' to the categories, making it more relevant to the subject matter. I have also adapted the mechanism of access to markets to include opportunities, reflecting the route to benefits. As part of the analysis process I developed a 'flow of benefits model' that reflects the factors affecting providers and participants.

The Combined Progression model consists of two interdependent parts. The APM provides a way of showing how progressive opportunities can be linked by developing the capacity for autonomy and serves as a visual model to explain the theory. The practice of delivering that aspiration, however, demands a different model which is provided through the idea of an Outdoor Learning Ecosystem (OLES). That in itself remains theoretical without the application of the design process guidelines that I have developed and tested to translate the model into practice. My argument is that by deliberately developing purposeful ecosystems

that involve all the key stakeholders in the delivery of OL access to OL can be increased for all.

16.9 Limitations

This research focuses on OL in England, specifically in the District of Copeland, Cumbria. As such, caution is needed when applying the findings elsewhere. I do, however, make claims for generalisability as the themes I develop are intended as frameworks to stimulate questions rather than to develop specific evidence-based policy or practice. AT has already been used in multiple contexts and the modifications I have suggested make it applicable to the field of OL.

Copeland has a very low representation of BAME communities and so is not representative of other communities. The issues faced by its residents are specific to the locality and may or may not be replicated elsewhere. I acknowledge this in the OLES design framework through the inclusion of contextual research as a key process.

My proposal of autonomy as a goal may be culturally dependent and not easily transferrable. It relates to the neoliberal discourse currently dominating the UK, but may not be relevant to more paternalistic societies.

Limitations to the actual research process caused by the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the direction of the research. Lockdown occurred just before I was to begin my data collection with CYPF necessitating a change of direction, meaning that I was unable to interview these groups. I attempted to mitigate this by using online surveys to capture young people's voices. Although this was as successful as I could have hoped for, there is a need for further research to better understand young people's perceptions of OL and factors affecting access.

Throughout the research I have attempted to mitigate the potential bias that I may hold in favour of OL. I have tried to do this by regular engagement with the wider OL community, sharing ideas and inviting comment through workshops, webinars and conference presentations. It has been reassuring to note that there has been very little disagreement

with my proposals although this may be because they remain theoretical until they force something to change.

16.10 Recommendations for the Institute for Outdoor Learning and the wider sector

The research has shown that there is latent demand for OL opportunities, be it as a participant or as a potential enabler. The new ideas offered in this thesis provide a potential avenue to increase participation but require actions from the sector to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The first five recommendations assume and support entirely the development of a sector wide representative body that has the critical mass to engage with government and support large scale campaigns. It is acknowledged that these actions are resource dependent and that creative solutions may need to be found. The recommendations are to:

1. Develop and implement a strategic communication plan to highlight the benefits of OL/OR and promote OL as a cultural good. The plan needs to account for different audiences and be framed accordingly. Specific audiences could include young people, parents, and enablers. There are also various groups of gatekeepers, such as social prescribing link workers, community regeneration officers, youth workers, community leaders, faith leaders, etc. who have influence in their communities, and policy makers with influence in government.

2. Use the table of publicly available participation data (Table 4.1) as a basis for regular analysis of the levels of participation in facilitated OL.

3. Develop and implement a strategy to build relationships with organisations who control access to OL, e.g. large landowners such as United Utilities, Forestry Commission and National Trust. Inviting them to be part of the OLA would broaden its potential influence.

4. Revisit the Outdoor Citizens campaign in the light of the new Outdoor Learning Association. The campaign has been dormant for several years but remains relevant. The adoption of the models proposed in this thesis could provide the practical way of translating the campaign into practice.

5. Continue to raise awareness of and address issues of equality, diversity and inclusion in the sector. Social identity is a major barrier to participation at all levels.

6. Support and promotion of the APM – OLES approach through practitioner training and engagement with projects such as TOP.

7. Support the development of training packages to assist providers and practitioners to develop their offers to contribute to the APM / OLES approach: how to develop programmes to incorporate signposting, how to develop skills that can be used independently, etc.

8. Support the development of training for non-specialists that enables them to have the basic skills and confidence to take people outside.

16.11 Future research

As well as a focus on gathering the voices of CYPF in accessing OL identified earlier, there are three clear avenues for future research.

1. The first relates to implementing the ecosystem APM-OLES approach in different contexts. Assessing existing projects using the OLES design framework would give an indication of its viability in a range of contexts and support (or otherwise) its application as a design process from the start of a project.

2. Secondly, access theory has been shown to be a valuable tool for analysing the factors influencing access to OL. Applying to different demographics and geographical areas would further strengthen its validity as a research tool.

3. Thirdly, undertake on an annual basis a revision of the data sets included in table 4.1. This will provide a very broad overview of access to OL opportunities and trends in participation. Further development of ways to assess participation levels would also be beneficial.

16.12 Concluding remarks

At the heart of this study was a desire to change something for the better, to make a difference. Nixon (2019, p. 7) suggests that the task for those with privilege is to recognise that they have it and then to practise what she calls 'critical allyship'. By this she means identifying the resources one has and finding ways to shift them to people who are less advantaged. I hope that the models and framework I have proposed as a result of my research contribute to that goal.

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