Young people, active travel and social justice: findings from a participatory research study in the North East of England

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Abstract

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Many cities have environmental sustainability goals. Active travel – people walking, cycling or combining the two with public transport to reduce individual car use – contributes to reducing carbon emissions. Active travel is impeded by road infrastructure prioritising car use. Public consultations regarding transport policies, typically using online surveys and Geographical Information Systems (GIS), generate maps for spatial analysis by city planners, but may exclude marginalised groups' inputs.

This case study of young cyclists aspiring to participate in the public consultation on a new regional active travel strategy examined their experiences, identifying systemic barriers they encountered. Using a Participatory Action Research approach, the group engaged a variety of research methods, including combining and adapting Photovoice and Go-Along Interviews. Additionally, adults in the research group used social work skills to facilitate, support and provide capacity-building skills to enable young people to address social justice barriers which precluded participation in the public consultation. Thematic analysis of ethnographic field notes and Group Session transcriptions found that young people prioritise fun and safety when cycling, which has the additional benefit of promoting youth agency and autonomy.

The group used their data to build a dynamic map of their lived experiences of cycling, thus using counter-power to overcome the barriers to consultation participation. Their data was held on the Padlet platform, which produced global positioning coordinates, thus evolving into a new tool providing quantitative data to integrate with GIS software. As Padlet is free, online and accessible, it can facilitate marginalised groups taking control of their narratives as they contribute to consultations. If used by city planners during community engagement, the tool can deliver more inclusive public feedback, reducing the chances of perpetuating epistemic inequalities otherwise arising, as cities and regions aim to reduce carbon emissions.

Young people, active travel and social justice: findings from a participatory research study in the North East of England

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Declaration

I confirm that no part of the material presented in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other university. In all cases, where it is relevant, material from the work of others has been acknowledged appropriately. The contents of this thesis are produced solely for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy at Durham University and consist of the author's original contributions with appropriate recognition of any references indicated throughout.

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AI that generates text, such as ChatGPT, was not used in the thesis. Only AI incorporated within Google search engine, Microsoft Co-pilot and Grammarly (non-BETA) applications were used.

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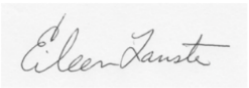

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Foreword

Although I was only a toddler when law enforcement used a tank on my street to stop three days of civil protest, its effects have reverberated through my life since then. The tank left an impression on that street's concrete that could be seen years later. Its impression on my social awareness was equally profound and lasting.

The protests were a reaction to a black man, his white wife, and their young daughter moving into a house across the street from mine. They were the first people of colour to move into Warren, a then all-white suburban city of Detroit, Michigan, United States (US) (Hirschman, 1975, p.71). This was a time of upheaval and rioting, with protests regarding the Vietnam War and Civil Rights taking place in major US cities and sometimes resulting in violence (ibid). The segregation of cities had been enshrined in federal policy since 1937 through the Home Owners Loan Corporation (Fullilove and Wallace, 2011). Favourable home loans were only available in locations which did not include a single Negro family. Areas where black people lived were redlined on maps which were later used to determine credit risk and urban development, with the result that, decades later, redlined areas were often demolished or earmarked for urban renewal (ibid.). It is not surprising then that when a young family moved into my neighbourhood, there was violent opposition from the white homeowners (Farley, 2018).

Although based on another later federal housing policy, urban renewal refers to programmes stemming from the Housing Act (1949) that deemed undesirable lands be cleared and transferred to developers at reduced prices (Fullilove and Wallace, 2011). Whilst converting run-down areas into housing, universities or other developments was packaged as a positive initiative, the reality was that property owned by black people was seized with little or no compensation. The author and social commentator James Baldwin referred to urban renewal as 'negro removal' (Marty, 2024).

Urban renewal programmes in Detroit city and suburbs were used in part to build road structures to support the growing post-World War II automobile industry and migration to suburbia (Cohn, 2020). The road structure continues to support the auto industry. To put the impact of this in perspective, in 2022, 21% of all US auto production still occurred in Michigan, despite many factories having relocated to cheaper labour markets in the 1970s

and 1980s (Detroit Regional Chamber, n.d.). These facts were presented to me as a white person growing up in suburbia as all very positive and benefiting the greater metropolitan area economically. It was not until I moved into a housing estate in Detroit as an adult that I learned from my black neighbours that 600 homes were destroyed when their stable housing estate, mostly black owned, had been divided in half by a six-lane motorway, confirming Baldwin's description of urban renewal.

In addition to the upheaval of losing one's home, the transport planning and subsequent infrastructures described above appear to have created or exacerbated social inequality by not providing social connections and accessible modes of transportation. Transport planning and infrastructure include all forms of mobility — walking, cycling, vehicles and public transport. Contemporary 'green city' initiatives in other countries may risk replicating similar inequalities to those in my hometown due to the formation of policies that do not value input from all individuals who will be affected by the new initiatives, despite their governments' well-intentioned environmental benefits (Colombo and Dijk, 2023).

Efforts by the US's Biden Administration (2020 – 2024) acknowledged the widespread injustice in urban areas mentioned above and funded the removal of one motorway section that destroyed a vibrant black community in another part of Detroit (Egan, 2024). There is, however, some debate that the same mistake of not including those impacted by a national policy is being made again. Some residents near the proposed plan's site are concerned that the new boulevard will be a barrier to mobility (Yen, 2022).

During the late 1980s, I lived in Detroit while studying for my master's in social work. Informed by this and past experiences, my education on administration and community organising raised my awareness that structural racism and neoliberal policies continue to impact people living in deprived areas of the city. (Wacquant, 2012). I was and continue to be interested in finding solutions to community-level social justice inequalities through practice and research.

In the mid-1990s, I began serving as Director of Community Service in a large family agency in Detroit. As part of my job orientation, I initiated outreach calls to service providers to learn about the local resources in a part of the city where I had not previously lived or worked. One of the services that was appropriate for our clients was a domestic violence shelter for women. During my conversation with the manager, I found myself sharing my

insecurities about starting a new post. This was unusual for me, as I had adopted a stance of detached professionalism, especially when making initial contact with another professional. She replied in a warm and kind voice, ‘That’s okay; we can hold hands’. This interaction was unexpected and demonstrated to me the power of kindness and connection on a human level. I, in turn, reduced my level of detachment and increased kindness with others in my social work practise.

That message of human connection has stayed with me in equal measure to the disconnect between people described from my childhood. Both perspectives have served me well in increasing my sensitivities as a professional and as a person, and both have informed the research project.

1 Introduction

1.1 Setting the scene

The research project addresses social justice issues, which are complex, multifaceted and interrelated, making them challenging to investigate. However, the attempt is a worthy one given the impact on people who experience the adverse effects of social injustice. Social work, as defined internationally, considers addressing social justice as a primary component of its work on all levels of intervention (Hare, 2004). Typically, social workers advocate for social justice with individuals and families. However, Ferguson *et al.* (2018) argue that community-level interventions can also be effective. This research project adopts the latter idea and explores how social justice connected to sustainability can be addressed through social work interventions at the community level.

1.1.1 Social justice

> Social justice refers to the fair and equitable treatment of all individuals and social groups within a society. It encompasses social, political and economic institutions that promote fairness, equity, inclusion, and self-determination, especially for marginalized populations. (Duignan, 2025, para. 1)

Reflecting on this definition, one may consider how 'fair treatment' is described and how individuals and groups are demarcated as marginalised. Rawls (1971) viewed fair treatment as the fair distribution of the 'primary goods' that most human beings need for existence. Sen's (1985) capabilities approach addresses distribution not just in terms of material goods, but also in terms of fair opportunities for well-being. This, in turn, raises questions of who determines what well-being is for another person and what goods should be distributed.

As Fraser (1995) notes, '… virtually every struggle against injustice, when properly understood, implies demands for both redistribution and recognition' (p. 70). Fraser suggested the first step to resolve the struggle is to acknowledge the interlinked dynamic between redistribution and recognition (ibid.). When tackling social justice through a social work lens, some argue that social workers need to expand their work and discourse on social policy to include sustainability (Lombard and Vivers, 2020; Knight and Gitterman, 2018). Lombard and Vivers (2020) also emphasise addressing social justice on the local, global, personal and political levels. Throughout the thesis, the struggles for redistribution and

recognition, as well as the social work interventions applied to address these struggles, are examined.

The focus of the research project is the social (in)justice experience for a marginalised group in the context of the Global North and sustainability issues. The challenges, as the group viewed them, were related to the fair distribution of public resources and the recognition of their input into a new regional transport strategy. The challenges highlighted a lack of epistemic justice for this marginalised group of young people.

1.1.2 Other types of social justice and marginalised groups

Epistemic justice refers to the fair treatment of individuals in their capacity as knowers, further defined by testimonial and hermeneutical justice (Fricker, 2007). Testimonial and hermeneutical injustice are related because, in the case of the former, a person or group is discriminated against due to the credibility of the knowledge shared being questioned, and in the latter, because the information used to determine credibility is not collectively valued (ibid.).

Consider that epistemic injustice manifests as discounting, ignoring and minimising a person's, or group of people's, knowledge emanating from their lived experiences, due in part to their lived experiences being deemed unworthy to be part of a conversation or input. In that case, there is a clear imbalance of power. One group is determining the value of another. Social workers are trained to address power imbalances through relationship-building with a person or group by practising critical reflection, listening empathically and communicating respect and attention, among other skills (Johnstone, 2021). More information on social work interventions at the community level and sustainability issues is discussed in section 2.1.4. (For brevity, numbers with decimals in parentheses refer to thesis section numbers going forward.)

Another type of social justice a marginalised group may encounter is procedural justice, which concerns the fairness of institutional procedures. A report assessing research on social justice and climate change in the United Kingdom (UK) found that national policies and plans lacked the involvement of vulnerable communities in decisions that impacted them, and that although consultations and lobbying aimed to be inclusive, in practice this was not the

case (Preston *et al.*, 2014). The Discussion chapter (7.2) explores the case study results and the group's experiences with procedural (in)justice.

Marginalised groups, as defined in this thesis, refers to groups of people who are perceived as different from mainstream society (Pettican *et al.*, 2023). Reasons why a group is considered different could be based on assumptions that they are not interested in the issues being considered or that they lack the knowledge or skills to participate in a meaningful way, or simply the group is not considered by omission. As a group from an economically and socially disadvantaged location, the research group expressed frustrations associated with marginalisation. The relationship between marginalisation and youth agency and autonomy is explored in the literature review (2.2). The review also considers incorporating the knowledge of marginalised groups through the dynamics of communication and power between marginalised groups and mainstream society (2.3.1).

As mentioned, the context of the case study is young people addressing a new regional strategy. The strategy is part of green transitions, which aim to reduce fossil fuel use while increasing renewable energies and sustainability approaches (Wang and Lo, 2021). Fricker (2007) argues that epistemic injustice begins with discrimination. In the context of the green transition, the term 'just' needs to be added to emphasise that all levels and groups within a society must be considered during the transition to reduce discrimination (Wang and Lo, 2021). If not conducted in a **just** manner, the new policies and procedures could create new or exacerbate previous inequalities (ibid.). As Larocque (2023) notes, young people as a group are well-positioned to share insider and experiential knowledge that aids society's transition to a greener future. The literature review explores topics related to sustainable cities and transport (2.1.5), as well as inclusion of marginalised groups (2.1.7), especially youth voices, on sustainability issues (2.2.4).

1.1.3 Sustainability

A key point in defining sustainable development was the United Nations (UN) resolution to establish the World Commission on Environment and Development to study the topic. Usually referred to as the Brundtland Report, after the Commission's chairperson, it defines sustainable development as seeking to meet '… the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987, p.

39). The UN later created the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG), urging nations to improve their sustainability efforts across economic, environmental and social pillars by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). The hope was to achieve inclusive development while protecting the environment (Jacob, 2024). Moving the focus from a global or hemispheric level to the national level was viewed as a new approach for achieving goals, as different countries can create implementation plans tailored to their specific circumstances. However, globally, efforts tend to stress the *environmental* over the remaining pillars of economic and social sustainability (ibid.).

An in-depth scrutiny of economic and environmental sustainability is beyond the scope of the thesis; however, the social sustainability pillar is examined in detail within three contexts. The definition of social sustainability in relation to communities (2.1.2), its interconnections with social work (2.1.4), and with cities and transport (2.1.5), are addressed in the literature review. The research project findings and discussion relating to social sustainability are presented (7.1.2; 7.2.3; 7.3.3), with the sustainability implications outlined in the Conclusion chapter (8.5; 8.6; 8.7). An example that incorporates many aspects of all three pillars of the UNSDG and social justice issues is an urban transport policy that aims to benefit city dwellers and visitors while addressing sustainability issues.

A sample of literature demonstrates that social work researchers have been writing on sustainability – on the environmental impacts (Dominelli, 2012) and economic impacts (Peeters, 2022), and on social sustainability (Naranjo, 2024). Examples of social work and sustainability topics included in the thesis are social work history (2.1.3), sustainability and ecosocial work, with discussions and explorations of social work interventions throughout. The Conclusion chapter suggests implications for social work practice (8.6). Mary (2008) suggests expanding the person-in-environment paradigm to address sustainability issues and calls on social workers to address the complex and multi-layered relationships as part of our practice and research. The paradigm shift will support human and planetary well-being, a key component of ecosocial work (Närhi and Matthies, 2018; Stamm, 2023b; De Brabander, 2023). As previously mentioned, social justice is needed for just green transitions, and social workers need to continue their focus on social justice despite pressures not to engage in system-level interventions (Higgins, 2015)

1.1.4 Active travel

Returning to the topic of urban transport policy, active travel is one approach to addressing climate change issues by prioritising walking, cycling and public transport over vehicular use for transportation (DfT, 2020). By reducing the number of vehicles that use fossil fuels, air quality improves, and the need to mine and process the fuel decreases, both of which are environmental benefits. The economic benefits include savings on public healthcare costs, primarily due to reduced air pollution, as well as increased physical activity, with subsequent health benefits for most people. As noted in the Foreword to the thesis, a road structure prioritising vehicles can be detrimental to communities, decreasing social sustainability goals. Active travel is complex, and is discussed further in the literature review (2.1.5).

As Levy and Patz (2015) note, however, whether a city can embrace change may depend more on socioeconomic status than on a will to address climate change. The UNSDG update report, concerning transport, found, 'Only half of the world's urban population has convenient access to public transport. Convenient access means residing within 500m walking distance of a bus stop/low-capacity transport system and 1000m of a railway or ferry' (United Nations, 2021, p. 18). In England, active travel policies are established at the national level in conjunction with public funding for local implementation strategies, as further explained in the Methodology chapter (3.4.1.1). As revealed by the findings, national funding priorities can change, as illustrated by a cut in funding for active travel during the fieldwork timeframe, as a new local strategy was being formed (6.6). A key message from the overall research project is that the processes for informing local active travel strategies can be problematic for marginalised groups; therefore, community groups need to consider alternative approaches for inclusion (8.7). Inclusion can be challenging due to tensions between the needs of various users, as discussed further in the literature review, with road structure management serving as an example (2.1.6). One approach to researching a complex topic such as active travel is Participatory Action Research, especially for marginalised groups.

1.1.5 Participatory action research

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach shares knowledge generation with groups of people on issues important to them, builds capacity if needed and shares decision-making

on all phases of the research project (Israel *et al.*, 1998; Pain *et al.*, 2008; Hall and Tandon, 2017). Covered in more detail in the Literature Review (2.4) and Methodology chapter (3.1; 3.3; 3.4; 3.6), the rationale for using PAR as a research approach is its focus on the research priorities of marginalised groups on a topic of interest to them, while addressing gaps in the literature on the concepts introduced in this first section. As was the case in our study, the group's new approaches to addressing their concerns, coupled with capacity-building, resulted in the development of a new data collection tool (3.4.4.4; 7.3) in addition to the overall findings.

Throughout the thesis, there is a focus not only on the data gathered and the resulting findings, but also on examples of **how** the data was generated and disseminated. A PAR approach to research requires flexibility during the co-design process, necessitating an equally flexible and reflective approach to ethics (Dubois *et al*., 2021). Defined as everyday ethics, the approach requires ongoing negotiation with participants (Banks *et al*., 2013). The topic is discussed further in the Methodology chapter (3.6) with examples throughout the thesis.

1.2 Research aims

The research aims of the study were aligned with the funder's broader research objectives. The *Applying Sustainability Transition Research in Social Work Tackling Major Societal Challenge of Social Inclusion*, referred to as the ASTRA Project, comprised 15 globally recruited doctoral students, including the author, funded by the European Union's (EU) Horizon 2020 programme. The University of Jyväskylä, Finland, served as coordinator of the project, which was implemented in six European Union countries between 2021 and 2024. The project focused on various research topics that intersected environmental, economic and social sustainability. All 15 students received training across the three pillars of sustainable development, informing their individual research projects, which address social work and transdisciplinary frameworks. These frameworks employ a holistic approach to transdisciplinary sustainability transition research, promoting justice for vulnerable people and communities. (Matthies *et al.*, 2022).

For the research project connected to the ASTRA Project, which is the topic of the thesis, young people are identified as a marginalised group because their input into sustainability transitions is often limited, even though their generation will experience the effects of

climate change as it worsens (Larocque, 2023). As mentioned in section 1.1.1, injustice often begins with discrimination; therefore, there may be an incorrect assumption by adult decision-makers that young people are not interested or do not possess the necessary knowledge to participate in public consultations. A common practice for soliciting public consultation on planning issues is the use of online surveys. However, the consultation efforts in the research study failed to engage young people with this approach, as outlined in section 6.3.

This study aims to move beyond superficial consultation on green initiatives by involving a community experiencing barriers to inclusion. Through the Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) approach, a collaboration of community group members' skills and experiences, including alternative methods of communication, enables the identification of urban transport planning issues from their perspective. This leads to new approaches being developed, facilitating an alternative framing of climate change policies.

1.3 Research questions

The research project started with the goal of addressing sustainability with a vulnerable community group. An initial literature review suggested a need for more research on social work addressing social justice on the macro level in practice, and just green transitions with sustainability goals. Later, when the group agreed to the research project, the aspects of youth issues and epistemic justice in a transport context evolved. Therefore, the final research questions for the project were:

1. Based on young people's current experiences of active travel and their goals for developing active travel in their communities, how do they see their route to achieving those goals, given their status as a marginalised group?
2. How can young people, as a marginalised group, express their needs and wants regarding active travel to decision-makers through the structure of a youth work organisation?
3. How can social workers and youth workers aid youth development through community action activities relating to active travel?

1.4 Research group described

1.4.1 Who is in the research group?

The research group consisted of young people and workers, with detailed descriptions of participants in the Methodology chapter (3.4.1.1; 3.4.1.2). My process of joining the group included relationship-building and is described in detail (3.4.2). The young people are a mixed group of genders, ages and cycling abilities and motivations. A few members are cycling independently, going on day trips with other young people or family members. The same young people were also the ones in the group who would regularly cycle to school and cycle for other transport needs.

Other members of the group were less independent and mostly cycled with the youth organisation from which the research group stemmed. Cyclists in this group also tended to be younger and less confident on their bikes. The youth organisation meets weekly in a large park, which is one of the few green areas in a primarily residential area, not far from the town centre. The town is within walking distance of the English North Sea coast, offering tourist-friendly amenities such as cinemas, ice cream shops and food venues that appeal to all age groups. A key message of the study is that the young people enjoy aspects of their community; however, they feel it is lacking fun things for their age and cycling abilities (7.1.2; 8.1.1; 8.1.2).

The research group's adult members consisted of two employees from the youth organisation and this author. One worker in the research group has 30 years of youth work experience and many community networks, which are used to secure resources (such as borrowing a bike trailer from another charity) and to promote the needs of the youth; they are, however, frustrated by the broader community's continuing lack of interest in youth affairs. The second worker was employed part-time for the youth organisation and supported youth inclusion in general. Both workers are active cyclists who use their bikes for transport to work and leisure activities, thereby serving as good role models and supporters for the young people and active travel. My role in the group evolved and changed over time, as is typical for a PAR project. The trajectory is discussed throughout the thesis with a more in-depth reflection on my role as a research facilitator (3.7).

1.4.2 Where does the research group live?

Some of the issues the young people encountered were related to the economic, health and cultural forces of their location. The location itself is overshadowed by an extensive history of coal mining and manufacturing. McDonald (2012) effectively describes these forces in relation to a similar city in the same region. By way of introduction, and drawing on McDonald's (2012) descriptions, the area where the fieldwork took place can be described as having a working-class community with a long industrial history; industry has been in decline and the area is now more based around service industries.

Other authors have examined the structure of coal communities and coal miners in England, Scotland and Wales, with findings that are equally applicable to the fieldwork location (Crow, 2002; Strangleman, 2017). The structure is defined as communities in villages near mines with shared locations, interests and identities (Crow, 2002). Strangleman (2017) challenges the description by noting that change happened over time and in reaction to local and systemic forces,

> … capitalism profoundly shaped the economic life of the village and those who inhabited it, while also emphasising the individual and collective agency of the miners and their families (p. 21)

Nationally, the communities experienced near full employment in the 1950s, with mine closings starting with smaller, less productive ones in the 1960s (ibid.). Beatty *et al.* (2019) report that a handful of mines employing fewer than 1,000 workers still exist (as of 2019); however, the last deep mine closed in 2015. As a comparison, at the peak of UK coal production in 1913, the industry employed 1.1 million miners (ibid.). A 2014 report concluded that the year-long miners' strike in 1984/5, to prevent coal mines from closing, failed, with the effects still felt in the economic realities of the communities (Foden *et al.*, 2014). McDonald (2012) summarises the impact of economic forces in the region, shifting from,

> … the proportional dominance of manufacturing compared to the service sector, male compared to female employment, and full-time and permanent compared to part-time and temporary employment found elsewhere. Nationally, part-time and temporary employment has sharply increased for women, men, younger and older workers, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. In other words, employment became de-standardised and less stable (p. 43)

Active travel addresses health and environmental issues and includes people with mobility difficulties in navigating urban transport. Because of this, it is vital to gather a snapshot of public health statistics connected to the region in the research project:

- People living in former coalfields nationally have a one-year decrease in life expectancy compared to the rest of the UK; however, this is not attributed to coal-related illness, as most mines have been closed for some time (Beatty *et al.*, 2019).
- In 2018, there was a higher percentage (7.6) of people aged 16 to 64 living in former coalfield areas claiming Disability Living Allowance (replaced by Personal Independence Payment) compared to South East England (4.4) (ibid.).

Culturally, post-closure, some mining communities embraced their past and created tourist attractions of the closed collieries or diminished their importance, focusing more on ancient Roman heritage (Strangleman, 2019). Other communities use the coal mining past to inform arts and music, with the Durham Miners' Gala, a city-wide parade with music and large banners connected to previous miner groups, as an example (ibid.). These activities can be seen as impacting the identity of younger generations, as informed by Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' – that is, the '… notion that actors inhabit a set of culturally and socially mediated structures upon which they react and act' (ibid., p. 29). As noted in the Findings chapter (6.1), the young people, as part of their everyday lives, encountered messages of exclusion.

1.5 Thesis structure and writing style

The thesis is structured in three parts; however, the design evolved over time and through interactions, so the order of events may differ from how they are presented. The first part, Chapters 1–3, sets the scene for the project, comprising the Introduction, Literature Review and Methodology chapters. The second part, Chapters 4–6, presents the project's findings. Part Three reviews the study first through a discussion of the findings (Chapter 7) and then a summary of the project in the concluding chapter (Chapter 8). The Introduction chapter begins the thesis by outlining the main concepts discussed throughout and providing a brief description of the case study group and the fieldwork location. The research aims and questions are presented along with an outline of the thesis structure and a note on writing style.

The Literature Review chapter builds on the concepts raised in the Introduction (1.1.1 through 1.1.5) by going further into four subsections:

1) Sustainable community perspectives

2) Young people and inclusion
3) Knowledge, communication and power
4) PAR approaches and variations

Section 2.1, **Sustainable Community Perspectives**, introduces the concepts of community, community work and some challenges faced by groups, with a focus on a specific population group: young people. Issues regarding youth agency in the context of the study, particularly in relation to sustainability, are addressed in terms of social work, sustainable cities and transport, with a focus on cycling. Addressing cycling on a deeper level involves exploring the literature on young people's cycling motivations and barriers to increased cycling. Sustainable cities and transport, with young people's and adults' perceptions of these, are explored. Section 2.1 ends with a discussion on just green transitions and marginalised groups.

Section 2.2, **Young people and inclusion**, explores social construction issues affecting young people. The discussion continues by considering the various ways young people engage in research projects and their levels of involvement in decision-making. The subsection ends with a review of the literature on youth voices in sustainability issues.

Section 2.3, **Knowledge**, **communication and power**, continues the discussion, addressing young people and decision-making by exploring different types of power. This is important because, as discussed, social justice issues can arise from who decides who is worthy (or dismissed) when contributing to decision-making. The literature review explores topics of lived experiences, counter-power and mapping processes. Social work history and approaches to mapping conclude the subsection.

Section 2.4, **PAR approaches and variations**, the final subsection of the literature review, discusses issues raised in the literature on the PAR approach and its variations most pertinent to the research study. Literature that addresses the benefits and challenges of PAR, considering the type of knowledge that can be generated and the implications for everyday ethics, is presented.

The Methodology chapter starts with a discussion on social work values and draws parallels between them and pragmatism. Democracy is a crucial component of PAR, so it is also presented as a core element of the research project's approach. Community-Based PAR (CBPAR) is explained in theory, followed by an outline of its implementation with each

method described. Detailed information is provided on the combination and adaptation of methods resulting in a new approach to data collection through an online map platform. The Methodology chapter continues by covering the data analysis approach and ethical considerations, which began in the Literature Review chapter on everyday ethics, and continues with a discussion of confidentiality challenges that arose during the research project. The chapter concludes with a reflection on my research facilitation role.

The findings were categorised across the experiences, relationship and communication themes derived from the data analysis. Part Two of the thesis starts with Findings Theme 1 on the theme of experiences. This chapter draws together key findings regarding the young people's experiences as they recount how they approach increasing active travel in their area, primarily through cycling. The chapter shares findings on cycling motivations, and barriers to cycling more, among young people. The chapter concludes with findings on the differing views of young people and adults regarding cycling confidence, school support for cycling, and cycling in adverse weather conditions.

The following chapter, Findings Theme 2, discusses the significant findings on the theme of relationships, first, those that are supportive of young people, and secondly, the more contested relationships as identified by the young people. The subsections on workers supporting youth capacity-building and in other roles are outlined. The relationships between young people and adults in school settings and regional planning inform the final subsection on contested spaces.

The chapter Findings Theme 3 focuses on young people's communication efforts and the barriers they encounter. The chapter begins with examples of messages sent to the young people within the surrounding community – home, school and social life. The group's communication efforts are outlined through key phases of CBPAR implementation. First is engagement with details of the tools used. Next is the group's generation of and reflection on data production, followed by the challenges and alternative avenues they used to convey their findings to the planning body. The chapter covers the dissemination activities and finishes with the workers' role in the ongoing phase of CBPAR.

The final part of the thesis begins with the Discussion chapter, which synthesises the research project's findings with theoretical and empirical findings from the literature. Three themes are discussed. The first is motivation and safety perceptions. This theme brings

together the value of young people's motivations to cycle and the variation in safety perceptions between them and adults. The second theme addresses youth voice and sustainability challenges. More details on perception differences are discussed within the context of power and control challenges. Youth voices and workers' roles in just green transitions are also addressed. The final theme is creative approaches to communication through technology-assisted PAR. This theme brings together the process of everyday technology and capacity-building, leading to a new approach to communication with young people's voices in system change, supported by social work.

The Conclusion chapter completes Part Three. The chapter begins with a summary of key messages arising from the research questions and findings, namely, young people's experiences with active travel, the motivations and challenges associated with cycling more and their communication efforts during the public consultation on the new regional strategy. Next, the study's conceptual and methodological contributions are presented, followed by an examination of its limitations. Lastly, the project's implications for future research, social work practice and public policy are outlined. The chapter and thesis text body end with the young people's list of next actions they wish to pursue after the project's completion.

In addition to the thesis structure, the reader may benefit from an explanation of the writing style. The research project was a case study involving a community of people, some of whom have expressed interest in reading the thesis once it is finished. To maintain accessibility for those who participated in the project's formation and execution, the goal was to use clear and concise language throughout the thesis while maintaining academic standards (Morley, 2023; Hyland and Jiang, 2017). The collaborative nature of the project also resulted in the use of first-person pronouns to differentiate my contributions from those of the group, during my reflections on facilitation and when discussing my conversation with the literature during the review. In all cases, the use of the first-person pronoun does not intend to convey a position of personal authority (Tang and John, 1999).

2 Literature Review: Conversations between broad concepts and the literature

Introduction

As presented in this Literature Review chapter, the combination of a commissioned project and participant control of the process yields an atypical literature review in terms of scope and approach. Firstly, a satisfactory literature review for the project required managing searches on broad and complex concepts such as social justice, urban transport, youth agency and autonomy, social work and sustainability. In addition, literature from the geography and urban planning disciplines was included as they were a component of the research project and aligned with the interdisciplinary goals of the ASTRA Project. Lastly, the literature review started before the fieldwork, evolving as the research group identified their issue topics. To accommodate the research project's literature review needs with the complexities outlined, the review did not use a systematic literature review protocol. Instead, the literature review approach follows Walker's (2015) idea of the literature review comprising a creative approach which aims to find systemic links within the material. She was influenced by Montuori's (2005) analysis that '... the process of the literature review is framed as a participation in a community, a dialogue with those who are part of the community now and with one's "ancestors"' (p. 374). Further, Montuori (2005) asserted that the literature review 'can also explore the deeper underlying assumptions of the larger community or communities of inquiry one is joining and one's own beliefs, assumptions, and attachments' (p. 374). Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to explore broad concepts connected to the research project parameters and present the connections between the concepts and the project. Because of the personal and creative approach, I will speak in the first person as I explore and dialogue with the literature.

Sourcing relevant literature started with a search on the Web of Science database using the keywords 'sustainability', 'city', 'social work' and 'social work policy advocacy'. Google Scholar was also used with the keywords 'social work', 'ecosocial work', 'community' and 'youth' to expand the literature base further once the fieldwork commenced. The final expansion of the available pool was by 'snowballing' the reference lists of relevant literature (Cohen and Arieli, 2011). Literature primarily comprising peer-reviewed journal articles was included; however, literature produced outside of publishing companies, such as

community-based research conducted by charities and government agencies, was included if appropriately assessed against the criteria of academic rigour (Adams *et al.*, 2016).

The creative aspect of the review started as I organised the literature first in OneNote and later in EndNote, using labels and groupings on both platforms (Spence and McCutcheon, 2019; Agrawal and Rasouli, 2024). The groupings in OneNote began with social work and then split into social work practice and research literature. My review process continued with the sustainability topics, with key literature labelled and grouped with highlighted notes on my questions and learning. When the amount of literature expanded, a more robust system was needed, so I used EndNote, which has a similar grouping and labelling function (Agrawal and Rasouli, 2024). Learning, questioning, grouping and labelling continued the dialogue with the literature and formed the basis of the literature review. The diverse strategies used in searching for and including publications again demonstrate the interdisciplinary and evolving nature of this study. The literature review does not aim to create a coherent narrative on topics but to shed light on relevant concepts and maybe their potential links.

Similar to an interpersonal conversation, the dialogue with the literature is iterative in approach (Wynn and Eckert, 2017). Section 2.1 of the literature review examines the concept of community, including a global perspective on our planet (Reason and Canney, 2015). This orientation results in a sustainability thread through the discussion on community practice and research. Community engagement, along with social work and other approaches, is explored. Time is spent on the 'sustainable city' as the concepts involved are critical to the research design and implementation. In this section, I explore literature on bikes and bike safety as these topics are key to the research project and relate to young people by exploring the differing perceptions of safety for them and adults. The section ends with a connection between marginalised groups and their exclusion in urban sustainability research.

Section 2.2 considers marginalised groups in communities and their challenges of knowledge generation and participation in decision-making. Because the research project participants are young people, the role of social construction and youth empowerment in critical social theories is discussed. The literature considers youth perceptions of issues that emerged during the design phase of the research project. I then explore possible approaches to

address the barriers to the involvement of marginalised groups in complex sustainability issues. Section 2.2 concludes with empirical findings that marginalised groups, such as young people, have valuable ideas to address sustainability.

Section 2.3 probes more deeply into the types of knowledge and power. The conversation throughout is framed through a lens of social work practice and research with a focus on social justice. I discuss lived experiences and how they can contribute to just knowledge generation. Next, I consider the barriers to research faced by indigenous and marginalised groups and how they address them, through an examination of counter-power and its intersection with knowledge generation. The conversation then circles back to a tool used to gather lived experiences. I present the debates in the literature on the pros and cons of using Participatory Geographic Information System (PGIS) maps with marginalised groups across different disciplines. This discussion forms the background to the Methodology chapter, where more details on the young people's map of their lived experiences are explained.

The last section in the literature review discusses Participatory Action Research (PAR) and some of the variations of the approach. Attention is drawn to its facilitation of counter-power when exclusion is present. Some of the concepts discussed in the previous sections are interlinked under the PAR theories. The chapter ends, therefore, with a path outlined by the chapter's discussion of the literature, connecting broad concepts and resulting in the formulation of the research questions.

2.1 Sustainable community perspectives

2.1.1 What is a community?

My discussion with the literature starts with the question, 'What is a community?', and focuses on the term in a pragmatic context of interacting with people. The definition by Sewpaul (2008) is appropriate because it acknowledges the variations, such as that communities can be place-based – neighbourhoods and citizens organisations – or issue-based – such as groups with shared hobbies or clean-up groups (ibid., p. 98). Cilliers and Timmermans (2014) explain further that, '… the term has come to reflect the reality of an industrial society in which people, due to their increased mobility and communications technology, relate to each other outside any territorial boundary by their shared interests

and skills' (p. 418). The definition reflects community groups' decisions about who is 'in' and who is 'not in' the community (Dominelli, 2002). Some authors propose that community definitions include the relationship between the community and wider global issues and sustainability (Cowans, 2006; Vida Mailene *et al.*, 2008).

When reviewing and discussing the literature on community, I chose to maintain consistency and focus on the definitions used in the Global North and within community practice and research literature. The definition that best summarises this situation for the research project was the one mentioned previously by Sewpaul (2008): community is a group of people defined by geography or commonly held interests. Since our study took place in Northeast England, I will discuss the term 'community' in this context, focusing on the uniting issues that concerned the research project's members: bike use, well-being, youth and sustainability.

Another trend I observed when reviewing the literature on community was the inclusion of non-humans or the planet when defining community. One example is from the action researchers Reason and Canney (2015), stating, '… a holistic ecological perspective shows us that we humans are members of a wider community of beings on Earth' (p. 553). They continue the argument by noting, 'Surely the time has come to see that, as members of a wider community of beings on Earth, we are also participants with the more-than-human world' (p. 554). A philosophical basis exists for the approach called Deep Ecology (Drengson, 2005; Besthron, 2012), created by Arne Naess (1973), which proposes moving from superficial approaches to environmental issues to deeper ones, where humans see themselves as part of the larger ecosystem. A comprehensive discussion of including humans with non-humans in practice and research is broad and beyond the scope of the thesis. However, there was a need to explore the literature on community and the planet, as the research project addresses environmental topics.

A further reason to include the global context when discussing local communities is the impact of regional, national and international policies on communities. One global issue is climate change, and sustainability is one approach to addressing it. The term 'sustainability', as used in the thesis, refers to economic, environmental and social sustainability. The research group is perhaps an example of a community formed around the common interests of well-being and climate action, which is also part of a larger community within the local

council and regional area, influenced by national and international policies as external factors; ideally, this is also reciprocally influenced by the research group (Smith, 2008).

2.1.2 Social sustainability and community

A concept like sustainability profoundly and broadly affects our perceptions of a community's identity and needs further explanation. Sustainability, as mentioned, encompasses both economic and environmental aspects; however, this thesis primarily focuses on social sustainability within the community context. Defining social sustainability is unresolved in the literature partly because of the complexity of the concept (Boström, 2012). One definition of social sustainability that illustrates its interconnection with the economy and the environment is offered by Dillard *et al.* (2009), who suggest that social sustainability encompasses the procedural aspects of social inclusion that enhance social health and well-being, as well as the social institutions that support environmental and economic sustainability for current and future generations. The definition of social sustainability varies across the literature; however, certain essential components remain consistent. One is social justice (Stamm, 2023b; Littig and Grießler, 2005; Ekardt, 2019), and another is capital with relevant variations, such as cultural (Bourdieu, 1986), natural and social (Roseland, 2000).

One definition of social sustainability that emphasises social justice is the positive '… impact of formal and informal systems, structures, processes, and relationships on the current and future liveability and health of communities' (Barron and Gauntlet, 2002, p. 4). The definition is appealing because it encompasses both informal processes, such as human relationships with friends and work colleagues, and formal processes, such as government policies or educational institutions. The dialogue with the sustainability literature continues in the remaining subsections of the chapter, as it is connected to social work practice and research, sustainable cities, youth participation in sustainable climate activism and the barriers they encounter.

2.1.3 Social work's history traverses environmental and community work

Prevention and community-level interventions with practitioner and resident input can be successful for communities (Wandersman and Florin, 2003). Literature on social work and

community work is substantial in its legacy and approaches. As outlined in this subsection, social work has a role in promoting healthy communities and brings unique perspectives.

When considering social work practice with communities in a Global North context, I will not undertake an exhaustive search on this topic; instead, I will paint broad strokes. This is due to the different approaches, definitions and contexts of the term 'community' mentioned earlier. For example, in the United States, Gutiérrez and Gant (2018) suggest social work community-level practice uses group work principles and organising skills that, '… advance the values, ethics and priorities of our field, such as service, social justice, the dignity and worth of individuals, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence' (p. 618). They continue to distinguish social work community development from community-level civil rights or activism as practised by others. Although the goals may be the same, social workers will bring their professional ethics and values to community development practice (Gutiérrez and Gant, 2018; McConnel *et al.*, 2021).

Another area that I will not explore extensively is the distinction between social work and youth work, as defined in the UK context (Dickens, 2012; Bradford and Cullen, 2014). For the thesis, I will use a social work lens throughout, as the fieldwork drew upon my social work skills and training, as well as my professional values and ethics. The PhD research project framework allowed flexibility in my interactions that other UK-based (statutory) social workers might not have (Smith, 2019; Higgins, 2015). Furthermore, the youth workers in the Community-Based Project (CBP) employed intervention approaches in their work with young people, much like mine; even in a UK context, the work was very similar. Hence, the literature on various topics will include youth and community work in a social work context, and the terms 'youth worker' and 'social worker' are used interchangeably.

Before the social work profession was founded, charities and community activists worked to identify needs and provide services to individuals and communities (Gutiérrez and Gant, 2018). Social work-based community development incorporates feminism, social change and community-organising approaches (Gutiérrez and Gant, 2018; Mullaly and Dupre, 2019; Appleby *et al.*, 2017). This framing of intervention could have been a response to recognising that social workers might be seen as those in control, while service users (and their communities) were disempowered (Smith, 2009). Another shift for the profession was from a deficit view to a strengths-based view of clients, thus moving practice approaches from

addressing problems to partnership with service users (Kam, 2021). A study on English undergraduate social work programmes, on the other hand, found social work, broadly defined and including community work elsewhere in Europe, is shifting towards more statutory definitions in England (Higgins, 2015).

Social work history (see Närhi, 2016) notes that early social workers, such as Jane Addams, considered the environment to be the living conditions of people. Ecosocial work emerged in the 2000s as an implementation approach to social work practice and research, which includes humans alongside non-humans (Matthies *et al.*, 2019). In their article, Rambaree *et al.* (2019) argue that social work in community practice will necessarily include the contexts and policies with an ecosocial lens, moving the profession's focus without creating a further speciality within the profession.

2.1.4 Social work and sustainability

Mary (2008), writing from a Global North perspective, distilled key sustainability principles for all institutions after reviewing definitions of sustainability and United Nations reports. She proposes that they are congruent with social work principles, codes of ethics and policy statements. The key principles are:

- an increasing value of human life and the lives of all species
- fairness and equality or economic and social justice
- decision-making that involves participation and partnership
- respect for the ecological constraints of the environment (p. 33)

In a more recent article following Mary's (2008) approach, Naranjo (2024) points to the agreement of three international social work bodies to include environmental and community sustainability in social work global agendas, which were aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Powers *et al.* (2021), however, caution social workers not to embrace sustainable development with a primarily economic focus. The authors instead call for social workers to have a 'Sustainable New Normal' viewpoint, which is a move away from economic growth development ideology and towards a person–environment approach with a broad view of the term environment to include economic, political, environmental and social interactions.

With attention on environmental issues, Kemp (2011) found that social work is well-positioned to respond to environmental changes and stress; however, this activity has not yet been widely reflected in the practice, research and policymaking literature. Kemp also draws attention to social work's focus on human justice with creative and effective interventions to justify the profession's role in this context, concluding that more interdisciplinary partnerships and collaborations with local communities are needed (Shackleford *et al.*, forthcoming; De Brabander, 2023).

Teixeira *et al.*'s (2019) literature review of social work and the environment demonstrated a gap in research on macro-level social work practice and sustainability. Their article gives two examples of research combining community work and tackling environmental issues. The first example was through a social work lens that focused on different levels of intervention, including community-level organising (Kemp *et al.* 2015). The second was through the application of an ecosocial model of social work (Matthies *et al.*, 2019). The ecosocial, person–environment (Hutchison, 2018) and PAR approaches are discussed in more detail in section 2.4.

The discussion in section 2.1 so far has outlined how social work, along with other disciplines, with environmental and community perspectives, can promote sustainability, health and well-being, on the macro level of intervention. Next, I explore the relationship between these broad themes in the context of one approach to healthy and sustainable cities through adapting active travel.

2.1.5 Sustainable cities and transport

The conversation with the literature on sustainability to improve health and well-being led to the question of how these goals are brought into practice for communities. One of the ways is through city sustainability goals. As the fieldwork evolved, the group chose to focus their case study design on a new regional active travel strategy formation in their area (6.3). Transportation is essential for city living, so a sustainable city design needs a sustainable travel policy (Gamble and Weil, 1997; Wågsæther, 2022; Woods and Hamilton, 2022; Manzi *et al.* 2010).

Active travel addresses sustainability issues through increasing walking, cycling and the use of mobility devices in conjunction with public transport, thereby reducing reliance on

carbon-emitting vehicles (DfT, 2020). In addition to environmental issues, car use impedes good community health through increased air pollution, decreased physical activity, increased risk of injury as a result of collisions and poorer mental health (Woodcock *et al.*, 2013). Walking and cycling are low-cost modes of transport, largely without these adverse impacts, aiding city dwellers and other travellers with limited incomes (Litman, 2015).

Dempsey *et al.* (2011) write in the UK context that urban sustainability should encompass social, as well as environmental and economic, sustainability. They state,

> Sustainability of community involves social interaction between community members; the relative stability of the community, both in terms of overall maintenance of numbers/balance (net migration) and of the turnover of individual members; the existence of, and participation in, local collective institutions, formal and informal; levels of trust across the community, including issues of security from threats; and a positive sense of identification with, and pride in, the community (pp. 293–294)

They conclude the article by identifying social justice and community sustainability as core to urban sustainability, which is influenced by the built environment.

Cuthill (2009), in an Australian context, identified similar points. In his review of 162 articles from 2002 to 2007, he found that the terms sustainability, social sustainability, sustainable development and sustainable communities lack a social emphasis and instead were primarily concerned with environmental and economic issues. To define and promote social sustainability in urban design, he proposed a framework for social sustainability with four key concepts.

- **Social capital** is widely defined as social networks that include institutions and values of trust, promoting civic engagement. The concept through public policy supports individual and community health and well-being.
- **Social infrastructure** is community services that build capacity for informed, active citizens, leading to strong local governance.
- **Social justice and equity** are defined as access to basic human needs, such as transport, housing, employment, information, health, education and capacity-building for social and civic engagement.
- **Engaged governance** addresses representative democracy by calling for power sharing – based on 'a collaborative approach to governance involving all stakeholders working together for the common good' (p. 369).

Cuthill's (2009) framework, combined with Mary's (2008) key principles of social work and sustainability, as discussed in section 2.1.4, was incorporated in the research project. The

framework and key principles align with the definition of social sustainability discussed in section 2.1.2.

In the Foreword, I raised some examples of damaging results for communities arising from unsympathetic infrastructural decisions and efforts to correct past mistakes. Literature on city design and sustainability cautions that some efforts to increase economic and environmental sustainability can cause harm to vulnerable groups living in the city (Praharaj, 2021; Anguelovski *et al.*, 2018). There is one promising alternative model to urban design within the Global North context that I chose to explore because it aligns with active travel and England's Department for Transport's funding priorities (Department for Transport, 2021). The 15-minute city model aims to reduce carbon emissions by reducing vehicle traffic. It proposes that cities be designed with social functions and key resources (such as shops, healthcare or recreation areas) always reachable within 15 minutes of residents' homes (Moreno, 2024). Modes of travel during the 15 minutes should be walking, cycling or public transport. The social functions are living, working, supplying, caring, learning and enjoying the area around one's home (Young, 2021). Supporters argue that it is beneficial for residents to explore and value their locality, as was necessitated during COVID-19 travel restrictions (ibid.). Critics of the model argue that it will exacerbate existing resource shortages in some city areas (O'Sullivan, 2021). In an empirical study considering three cities that have adopted the model, the authors found that the model is not a solution for all cities. The model is based on established urban planning ideas; however, its approach differs because it aims to bring resources to the locality, rather than relocating people within metropolitan areas to facilitate their daily activities (Pozoukidou and Chatziyiannaki, 2021).

Another study conducted in Dublin, Ireland, found that walkable neighbourhoods contribute to the happiness and well-being of older and younger generations (Leydon *et al.*, 2024). The researchers surveyed 1,064 adults across 16 neighbourhoods. They measured the direct and indirect effects of walkability and found a link to happiness, which was more pronounced for people aged 36–45, but remained significant for those aged 18–35. They called for a change in the design and development of urban and suburban areas to better enable health and well-being (ibid.). The findings are supported by the World Health Organization's (WHO) age-friendly cities goal (Marston and Van Hoof, 2019). Chan (2025) argues that urban transport is a complex system that requires both engineering and social considerations for institutional

policies to be inclusive. For the research group with a high interest in cycling, safety was a key aspect of the complex urban transport system.

2.1.6 Youth cycling for sustainable transport: Motivation and challenges

The results of a literature search using the keywords 'bike', 'youth' and 'safety' are varied across disciplines and scope. As part of the creative review process, section 2.1.6 combines the three key terms and their relationship to sustainability and community. The conversation starts with considering young people's motivations for cycling, and then the barriers encountered.

2.1.6.1 Youth motivation for cycling: Fun and school

In a research project based in Northeast England, the authors found that children and young people are less represented in transport literature despite the fact that their needs for transport to school, leisure activities with families, and independent leisure account for 20% of travel within the European Union (Casadó *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, there is a worldwide decrease in primary-age children using independent travel and an increase in car use, with safety risks for children who interact with vehicles during their travels (ibid.). The trend of decreased childhood independent travel within urban areas was highlighted in Ward and Golzen's *Urban Childhood* (1978). Writing in the British and United States contexts, they gathered data that, even then, highlighted the dynamic that increased car use aligns with a decrease in safety for young people when walking or cycling. For example, there was a London police preference, supported by transport planners, that young people travel by bus or car to school so that traffic speed could increase.

There are many studies considering young people and their transport mode choices (Porter and Turner, 2019, provide a summary). Those most similar to the research project are discussed. In one research project with older young people, Simon *et al.* (2014) used a focus group in Flanders to identify travel mode-choosing factors of 36 young people aged 18–25. Those factors considered important were autonomy, travel time, financial cost and vehicle ownership; less important in this case are the built environment and perceived safety; and not important at all are ecology and health. The young people were identified in working and studying groups (according to their main need for transport), making up to an eight-

kilometre journey. The authors suggest more research is needed on encouraging active travel (AT) among this age group and that,

> Focus should be put on cycling instead of walking, on flexibility, speed, good social support and low costs. Also, more bicycle storage and workplace facilities should be provided. Furthermore, owning a private car should be avoided as much as possible, as this is the main barrier to AT. Next to that, public transport should be optimized to fit the needs of young adults, as this could be a good combination with or alternative to AT (ibid., p. 158)

Simon *et al.*'s (2014) study demonstrated that health benefits are a low priority for young people.

In another Flanders study (Ghekiere *et al.*, 2014), 35 young children aged 10–12 and their 35 parents used 'Bike-Along Interviews' to identify environmental factors impacting the use of a bike for transport. Bike-Along and Walk-Along Interviews are conducted in the local environment and capture feedback from the participants as they experience walking or cycling with the researcher (Carpiano, 2009). The perceptions of safety from the young children and their parents are summarised in Table 1: Summary of environmental factors for youth and adults.

Table 1: Summary of environmental factors for youth and adults (Ghekiere et al., 2014)

Factor	**Young Children's Perception**	**Parents' Perception**
Traffic	Other factors were equally important to them too.	'Parents indicated that traffic situations are a major concern for letting their child cycle for transport' (p. 3).
Traffic speed	Sometimes cars avoid speed calming measures and drive closer to a child.	Parents did agree with children that slower speeds are safer but didn't mention this issue.
Visibility in traffic	'Wearing fluorescent clothing and lighting on the bicycle were seen as helpful tools to increase the visibility of children in traffic, which were, however, disliked by children.' (p. 4)	Parents and children agree that seeing traffic and being seen are important.

Distance to destination	Children tend to cycle short distances that are longer than a five-minute walk.	'Remarkably, parents often overestimated the time to reach the chosen destination and were often surprised that the destination was reached so quickly' (p. 4).
Cycling Lanes/tracks	Both children and parents liked separated cycle lanes/tracks.	Parents mentioned parked cars as a concern due to doors opening.
Cycling space	Children like wide paths so they can cycle next to a friend.	Parents like wide paths because young children might have difficulty cycling in a straight line.
Road/cycle lane surface	Children didn't like slippery or uneven surfaces that might cause them to fall or damage their bike with vibrations.	Parents were concerned the child might not see a hole and fall.
Road markings	Children agreed that road markings need to be clear.	'Parents found a lack of legible road line markings a major issue that makes it unclear where cyclists have to ride' (p. 5).
Cycling network/crossings	Children don't like to get off their bike at crossings or wait at zebra crossings. Roundabouts are also an issue in relation to seeing cars approaching.	Parents prefer a good network of cycling lanes/tracks with bike tunnels and lights at roundabouts.
Traffic signs	Some children don't pay attention to them, others find them helpful.	Parents concerned that young people don't know the rules of the road.
Bike safety	Unclear how children felt about this factor.	Parents said child not allowed to cycle if secure storage is not at the destination.
Aesthetically appealing locations	Children found them more inviting.	Parents valued safety over aesthetics.
Weather	Dark and rain were deterrents.	Parents said lighting was essential for evening cycling.

Social cycle	Children like cycling with others.	Parents concerned others will distract their child from the road.

The authors concluded that more experimental studies are needed on environmental factors and children increasing their cycling (Ghekiere *et al.*, 2014).

In a study with 31 children aged 11–16 and 14 of their parents in urban and rural locations in Scotland, Woods and Hamilton (2022) found that:

> Largely, there are greater barriers to independent active travel for younger age groups, and for girls. Meanwhile, urban areas have more motivating destinations but greater barriers posed by anti-social behaviour and traffic; rural areas have fewer motivating destinations, but greater access to leisure routes. There are poorer opportunities for cycling and considerably more dangerous traffic and other infrastructure barriers in areas considered to have lower socioeconomic status. However, all areas would benefit from improved infrastructure, especially for cycling and listening to the voices of children and young people helps ensure it meets their needs now and in the future. (p. 8)

In other research conducted in London on active travel, the researchers considered motivation for young people to use active travel (TfL, 2008). The 20 young people were aged 12–18, with six parents taking part. The researcher identified eight motivations for increasing active travel '(Fun seeking, Socialising, Following pack, Protection seeking, Pragmatic, Intelligence, Leading pack, and Energy)' (p. 24). Young people identified three activities they considered fun: 'Racing bikes on the street, Cycling in parks over more extreme terrain (mountains, hills, etc.) and Cycling for exercise' (p. 34). The study echoed that young people like activities that adults may question for safety reasons, like racing on a street.

Recalling Casadó *et al.* (2020), young people's transport needs are different from those of adults. One of those needs is cycling to primary and secondary schools. In a UK-based study, the authors used surveys (1,646 across 49 schools) and focus groups (four sessions in four schools with teachers, students and parents) to explore the perceptions regarding active travel to school (Lester and Howard, 2019). The study found that safety was ranked high as a concern despite low accident statistics. The other barriers were travel distance, adverse weather, time logistics and negative attitudes, such as not interested or motivated. Their suggestions to increase active travel were to use promotional messages to address safety concerns and encourage urban planners to address structural barriers such as traffic calming

zones around schools (ibid.). In another study reviewing literature, the focus was explicitly on bike travel to school. The researchers identified four domains (cycling infrastructure, connectivity and urbanisation, safety, and surrounding environment) consistent with other studies identifying factors relevant to cycling to school (Paulusová and Sharmeen, 2024). The study highlighted that caretakers often make travel choices for children; therefore, their perceptions must be studied. Some physical factors that would increase bike use at schools are bike parking facilities, vehicle speed limits, vehicle speed-limiting measures and the location of school entrances (to limit conflict points) (ibid.). The theme of safety, whether a child is cycling to school or for leisure, was highlighted across the literature, necessitating a further look into the topic.

2.1.6.2 Differing perceptions of safety for adults, young people and people with disabilities

Some researchers have explored the dichotomy between adult safety perceptions and those of young people. Carver *et al.* (2010) researched a group of Australian young people (170 mean age 11.1 and 27.0 mean age 16.3) with their parents. They found that young children and adolescent girls were less physically active outside of school hours and used active transport (travel) less due to their parents' constraints based on perceived risk. The authors suggest improving infrastructure and actual safety to ease adults' perceived risks. Lorenc *et al.* (2008) conducted a systematic review of the literature in the UK on the attitudes of young people and adults towards walking and cycling. Their findings echoed Carver *et al.* (2010), noting that adults prioritise their safety concerns over children's need to develop independence. The authors call for more interventions by decision-makers to counteract this fear, decrease prioritisation of car use, and improve local environments.

In a news article on the UK Bikeability programme[1], there was a clear disconnect between the perceived safety concerns of adults and the changes in the Highway Code (Department for Transport, 2022), which gave non-car users more priority on roads. The result is that despite large numbers of children being trained to cycle in the middle of a road as recommended in the Highway Code, some parents consider this 'risky' behaviour. Another

[1] Bikeability is the UK government's flagship national cycle training programme for children in England. The programme provides practical cycling skills training at various levels, helping participants feel confident when using a cycle on England's roads (Active Travel England, 2025).

factor increasing risk perception is poor road infrastructure for cyclists in general and in proximity to schools (Mallon, 2024).

Building on the topic of perceived safety, Dempsey *et al.* (2011), writing in a UK context, draw the connection between perceived safety and social sustainability. A key contributor to safety perceptions, for example, is the built environment – asking if it is inviting (and inclusive) or fear-inducing (ibid.). Dempsey *et al.* (2011) note that the UK government used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954), calling for basic needs to be met before social cohesion occurs. However, some authors noted that the emphasis on physical safety first is not appropriate in all circumstances because children have psychological and social developmental needs, too. Taking risks is considered a normal development stage within cognitive development theory for young people, as their capacity to acknowledge others' perceptions and the consequences of their actions is progressing (Sharland, 2005). Furthermore, risk taking is desired for young people to gain an '… integrated sense of self, self-esteem and self-regulation' (ibid., p. 252). For social workers, when using critical reflection on youth risk taking, it is suggested to consider young people,

> … as agents of their own lives, pursuing their own trajectories, situated within their own social, material, cultural and relational worlds. Neither the life politics of reflexive individualization, nor the determinism of social structuralism, nor the regulatory thrust of governmentality, is sufficient to explain the complex interplay of agency, structure and power involved. (ibid., pp. 259–260)

The topic of young people and social construction is discussed further in section 2.2.

Redesigning the built environment for safe cycling is essential for improving active travel access for young people of all ages, genders and abilities. The situation is a good example of how just green transitions require the inclusion of all members of a community as urban transport systems move from fossil fuel-dependent vehicles to active travel. However, there is no literature, within English-speaking Global North contexts, on how the built environment supports children with spatial disabilities such as dyspraxia. The search results found articles, papers and reports supporting physical activity on the individual level for children and adults with disabilities without mentioning that cycle lanes, as part of infrastructure, need to be designed to accommodate spatial disabilities (Jaaradm and Smith, 2018; Friends of the Earth, 2019; Ginis *et al.*, 2021; Bellew *et al.*, 2020; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2012; Yang *et al.*, 2019; World Health Organization, 2018). One

article with a global perspective identified the need for low- to middle-income countries to address the built environment, community-level interventions and inclusion of people with a disability in decision-making to increase physical activity (Ginis *et al.*, 2021), which aligns with a just green transition approach (Wang and Lo, 2021) and the disability rights movement (Oliver, 2013).

Addressing road infrastructure to separate walking, cycling and car use would benefit cyclists of all abilities by reducing the shared (and conflicted) spaces between bikes, pedestrians and vehicles. In a study that included the built environment, De Hartog *et al.* (2010) compared the health benefits of private car use with those of bike use. They found that the health benefits of bike use outweighed the increased exposure to air pollution and accidents when separate cycling lanes were present.

2.1.7 Just green transitions: Inclusion of marginalised groups

The literature review identified topics that raise concerns when considering how to utilise community work to bring about sustainable and inclusive system change. Wägsaether *et al.* (2022) argue that excluding the public from decision-making risks both exacerbating existing inequalities and creating new ones during green transport transitions. In the United States, Gutiérrez and Gant (2018) share an example of a movement for effective economic system change for young offenders where community participation *contributed to its demise*: '… the value placed on direct community participation and governance in these programs eventually contributed to conflicts with local officials that led to the programs' demise, as those with political power felt threatened by the demands of community members' (p. 625). Despite possibly increasing conflict, however, community participation is necessary. For example, Casadó *et al.* (2020) illustrate that the lack of children's participation in transport research is problematic because some of their needs are separate from those of adults, requiring recognition of young people's agency in their transportation choices. Keeping the young people's differing needs to the forefront required using everyday ethics throughout the fieldwork and is discussed further (3.4.7).

Since marginalised groups often lack political power and are adversely affected by high-level decisions, this is arguably an issue for community-based social work. De Brabander (2023) maintains that ecosocial work theory supports more ethical political action on green

transition issues. He contends that epistemic justice is an issue social workers should and can address. The gap he has identified is that there is little discussion in the literature concerning cultural and epistemological aspects of climate justice. He notes,

> With their knowledge of poverty, social security, community building and marginalisation, social workers could and should play a significant role in demonstrating the effects of the climate crisis as well as of the transition (p. 14)

Kersting (2013) also highlights the need for dialogue in democratic decision-making, noting the difference between governmental 'invited spaces' and civil society 'invented spaces'. I will revisit this theme throughout the thesis as the power dynamics that emerge are explored.

The literature review conversation opened by drawing on understandings of what the term community means and approaches to working with communities. Since the research project co-designers chose to address active travel, the literature review focused on materials connected to young people, urban sustainability and transport. Next, young people's motivations for cycling, a sustainable transport option, were explored with a focus on the barriers encountered. The conversation on community and sustainability concluded by noting that just green transitions require the inclusion of marginalised groups. The discussion with the literature continues by exploring the role of young people and the challenges they encounter with inclusion and adult spaces and perceptions.

2.2 Young people and inclusion

2.2.1 Youth social construction: Adult perceptions

The group of young people who participated in the research project has been introduced briefly (1.4.1), with more detailed information to follow (3.4.1.1). It is beneficial, while engaging with the literature review, to take a step back and consider some of the broader issues that may be encountered as a marginalised group.

Throughout the thesis, the terms 'youth' and 'young people' are used interchangeably, based on the United Nations (UN) Secretariat's definition, which encompasses an age range of 15–24 (United Nations, 2008). The young people in the research group under age 15 might be considered 'children' instead, but the term 'youth' will be used for simplicity. Using age to define a group of people appears to be straightforward; however, it tells us little

about the individuals within that group, such as differences in gender, socioeconomic status or educational attainment.

Further, the defining characteristics of the individual will be impacted by variations in social context, such as locality (Lesko, 2001; Smith, 2010; Nybell *et al.*, 2009; Berger and Luckmann, 2016; Teixeira and Kennedy, 2022). Due to these factors and limited space, the review focuses on literature topics that align with youth in a Global North urban context, with a focus on social work literature. The discussion also acknowledges the social construction of the term 'youth' without a detailed exploration of the history of social construction theory (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The meaning of the term 'youth' or, more specifically, how young people are viewed, has, of course, changed over time.

The role of children in England moved from being essentially household income contributors and carers during the agricultural and industrialisation eras to being dependent family members by the late Victorian era (Hendrick, 2014). However, the effects of class clearly influenced this characterisation (Somerville, 1986). The difference of class is reflected in more recent times with Prout and James (2015) proposing that research on children is shaped by cultural, political and historical frameworks. Finn *et al.* (2013) agree and encourage social work to consider children within the context of power and privilege in neoliberal ideology (literature on communication and power is discussed further in 2.3). Focusing on the adult perception of children in urban settings, authors have noted that cities can be places with opportunities, resources and space to interact and grow developmentally, while at the same time, cities can be unsafe places for children's well-being (Ward and Golzen, 1978; Cameron *et al*., 2025; Aruk and Cameron, 2025).

Therefore, it seems that the adult view of children has changed to an emphasis on children as needing protection and care, which is different from children as household income providers in the past. For example, Brown (2014) discusses the protection of childhood construction in terms of vulnerability. One of the routes adults have used to protect childhood vulnerability is legislation and declarations (Beck, 1992; Misztal, 2011). Building on the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) serves as a basis for legislation designed to protect the rights of children. Ideally, the best approach is the inclusion of young people in decision-making activities that affect them, thereby perceiving them as partners in addressing their

vulnerability, rather than just as needing protection (Shier, 2001). One approach aimed at meeting this goal is more relational than legislative. Relational Autonomy (RA) Theory (Rachmad, 2017) was created to address people of all ages who wish to be independent and connected to others; the theory '… defines autonomy as the ability of individuals to make decisions and act independently, but within the framework of social relationships that influence and are influenced by others' (ibid., p. 1). For young people under 18, RA is more problematic, given that their social and legal status requires some dependence on adults. Even in these social relationships, though, there is flexibility that allows adults to influence the relationships in a way that supports as much autonomy as possible for the young person. (A further discussion on RA is in 2.2.4.)

2.2.2 Youth social construction: Young people's perceptions

Having explored adult constructions of youth and young people in the literature thus far, I next asked, 'What is revealed about young people's views of their place in society?' One example is Wenham's (2020) research in a large coastal town in England, which found that young people are aware of the inequalities in resources within their communities compared to larger urban areas, perceiving these as a reflection on themselves and their place in society. This was evidenced by the participants noticing a lack of maintenance of the public amenities they would use in their area, with decision-makers prioritising tourist amenities instead.

In another example of young people's perceptions being different from adults, Burningham *et al.*'s (2022) study on the eating habits of young people found that adults perceived fast food outlets as contributors to childhood obesity. However, young people valued the locations for social reasons. The researchers concluded that perhaps the social value for young people was equally important to achieving physical health goals. In another study on youth-defined needs, Bolzan and Gale (2012) found that young people need a safe opportunity to exercise control and power. By determining their own projects and given the resources to implement them, the authors found that,

> For the young people, social resilience was not just about a creative response to adversity. It was about opening up opportunities, both in terms of who they could be in the world, the identities on offer to them, and also in terms of the power resources available to them. (ibid., p. 513)

The last example highlights the need for relationship opportunities between adults and young people, with adults changing their perception in order to open up spaces for youth power. Having reviewed this literature, I was prompted to ask, 'What types of relationships do adults have with young people?'

2.2.3 Adultism and anti-adultism

Critical social theories offer a framework for examining adult–child relationships. These theories question and challenge the labels, subordination, marginalisation and denial of access that people experience, whether by age, gender, ethnic background, religion or sexual orientation (Fook, 2002; Jennings, 2006; MacKinnon, 2009). Similar to other critical social theories, the goal of youth critical social theory aims to address oppression (Young, 2014; Hall, 2019; DeJong and Love, 2015). Adults could use critical youth theory to recognise that they can sometimes be oppressive rather than protective of children and their needs (Mullaly and Dupre, 2019; Young, 2014).

Adultism is 'The systematic subordination of young people who have little access to goods, resources, and power to make decisions … ' (Teixeira and Kennedy, 2022, p. 286), including political agency and self-determination (Bell, 1995) and economic opposition to adults (Oldman, 1994; Alanen, 2011). Alanen (2011) proposes linking her generational order framework for studying childhood, acknowledging age and social order in Bourdieu's field analysis approach (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), which aims to bring in different levels of study.

> In such a vision studies on children and childhood will be linked to the social study of larger social entities, processes and structures, opening the field towards possibilities of interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary collaboration with a range of other disciplines and research fields (Alanen, 2011, p. 8)

Adultism in this framework can occur when adults view children as having deficits and aim to protect them. Examples of overcoming adult protection regarding activity and safety (2.1.6.2) can be found in Carver *et al.*'s (2010) study, which aims to increase young people's physical activity outside of school. They found that parents need to reduce their restrictions on young people's activities due to safety concerns by using social interventions, such as organised groups walking to places, and physical interventions, such as traffic calming measures. Lorenc *et al.* (2008) found similar results. Another example of subordination, in a

different context, which can result in young people being excluded from participation in political and social activities, occurs because young people are labelled as 'risky' or 'disengaged' by adults (Delgado and Staples, 2007; Teixeira and Kennedy, 2022; Sharland, 2005).

Hall's (2019) article *A conceptual mapping of three anti-adultist approaches to youth work* brings together Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), youth organising (YO) and youth–adult partnerships (Y–AP) as anti-adultist approaches under one conceptual framework. Anti-adultism approaches share power, are socially just and request all people to reflect on their social status, actions and influences so they are not oppressive, and to challenge dominant systems when they are oppressive (Hall, 2019; Larson, 2011). Hall (2019) argues that the three approaches working together can make them more effective. For example, YO is the only approach that can be used without adult assistance. Therefore, it might be beneficial in a YPAR project to include YO to lessen potential adultism.

Another approach used by some institutions to reduce adultism in research and practice efforts includes youth participation groups, boards or forums (Horgan and Martin, 2021; Mercieca and Jones, 2018; Ergler, 2017). However, Horgan and Martin (2021) shared their experiences with two projects that used Children's Research Advisory Groups and found that these efforts can become tokenistic, costly and time-consuming (Lundy, 2018; McCarry, 2012; Franks, 2011). This issue occurs when adults co-opt young people's goals, limit their voices, provide inadequate funding, and request the youth to sanction policies lacking in scope (Teixeira and Kennedy, 2022; Connor, 2016). Horgan and Martin (2021) propose addressing some of these issues by adapting to young people's time constraints and offering different levels of input, supported by Franks's (2011) idea of 'pockets of participation'.

Marginalisation is an aspect of power imbalance that can arise in research with young people. One example is Squires and Goldsmith's (2017) research on youth (young men in this case) marginalisation in Britain. They note that although young people may be blamed for poor outcomes, researchers did not come to that conclusion after reviewing the data on inequalities and social problems in Britain (Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009; Squires and Goldsmith, 2017), instead stressing that,

> … the increasingly marginal status of many young, working class, men, is not an inevitable outcome of inexorable social and economic forces but the result of clear *political* decisions (their emphasis, Squires and Goldsmith, 2017, p. 32).

Squires and Goldsmith (2017) build upon Fergusson's (2016) work, which demonstrates that decisions made in Britain over four decades have had a detrimental impact on young people, adversely affecting them during economic downturns and limiting their benefits from government recovery efforts. The research also highlights the contradiction between policy in one direction, which creates barriers for young people, and other calls to increase youth agency and autonomy. In section 2.2.5, I share examples of youth activism to counteract marginalisation.

The call for inclusion of marginalised groups in other contexts, this time regarding health promotion and young people, is important to improve youth engagement on policy and youth development (Ozer *et al.*, 2024; Patton *et al.*, 2016).

2.2.4 Youth–adult partnerships, relational autonomy and social work

If young people are dependent on adults who create and implement policies that can be detrimental to them, then what alternatives are available for youth autonomy? One approach, mentioned in 2.2.1, is for adults to incorporate the relational autonomy (RA) theory (Rachmad, 2017). For young people under 18, RA is more problematic, given that their social and legal status requires some dependence on adults. Even in these social relationships, there is flexibility that allows adults to influence the relationships in a way that supports as much autonomy as possible for the young person.

PAR and social work with an emphasis on relationship-building are both congruent with RA. RA is supported by McLaughlin (2020) and Juhila *et al.* (2020) when young people are in PAR projects. Cleece *et al.* (2025) call on social workers in the UK context to bring RA into practice based on a scoping review by Lamph *et al.* (2023) that found relational practice benefits for both service users and practitioners. In the context of CBPAR, where social relationships span the personal and community, RA is applicable for all levels of youth interactions. As mentioned previously (2.2.1), cities can contain resources and services that can create space and conditions for relationship building, including network building as part of a counter-power initiative (discussed further in 2.3.3). Adults, such as those in youth and social worker

roles within cities, have skills to facilitate socialising and confidence skills, which are core components of supporting youth well-being (Mead *et al*., 2025).

Hall's (2019) Youth–Adult Partnership (Y–AP) could be defined as a relationship shift with RA theory. It describes the scenario in which adults work **with**, rather than **for**, young people (Hall, 2020). The shift is an antidote to oppressive practices and clarifies some of the problems of societal assumptions about the need to either protect or control young people. In their literature review, Hall (2020) found that studies with Y-AP were more likely to focus on one-to-one relationships, whereas YPAR and YO were more focused on system changes.

When people of any age are part of the decision-making process, they are less likely to be oppressed (Hall, 2020; Arnold *et al.*, 2008). Social workers may not always have equivalent decision-making authority in their relationships with young people; however, as in most countries where social work is considered a profession, a professional body exists in Britain to promote good practice. The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has a Code of Ethics that includes client self-determination and expectations that social workers are self-critical of their power in relationships with service users. (BASW, 2021).

Adults not sharing the decision-making power with young people is a clear barrier. One starting point to understand the barrier is Dominelli's (2002) concept of 'othering', which creates hierarchical relationships. Smith (2008) proposed a model of power and control to better analyse the hierarchy between children and adults by also including the *levels* at which children and adults interact, namely, family, community, state and global contexts. Lastly, the forces at those levels (political interests, social trends, economic forces and cultural/religious influences) are also considered.

Addressing youth agency in relationships on any level can be hindered by systemic, organisational, legal and political limitations on children, as well as social work's historical perspective of youth as being in need (Teixeira and Kennedy, 2022; Fox and Fine, 2013; Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002). Social workers building relationships with as few power imbalances as possible are evidenced in Bolzan and Gale (2012). However, the authors caution that sometimes young people will provide the answers they think adults want to hear. This dynamic adds an extra layer of caution for practitioners or researchers working with young people, encouraging honest dialogue so that young people's voices can be

expressed on more significant issues. The dynamic also calls for RA to be used to provide positive supportive relationships between young people and social workers, whether in practice or during research.

2.2.5 Youth voices in research and on sustainability

One reason to include youth in research is to shape public policy that affects them. Not including young people in matters that affect them is considered a social justice issue, similar to the idea of people with disabilities and their marginalisation in decision-making (Charlton, 1998). Additionally, there are many benefits of including young people in research.

Macauley *et al.* (2022) conducted a literature review of youth activity in the United Kingdom on health issues, revealing a spectrum of youth input into policy. They mapped the activity following the 2020 European Commission Report on Good Practices of Youth Participation and community-based participatory research literature (Israel *et al.*, 2005; Jacquez *et al.*, 2013). They found 14 articles, with just over half describing young people involved in designing, conducting activities and participating in dissemination. Less than half of the articles described young people synthesising results, and a minority were involved in setting priorities or goals for the research (Macauley *et al.*, 2022). The authors concluded that young people in research projects who are meaningfully supported by facilitators and integrated into the process are more likely to feel that the research was worthwhile (ibid.). The conclusion aligns with other authors' writing on meaningful participation in research (McLaughlin, 2012), with Hall (2020) and Arnold *et al.* (2008) adding that young people can be progressive decision-makers if given the chance.

In another study on youth input on community issues based in Canada, Blanchet-Cohen *et al.* (2012) found that young people could make informed decisions. The young people's decision-making processes were more time-consuming than those of adults, as they preferred to follow due process, seek consensus, value differing viewpoints and take the time for discussion and analysis. The authors noted a benefit to the youth contra adult process because, '… young people's process may be more rigorous than adults' as they make fewer assumptions about what they already know' (ibid., p. 830). The study also considered adult approaches to supporting youth decision-making. They found that adults need to learn

how to offer the right level of encouragement by adopting a supportive attitude and providing information in a balanced manner without taking control of the process.

In research on sustainability issues specifically, young people also have a role to play in forming policy. One international study demonstrates that young people are a valuable group to include in the environmental transport discourse. In the joint report, *The Role of Transport in Supporting a Healthy Future for Young People,* the authors recommend more input by young people in decision-making and a better understanding of their needs (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2019). In another extensive study, Derr and Tarantini (2016) discuss the advantages and challenges of young people's input to city planning. They conducted a two-year study in Boulder, Colorado, with 225 young people aged 4–16 on designing a prominent public space. Some of the advantages Derr and Tarantini (2016) found of including young people are:

- Capable and interested in having a voice
- Current and future citizens, therefore should be included in the decision-making process to foster future interest
- More creative and have new perspectives, resulting in better planning processes
- More inclusive of ages, ethnicities and environmental issues

In research with youth in Northern Canada impacted by changing climate issues, MacDonald *et al.* (2013) conclude that more studies gathering youth perceptions of climate issues are needed, including '… understanding their participation in decision-making processes … ' (p. 369). The authors acknowledge that young people may need to learn how to participate in macro-level strategies.

In another study of 332 young people aged 12–24 across seven urban areas (Christchurch, New Zealand; Dhaka, Bangladesh; Lambeth/London, UK; Makhanda, South Africa; New Delhi, India; São Paulo, Brazil and Yokohama, Japan), the authors Nissen *et al.* (2020) used interviews and focus groups to learn young people's perspectives of and interactions with local environments. There were five areas the young people identified as important in relation to transport and green areas amenities, namely:

1. social inclusion and belonging
2. autonomy

3. physical comfort and security
4. relaxation and reflection
5. health and fitness.

As the young people's list implies,

> … it is not merely the amenities or provision of transport or public and green space that matters, but the human interactions with it and the interconnections it enables with the natural world that need to be measured to understand how we can better support urban youth well-being in sustainable ways (p. 10)

Although researchers may aim to include youth voice or opinion on topics that affect or interest them, it is important not to revert to superficial data gathering. Research on social change needs a process that uses positive relational autonomy and reduces marginalisation and all forms of social injustice, otherwise it risks becoming another source of injustice with the research participants. Having young people as equal partners in research, from design through dissemination, is one approach to including their voices while lessening the risk of injustice. In the context of the research project with young people on green transportation strategy, the PAR approach to research can:

1. Build agency with travel by recognising that young people's needs, motivations and wants, are separate from those of the adult population (Casadó, 2019)
2. Build capacity for community action (Nunn, 2020)
3. Build social agents who are 'experts in their own lives' (Coyne and Carter, 2018; Jobson, 2025)

Conner (2016) researched reasons why youth activists can be dismissed. They concluded that there are many reasons compounded by adultism, creating an impossible situation where adults need to be convinced that the youth's voice is authentic before sharing their decision-making power with them; however, they remain unconvinced because young people cannot demonstrate their voice on an equal footing. The study concluded that more research is needed to focus on mechanisms that cause disruptions to the norms and practices that continue to preclude meaningful youth voices in decision-making and policy change. For the research project that is the subject of this thesis, an effort was made to avoid this cycle of non-inclusion of youth in decisions by utilising counter-power (Castells,

2007). Defined and discussed further (2.3.3), the sum of the counter-power activities in the research project resulted in the overall project as an example of using counter-power.

It is understandable why young people would feel vulnerable and mistrustful of adults and a society that views them as a problem. As a marginalised group, their input to matters affecting them is lacking, according to the literature discussed. Critical theories call for professionals working with young people to reflect on power relationships, relational autonomy and system changes, noting that YPAR, YO and Y-AR are antidotes to exclusion. Furthermore, literature highlights the valuable role of young people in research and in environmental discourse, demonstrating their promotion of inclusion and openness in the process.

2.3 Knowledge, communication and power

The conversation with the literature builds on the previous sections to consider how knowledge can be generated to address power imbalances that create social injustice. The PAR approach (2.4) is an option for research knowledge generation that can be conducted in a positive manner for participants or in a socially just way (Hall, 1992). The Methodology chapter provides more details on the research project's approach to knowledge creation. However, it is beneficial first to consider the literature related to the types of knowledge, barriers to creation and avenues for expressing knowledge.

2.3.1 Marginalised and indigenous groups' knowledge

The research project aimed to address a marginalised group's interpretation of problems. Since the young people did not want to do activities seen as text-heavy, alternative ways of discussing and expressing their interpretations were needed. In both Hothersall (2019) and Stern (2019), the authors argue that knowledge generated by non-traditional means is just as valid as positivist knowledge. Furthermore, Stern (2019) proposes that indigenous knowledge can make significant contributions to social and complex topics and should not be dismissed simply because it is expressed through forms such as dance, music or art.

The inclusion of marginalised voices in research can raise some dilemmas for the power hierarchy. Reason and Canney (2015) outline one:

> Both action research and ecological practice are concerned to attend to those aspects of the world whose voices have been silenced – the disadvantaged and

> dispossessed in human community; the unheard voices of the more-than-human world. Good action research also attends to those voices that are often overdominant, showing them how to recognize the power of their position, modulate their contribution and recognize other perspectives. Much ecological destruction occurs because the destroyers do not have to bear the costs of their actions, but can 'export' them to the less powerful. (p. 558)

Although the quote includes non-humans (most of which, such as plants or animals, will not have a direct voice), the point remains that power dynamics must be acknowledged. Like the analogy of needing two components because 'one hand clapping' will not work, in the above quotation, Reason and Canney argue **both** the 'disadvantaged' and the 'overdominant' must be in conversation to balance the cause and effect of macro-level decisions. A discussion on communication and power continues in section 2.3.3.

In an example from research in health and well-being, the authors use a hypothetical situation to illustrate the duty to share results with those who participate in research.

> Indigenous people everywhere have often complained of having opened up to graduate students about their issues, but have subsequently heard nothing and continue to live with poor health and struggling with their day to day lives they have shared with them. So much so they have refused to cooperate in any research unless they have equal say in the research process (Abma *et al.*, 2018, p. 3)

A response to this ethical issue for an indigenous group is proposed by Stern (2019) regarding measuring a research project's success. He says,

> The main criterion for success is not the impact factor within the scientific community, but the benefit for the people involved, i.e. the usability of the results for an improvement of their situation (p. 443)

The topic of useful research related to pragmatism is discussed further in the Methodology chapter (3.2).

The examples from literature illustrate the clash between the power, usually in the academic sphere, and the lived experiences of people. The clash is between one group with power and one with less power. One solution highlighted in the literature to counteract the situation is a participatory approach to research. Pain *et al.* (2008) note, '… PAR disrupts researchers' monopoly on possessing and controlling what is ethical, and demands negotiation with co-researchers and participants' (p. 30). Throughout the thesis, the term 'co-researcher' applies to me as the academic researcher, as well as to the young people and workers in the

research project, who are equal partners. The PAR approach calls for dialogue between partners as a solution to the possession of knowledge, which, for marginalised groups, is often rooted in their lived experiences.

2.3.2 Lived experience

One approach to data collection is through gathering lived experiences. Lived experiences as defined in research are when people, as co-researchers, speak about their knowledge and life experiences, usually concerning a specific issue (Dembele *et al.*, 2024; Darley *et al.*, 2024; Mayers and Glover, 2021; Bailey, 2021). Someone sharing their lived experiences as a co-researcher is different from someone in a consultative role, for example, when completing a survey of their experiences. A survey can gather people's experiences; however, this describes a quantitative method which can fail to offer insights into informants' experiences (Galasiński and Kozłowska, 2010). People from Marginalised and Indigenous Groups (MIG; groups plural) sharing lived experiences creates a situation where the relationship between them and researchers without awareness of power dynamics can be problematic. One adverse impact I highlight for the context of the thesis is the control or power MIG have over their experience when it becomes data.

In the hypothetical example in the previous subsection, marginalised and indigenous groups, hoping to effect structural change through participation in research, became disappointed when none occurred, motivating them to change the way they interact with researchers (Abma *et al.*, 2018). A group with a similar frustration wrote about their journey in Costa *et al.* (2012). The authors are mental health service users attempting to regain control over their lived experience stories. They achieve this by organising a public forum. One motivation to do this was the sanitisation of their stories. The authors felt that censored stories,

> … do little to change the way that agencies function or to address broader issues such as poverty, unemployment and discrimination. These conditions persist despite the work of social service providers, police, government and other powerful institutions capable of implementing systemic change. (ibid., p. 91)

In a handbook discussing injustice in healthcare, the authors noted a similar approach to sanitising stories in the UK resulted in reducing diversity or compromising the '… richness of such experiences' (Carel and Kidd, 2017, p. 341).

Other literature in a UK context addressing data collection includes capturing young people's lived experiences, concluding that residents need to be involved in planning, including children, as they are '… knowledgeable experts on their own experiences with unique contributions to make' (Tupper *et al.*, 2024, p. 2).

Trust as a component was mentioned by authors as necessary for positive experiences for research participants sharing uncensored, lived experiences (Armstrong *et al.*, 2022; Smith, 2004). The literature on the PAR approach demonstrates this by including respect and negotiation during research with co-designers. Further, the PAR approach assumes there is not one version of reality waiting to be discovered (Pain *et al.*, 2008). If trust between academics and MIG as co-researchers is built, then the research is more likely to '… constitute open and fluid possibilities which rest upon our co-researchers' needs and wishes, reflections and actions' (ibid., p. 29). If the literature indicates that uncensored, diverse lived experiences are valuable and if the groups providing the stories are MIG but trusting of the academic, then new knowledge emerging may result in system change. However, this thought led me to wonder how lived experience stories, even if shaped by a trusting relationship and uncensored by the academic, can be used against the co-researchers' wishes once the results are communicated. In other words, once both the academic and MIG lose control of the narrative.

2.3.3 Communication and counter-power

Controlling the narrative of one's story can be framed as a power related to knowledge. A discussion on the interconnection between knowledge and power is beyond the scope of the thesis; however, we have discussed some avenues for addressing power in relationships, such as relational autonomy (2.2.4), critical theories (2.2.3), anti-adultism (2.2.3) and disrupting adultism (2.2.5) through finding alternative approaches to adult–child relationships and the power adults have in decision-making on the macro level. Castells (2007) views power as the structural capacity of one over another. The term 'counter-power' describes when one challenges institutionalised power relations, which may include building networks of people to enact the intentions (ibid.). Therefore, young people using counter-power in conjunction with supportive adults to form a network may be an effective option for disrupting adultism in urban transport issues.

An awareness of political stances may help workers when engaged with MIG who are communicating their lived experiences, especially on larger global issues such as green transition (Smith, 2008) and with state and legal institutions (Castells, 2019). For example, Wågsæther *et al.* (2022) outline the different avenues injustice can take when discussing city transportation. They summarise some literature on the populist backlash to green transitions, which can affect policies.

> Toronto pursued progressive mobility policies for several years until a populist mayor was elected on the promise of ending the 'war on the car' (Walks, 2015: 402). The mobility debate in Vienna has led to a range of political factions (Buehler *et al.*, 2017). In Copenhagen, Henderson and Gulsrud (2019) show resentment to green mobility among right-wing populist parties (p. 3).

Wanik and Haarstad (2021) argue that the surge in populism is a good sign because it is part of the process that moves policies forward.

The literature review revealed a gap in understanding MIG and controlling the narrative of their lived experiences when they lack power, which led to the research questions in this project. Reflecting on how the research group addressed the issues requires a consideration of relevant literature. For example, when reflecting on communication options, Castells (2019) argues that mass media have evolved over the years, with some suggesting that self-publishing platforms are more transparent than traditional news outlets, as the author, rather than the news corporation, has editorial control. Others contradict this stance by noting that people are in 'news bubbles' created by algorithms (Liu *et al.*, 2021). However, it does raise the issue of MIG losing control of their stories' narrative based on who is controlling the communication pathways. Given that cycling happens in city road structures, the young people mapping their experiences onto the road structure through a map of their design was an option for a communication path they could control to some extent.

2.3.4 Mapping marginalised voices with social work

Some disciplines using mapping seem to recognise that maps allow for more than a geographical representation when a person is asked to create a map, explaining in their own words what the Map means (Vélez and Solórzano, 2019). In research, Marx (2023) credits psychology for mapping people's perceptions and critical geography for mapping human and geographic space interactions and relationships. Placing map creation in the context of the

research project using the keywords ‘social work’, ‘maps’ and ‘research’, the results include types of mapping such as Body Mapping, Asset Mapping, Science Mapping and Participatory Geographic Information System (PGIS) or Geographic Information System (GIS) maps. I used the results to explore the influences of young people as a marginalised group and how social workers can add to knowledge formation through mapping. I explore and debate the literature on types of popular online map platforms that are inadequate for certain groups in society.

2.3.4.1 Marginalised groups and PGIS maps

The topic of marginalised group voices in city planning is broad across many disciplines; however, it is usually connected to urban planning (Todes, 2011). One cost-effective approach urban planners use to collect public input on infrastructure changes is PGIS map applications with or without online surveys (Brown and Kyttä, 2014). The literature regarding PGIS maps is extensive. The promise of PGIS maps to assist governments, businesses, and the public or citizens in increasing communication between the three groups has not materialised (Radil and Anderson, 2019). For example, noting two studies, one by Moon (2002) and another by Coursey and Norris (2008), Ganapati (2011) states that most governments claiming to use more tech-based communications are primarily **giving** information, and few have adopted PGIS for **decision-making**. Skarlatidou *et al.* (2012) concur that communication is usually one way in public participation and web-based or online GIS. Therefore, participatory democracy remains an ideal, not yet realised, for all citizens and not just those in marginalised groups.

When discussing aspects of using PGIS maps to increase public participation in government decision-making, Ganapati (2011) notes that some issues are present despite technical advancements increasing reach and that mapping exercises are hampered by skill levels and power relations for marginalised groups. Groups lacking GIS skills and data access have decreased empowerment compared to those with access and resources (Elwood, 2008; Harris and Weiner, 1998). The technical barriers to GIS maps for marginalised groups exacerbate the power imbalances due to local context and culture, which may include opposition and lack of transparency and accountability by local leaders (Ganapati, 2011; Kyem, 2001). Adultism, discussed in 2.2.3, could be an additional barrier for young people.

When discussing urban planning, Shokry *et al.* (2022) created a new methodology using spatial quantitative data and qualitative interviews with community-based organisers, non-profit organisations and municipal stakeholders to reduce social inequalities in climate action plans. Other authors like Roula and Bouchair (2021), Tarsitano, Rosa *et al.* (2021) and Trygg and Wenander (2021) were also concerned with the decision-making process and equality. An urban planning researcher used GIS with children, but not in a PAR approach, to gain their input into city planning (Berglund, 2008). A few studies recognise the multiple dimensions of space and have called for more focus on people and activities (Healey, 2005; Stephenson, 2010). In her article, Stephenson (2010) shares that social science disciplines '… provide both theoretical perspective and resources for understanding and discovering people/place relationships in practice situations' (p. 10). What then does the literature says about the intersection between social work, MIG and city planning with maps?

2.3.4.2 Social work and mapping

Hiller (2007) argues that social workers could use GIS to benefit research and practice. Many of her reasons are similar to the ones used in our research project, despite her research being US-based. She suggests that social workers can:

1. Continue and strengthen the social survey tradition
2. Provide a framework for understanding human behaviour
3. Identify community needs and assets
4. Improve the delivery of social services
5. Empower communities and traditionally disenfranchised groups (ibid., p. 205).

She also proposes that social work skills could improve GIS mapping with MIG, suggesting,

> What might a GIS package designed for social workers look like? Perhaps it would be easier to use than existing GIS software, less expensive to purchase, and require less computer processor speed. Perhaps it would have special tools for protecting data confidentiality and allow multiple users to interact with the same data simultaneously (ibid., p. 217)

Other researchers support social work embracing GIS and mapping in identifying transport issues (Queralt and Witte, 1998) and aiding community asset mapping in Community-Based PAR (Lightfoot, 2014). Literature regarding social work and mapping is limited, relying on older sources. Given the rapid pace of technological development, this should also be taken into consideration, while indicating a need for more research.

Social work's connection to environmental issues is summed up by Kemp (2011):

> Since the profession's earliest formal beginnings, social workers have understood that where people live profoundly influences *how* they live, with important implications for equity and social justice. (Kemp's emphasis, p. 1200)

The summary fits well with the Environmental Justice approach to social work practice and research. Many authors in this area work at the community level to combat social justice issues in addition to working for climate action, and call for social work researchers to engage on the topic (Teixeira *et al.*, 2019; Hoff and Rogge, 1996). Social workers' use of maps, whether GIS or not, is worth developing, given that the focus on where and how people live is within the social work remit of social justice.

2.3.5 PAR approach: Just knowledge production

A unique aspect of social work practice and research is the inclusion of social justice, as reflected in the international definition of social work (Hare, 2004). As a profession focused on addressing social problems, social workers need to incorporate social justice into their practice and research (Smith, 2009). Therefore, an approach to research that is ethical, democratic and inclusive, valuing critical reflection, will be congruent with social work's focus on social justice.

The PAR approach to knowledge generation is valued because the social structures utilised tend to promote social justice. Ethical alternatives to positivist processes of knowledge generation, such as PAR, should be considered valid (Stern, 2019). As discussed, youth input into knowledge generation is endorsed; however, RA theory can assist with the inclusion of MIG, such as children, with a focus on social rather than individual capacity (McLaughlin, 2020).

Another issue related to the concept of valid knowledge production is the output types. Peer-reviewed journal articles may be considered the norm of knowledge output across social science fields; however, if a PAR approach is employed, this might not be the case. Pain *et al.* (2008) assert that '… PAR emphasises the production of different outputs before journal articles are even conceived (such as community reports, newsletters, presentations, websites, video, drama productions, art exhibitions, training packages and campaign materials)' (p. 31). Since PAR's starting point is to research topics of interest to participants, the resulting outputs will be similar to the ones listed.

2.4 PAR approach and variations

The dialogue thus far across and within the literature characterises a marginalised group's [this study's participants] experiences as they attempt to be included as community members and to express their autonomy. One framework that seems to address the inclusion of marginalised groups with system-level concepts is the PAR approach to research. This section examines how a strategy for social work practice and research, focusing on PAR, can benefit young people and similar groups by discussing the background and variations of PAR, the approach's advantages, and exploring PAR and creativity.

2.4.1 The PAR approach

PAR as a research approach was first developed and used in community settings before being adopted in universities (Hall, 1992). Hall additionally points to the development of PAR through interdisciplinary theories in '… adult education, sociology, political economy, community psychology, community development, feminist studies, critical psychology, organisational development and more' (p. 16). Due to the broad starting points, my focus is on literature relevant to the research project context.

The definition of PAR used in this thesis is from Hall (1981 and 1992). He highlights that it is a social action, education and research process which:

> … is biased in favor of dominated, exploited, poor or otherwise ignored women and men and groups. It sees no contradiction between goals of collective empowerment and the deepening of social knowledge. The concern with power and democracy and their interactions are central to participatory research. Attention to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical and mental abilities, and other social factors are critical. (p. 16)

Attention to social factors is needed as PAR calls for researchers to use critical reflexivity in their work and have mutual benefit as a goal (Teixeira and Kennedy, 2022).

PAR is inclusive of people who might have been considered unable or incapable of generating scientific input due to so-called 'social deficits', such as income levels, ethnic background and education levels (Dore, 2019). People using the PAR approach may discover that social factors considered 'deficits' are framed within the underlying system inequities, rather than in the individual (Teixeira and Kennedy, 2022; Tuck, 2009). Social injustice is another way to view underlying system inequalities. Recalling the discussion in section 2.1.1,

social sustainability comprises the formal and informal systems and structures that impact people's present and future health in communities (Barron and Gauntlet, 2002). Therefore, PAR with people in communities is applicable for research addressing sustainability issues with underlying system inequalities (Durham Community Research Team, 2012; Stamm, 2023a).

Reason and Canney (2015) outline PAR's place in ecological studies because, as discussed in section 2.1.1, people and the planet form a community. For example, humans live in the natural environmental system and, therefore, will have an impact on and be impacted by activities in that system. Another approach is to consider the interconnection of sociology and ecology. Reason and Canney (2015) suggest that '… action research may bring a capacity for inquiry and dialogue that is essential when dealing with complex socioecological systems' (p. 554). Active travel, as discussed in section 2.1.5, is an example of a complex socioecological system because it addresses environmental issues while changing culture and social connections within a city. An approach like PAR reduces the limitations of a top-down decision-making culture. It enhances the capacity to examine system complexity by including and empowering all individuals impacted by environmental problems and solutions, including researchers (Chilvers and Kearnes, 2016; Reason and Canney, 2015; Banks *et al.*, 2013; Chevalier and Buckles, 2013; Israel *et al.*, 1998).

Another way that PAR increases the capacity of marginalised groups to address system-level problems is through multiple iterations of action and reflection (discussed further in section 3.4.7): changes influence reflections, leading to further changes and reflections until an optimal solution is agreed upon (Reason and Canney, 2015; Pain *et al.*, 2008; Noone and Kong, 2025). PAR also builds capacity through people's collaboration and their perspectives on the problem and solutions because '… collaboration is also a political act: it affirms the right of people to make a contribution to the development of knowledge that will affect them. And more widely, collaboration is educational and developmental for all concerned, widening and deepening capacity to respond' (Reason and Canney, 2015, pp. 556–557). Charlton (1998) proposed a similar sentiment regarding people with disabilities and inclusion.

Paulo Freire (1970) used educational theory to generate change and build capacity through co-researching with people in South America. He proposed a non-oppressive manner of

research that requires trust between the researcher and those with concerns to be researched. Individuals who have been historically oppressed need to be included in the decision-making process (Charlton, 1998). Freire (1970) phrased this concept in terms of humanity: 'A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favour without that trust' (p. 36). When oppressed people move through their struggles, it is often referred to as liberation, a clear aim in Freire's (1970) and Borda and McTaggart's (1997) work.

As Hall (1992) describes, PAR has evolved into two traditions. One has a focus on collaborative reflection on the depoliticised process without placing priority on the knowledge and power relationship (Whyte, 1991). The other includes focusing on power and transformation, the 'liberatory' tradition (Hall, 1992, p. 17). As used in the research project, PAR was firmly in the liberatory tradition, in line with Freire (1970). Pain *et al.* (2008) described the origins of PAR as '… liberal humanist and scientific paradigms' (ibid., p. 28). The authors explain that the PAR approach builds on its legacy with inclusive, visual, emotional and affective methods, influencing change with non-verbal and non-textual techniques (ibid.). The topic of creative forms in PAR is discussed in section 2.4.2.3.

2.4.2 Relevant variations on the PAR approach

After examining the origins and aspects of PAR that address broader system issues, the focus now turns to more specific topics. Variations in creative approaches to PAR that align with groups engaged in the research are a natural outcome of the process (Cilliers and Timmermans, 2014; Lombardo, 2023). In the context of the research project that is the focus of this thesis, the conversation with the literature continues with an examination of the Youth and Community-Based PAR literature, preceding an exploration of creative methods used with PAR.

2.4.2.1 Youth PAR

Recalling section 2.2.3 on youth critical social theory, Youth PAR (YPAR) was named by Hall (2019) as one approach to anti-adultism because it addresses power sharing and system issues, and calls for critical reflection, all components of the PAR definition (Hall, B., 1992; Hall, S., 2019). YPAR differs from other forms of PAR in that it considers a population that may face challenges due to age (MacDonald *et al.*, 2001). Anyon *et al.* (2018) conducted a

systematic review of YPAR literature, identifying key components. Teixeira and Kennedy's (2022) definition of YPAR incorporates the traits identified by others, namely:

- Has a knowledge production orientation
- Uses critical scientific inquiry
- Challenges traditional research approaches
- Ensures youth and adults start at their level for the examination process (as opposed to a top-down starting position)
- Supports youth development
- Advances social change or disrupts power structures

When the above characteristics are combined with the democratic and critical reflection in all PAR approaches, it is understandable that there would be a positive outcome for people using the approach. For example, Teixeira and Kennedy (2022) found, '… YPAR was associated with increases in youth leadership, connectedness, communication skills, problem-solving, decision-making and the ability to recognise and disrupt inequalities in society' (ibid., p. 292).

The ability to address social justice is a valuable aspect of the YPAR approach for social work researchers. The trait of YPAR supporting youth development aligns with social worker practice goals. Therefore, YPAR is a suitable approach for social work practice research. The literature review, however, found a call for more youth involvement in policy changes (MacDonald *et al.*, 2013; Macauley *et al.*, 2022). In their article, Ginwright *et al.* (2005) outline why this might be the case, with one reason being that youth research is driven by problem identification, such as delinquency and substance abuse. The authors propose using a 'possibility-driven perspective' (ibid., p. 27) instead, which leverages youth assets to support healthy youth development. They further suggest that youth are not a problem to be fixed; conversely, youth need to be seen as agents for change with self-worth and self-awareness. The possibility-driven perspective values youth participation in research and acknowledges the need for collective challenges to marginalisation and injustice in urban communities (Ginwright *et al.*, 2005; Fox and Fine, 2013; Macauley *et al.*, 2022). The perception also includes seeing young people as having the agency, rights and abilities to shape policy (with creativity) despite having less control over their lives due to their age (Ginwright *et al.*, 2005; MacDonald *et al.*, 2013; Macauley *et al.*, 2022). Lastly, another

advantage of the possibility-driven perspective in practice research is that it aligns with social work theories, such as Strength-Based and Solution-Focused (DeShazer *et al.*, 2021), Ecological Systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Environmental social work (Teixeira *et al.*, 2019; Rambaree *et al.*, 2019).

Teixeira and Kennedy (2022) note that even though social work has a social justice objective, '… our practice and research methods are sometimes experienced as extractive and often perpetuate deficit-focused narratives of youth' (ibid., p. 293). Others caution researchers regarding power dynamics when using PAR (Pain *et al.*, 2008; Felner, 2020; Banks *et al.*, 2013), which is relevant to youth and adultism. Teixeira and Kennedy (2022) note that researchers should remember they hold power, even when PAR relationships aim for equality. PAR relationships are formed between co-researchers and researchers, changing the researcher; however, like adultism, the researcher may still be treated as having power (Teixeira and Kennedy, 2022; Felner, 2020). This can be particularly true for academic researchers (Lenette *et al.*, 2019).

2.4.2.2 Community-based PAR

Young people can be part of a community group, so it is appropriate for them to be included in a Community-Based PAR (CBPAR) project (more details on the research group match to CBPAR are in section 3.4.1.2). CBPAR can go by different names; however, social work, nursing and other health professions use the term CBPAR or CBPR (when referring to non-action research) (Israel *et al.*, 2012). CBPAR is research designed, implemented and disseminated with the community's input on topics of importance to them and can include capacity-building and co-learning (Banks *et al.*, 2013; Hacker, 2013; Shadowen *et al.*, 2020; Israel *et al.*, 2012; Kindon *et al.*, 2008; Minkler, 2005; Openjuru *et al.*, 2015; Salsberg *et al.*, 2017; Pettican *et al.*, 2023; Durham Community Research Team, 2012). More details on the CBPAR approach to research are in the Methodology chapter (3.3), as CBPAR is the primary approach for the research project. As part of the literature review, I consider discussions on the approach.

A starting point for conversation on CBPAR is the work by Banks *et al.* (2019) titled *Co-producing research: A community development approach.* In this book, the authors highlight themes in their approach within an international context as part of a research project aimed at imagining community development and the co-production of knowledge. One discussion

point is the need for diverse viewpoints to be accommodated if people are to feel heard. The authors continue,

> Crucially, this recognition of multiple perspectives is linked to people's sense of agency. If no one listens to people in communities facing difficult circumstances, then their agency is severely limited. Co-production can often entail community development outcomes if people do feel increased power and agency – but that is not easy and straightforward when imbalances in power are so embedded … (p. 206)

Power imbalances as a barrier to change are of concern for PAR co-researchers, which is perhaps why, in part, Banks *et al.* (2019) include details on the co-production process and analysis.

In a UK context, other authors have written about their findings using CBPAR in detail. In a study funded by Sustrans (a UK bicycle charity) to improve four Scottish communities with increased active travel, the authors and young people created maps of places to go and barriers to independent travel by walking and cycling (Woods and Hamilton, 2022). One of the findings was that young people's needs from the public spaces and built environment are generally not prioritised. Other changes needed were cultural and not infrastructural, such as parents and children becoming more familiar with active travel and anti-social and poor driving, which decreases young people's confidence in travelling independently (ibid.). The authors outlined that COVID-19 restrictions circumvented their original research design, so the final design was not as participatory as had been hoped. However, the goal remained that the communities would use the data and findings to improve active travel in their areas after completing the study (ibid.).

Other literature asserts that CBPAR is a good approach that requires more effort to include marginalised groups in dissemination. Openjuru *et al.* (2015) analysed five submissions to a journal special edition on CBPAR and found that marginalised groups are still omitted as main authors in published research. They found that some barriers to greater inclusion were the academic publishing industry still being dominated by the Global North, review processes still being biased, and the lack of resources, time and networking support to enable authors from marginalised groups to publish (p. 226).

One effort to address the gap between academic and non-academic researchers is through the Knowledge for Change Consortium (Lepore *et al.*, 2021). By providing training and following a set of five guiding principles (research ethics and values, understanding of power

and relationships, multiple types of enquiry, critical and reflective researchers, and a balance between theory and practice), the Consortium aims to reduce knowledge extraction from communities and create partnerships between communities and academics instead. The authors highlight that their approach will promote social change and can be used to address the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adding, '… nearly all of the 17 SDGs have specific targets that depend on local action' (p. 349).

2.4.2.3 PAR and creativity

A PAR approach to research will always incorporate some element of creativity if people come together in a spirit of openness and exploration, referred to as cultural synthesis (Freire, 1970). The cultural synthesis is established and maintained through a creative climate (Domínguez and Cammarota, 2022). The creative climate openness can generate new methods of data collection and analysis (Mannay, 2015). Creative approaches serve a purpose beyond collaboration and the values mentioned so far in all PAR approaches. The creative process also provides fertile ground for new solutions to problems, for example, when combining two or more partial views, resulting in a unified perspective (Peile, 1988). The dynamic is particularly helpful when considering social and ecological situations, as the creative approach can address young people's issues on multiple levels, including individual, family, community and broader systems (Lee *et al.,* 2020).

Creative processes in PAR can aid youth development through increasing capacities and skills (2.1.5; 2.2.5; 2.3.5; 2.4.1). Creative approaches blur into data collection and community action when creation expands to include technical skills such as map development, video filming and editing. The new technical skills are a result of capacity-building within a research project. In this way, creative approaches within co-designed research projects go beyond the expression of feelings and perceptions for research extraction only, and evolve instead to become a tool for community activism (Freire, 1970; Domínguez and Cammarota, 2022). For example, in the research project, Photo Voice and Bike-Along Interviews methods are combined with a creative approach, utilising an interactive map (3.4.4.3).

An example from literature on young people and creativity was a large study of 950 youths in Egypt and Iraq using PAR, which found that youth development and connection with the community improved with a collaborative and creative atmosphere despite the disruption of the young people's lives in areas of migration (Lee *et al.*, 2020). In a dissertation based on a

large PAR arts project, Lombardo (2023) notes that research can be creative by including all human senses. Other authors researching social workers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic's social restrictions found similar results (Kong *et al.*, 2021).

Literature review conclusion

The literature review was an exciting conversation with the literature. Due to time and space limitations, not all topics were explored in depth. However, gaps and calls for further research in specific areas were identified. The conversation started by reflecting on the term 'community' – first, how it is defined and second, how it is considered in sustainability topics. Next to be incorporated were the topics of social work in community and environmental work, leading to sustainable or socially just green transitions, such as active travel and the inclusion of marginalised groups.

Next, the conversation focused more on a marginalised group – young people – reflecting on their social construction by adults and themselves. The topics of adultism and anti-adultism were addressed in a social work context. The section on youth and inclusion ended with relational autonomy as an approach going forward with the inclusion of youth voice in research.

The conversation then turned to reflect on the combination of knowledge, communication and power when working with marginalised groups. In this section, concepts of counter-power were discussed. An approach to disrupting the adultism power structure by building a network of young people and workers, using social work skills, considered mapping as a form of communication.

The last section of the conversation incorporated all the previous topics through the lens of Community-Based Participatory Action Research by first defining its characteristics, and then examining a few variations and reflecting on how creativity can be used.

Given the gaps identified in the literature, social work values, and most importantly, the co-researchers' input to the research project design, the research questions for the project became:

1. Based on young people's current experiences of active travel and their goals for developing active travel in their communities, how do they see their route to achieving those goals?

2. How can young people, as a marginalised group, express their needs and wants regarding active travel to decision-makers through the structure of a youth work organisation?
3. How can social workers and youth workers aid youth development through community action activities relating to active travel?

3 Methodology: Rationale, design, implementation and reflection

Introduction

The research questions that emerged from the literature review aimed at addressing a gap in research on using Participatory Action Research (PAR) to address social justice in the context of sustainability and urban transport. Further reflection on the literature is necessary to delve deeper into the values and philosophies underlying the methodology. This chapter begins with explorations of social work values, pragmatism and democracy literature that align with Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR). CBPAR was identified as the most appropriate approach for this project and is based on the co-researchers' topics of interest and the underlying values discussed. Our study is compared with CBPAR implementation phases in the literature, along with details of the methods implemented.

The approach to the research design evolved over time and as work with the group progressed. From the perspective of the author, as facilitator of the project, an initial plan needed to be in place. The implementation of each discrete method used is outlined, with additional detail on the map process and technology, which proved to be at the heart of the study as our collaboration developed. The subsequent section of the chapter covers data analysis, leading to a section reflecting on the PAR process once completed. The chapter ends with a discussion of ethical issues. Everyday ethics with a flexible and reflective approach to research ethics aligned well with the CBPAR approach.

3.1 Social work values

> It is important to note that the values of PAR are crucial because they relate directly to social work values. (Barbera, 2008, p. 145)

The international definition of social work includes principles and theories that reflect values of respect, dignity, solidarity, collective responsibility and inclusion, so social work can, as stated in the definition, '… engage people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing' (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). Values can be in harmony or in conflict with the individual social worker, organisation or society over time and are acceptable if recognised as a possibility (Reamer, 1999). Writing and reviewing literature on social justice and social work in the English context, Craig (2002) notes,

> … one clear theme which emerges from this literature is the need for social workers not to lose sight of their role as agents of progressive social change (ibid., p. 677)

Social justice was defined in the Introduction chapter as fair and equal treatment of all groups by social, political and economic institutions, especially for those who experience marginalisation, with the promotion of fairness, equity, inclusion and self-determination (Duignan, 2025). Additionally, for the thesis, the term 'social justice' is defined broadly in various contexts of epistemic, testimonial, hermeneutic and procedural justice. Dore (2019) supports social work's focus on epistemic injustice within marginalised groups, based on professional values with a critical realism analytical framework. Epistemic justice is closely related to democratic values held by social workers when viewed in terms of inclusion.

Social work and Community-Based Participatory Action Research are consistent with democratic values because they build on the democratic approach to research proposed by Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Like Freire, Saul Alinsky's (1971) *Rules for Radicals* contains arguments for democratic approaches to shift power dynamics from those who 'Have' to the 'Have Nots'. The thread is seen in more modern activist researchers such as Kara's (2017) assertion that all people should have '… a voice, a vote and veto' (p. 289).

In his article, Hothersall (2019) sees the path to democratic knowledge generation through pragmatism as a philosophical base. He argues that this approach considers all types of knowledge as valuable if it meets the pragmatic criteria of being based on foundations or criteria for the knowledge, is related to its context and may be fallible. Overlaps regarding social work values and democracy can be seen in pragmatism, which also informed the research project design.

Social justice, democracy (both in knowledge generation and political processes) and the variety of values connected to aiding individual and community well-being are necessary. Because vulnerable groups are prone to abuses by other groups, critical reflection on social work values is one path social workers can employ to reduce possible social harm. An understanding of pragmatism aids critical reflection in a research context as it considers people and their daily lives.

3.2 Pragmatism and democracy: Informing the research approach

This section brings the concepts of social work values, pragmatism and democracy into sharper focus by first exploring the history and connection between social work and pragmatism. Next, the connections between democracy and epistemic justice are added to support the decision to use CBPAR for research with a marginalised group addressing just green transitions.

Kaushik and Walsh (2019) summarised the history of pragmatism as a general philosophy first discussed by the originator Charles Sanders Pierce with William James and others in Cambridge, Massachusetts, during the 1870s. Over the next one hundred years, many contributed to pragmatism's philosophical development, such as John Dewey, with Richard Rorty credited for bringing pragmatism as a philosophy to research vocabulary from 1979. As a term used in research, pragmatism can be defined as researchers using the philosophical and/or methodological approach that works best for the research problem under investigation, so the focus is on the research question and outcomes instead of the methods.

As pragmatism has evolved, different models have been created. In terms of social work research, John Dewey is important because he considered questions on how humans should live their lives in the context of different social issues (Reason, 2003). A model called 'critical pragmatism' was created to include Dewey's definition, which contains a critical aspect that can be overlooked (Wagenaar, 2011; Forester, 2013; Kadlec, 2006). The model starts with Dewey's premise that the ancient philosophers valued reason over lived experience because working people were in a lower class or slaves in their society and could not contribute to philosophical debate. It can be argued that people's opinions are still dismissed not because of the opinion itself but because of who is giving it (Kadlec, 2006). Fricker (2008) describes this as epistemic injustice, specifically, testimonial injustice, and calls for validating all voices in democratic and social discourse. The research group used democratic knowledge generation to build capacity as it moved through the CBPAR phases (3.4), and engaged with the democratic process in their community to effect change on a regional transport plan.

Forester (2013) proposes five claims that critical pragmatism can achieve regarding city planning:

1. Co-constructed and negotiated planning practice is concerned with processes and outcomes

2. Sensitivity to power dynamics because it is open to evolving forms of knowledge
3. Better practice through a better understanding of 'deliberative processes'
4. Better process design by embracing inventive, open conflict and ambiguity between parties
5. Deeper conversations which use more imagination, active listening and problem-solving

Another pragmatist model, called 'neo-pragmatism', looks at replacing objectivity with solidarity (Levine, 2010). Voparil (2021) pairs Rorty, who considered pragmatism in social change because some experiences are shared, with Jane Addams's approach to pragmatism, as they both used it to address democracy and social justice for marginalised groups.

Combining aspects of the two models by using critical pragmatism with a focus on solidarity was a good fit for the research project because the young people and I were asking what could be done, first to address climate change and later to improve their cycling experiences and well-being within regional planning. Critical social theories are used when working in solidarity with the young people and project workers (Mullaly and Dupre, 2019). Following the values of pragmatism, the workers were concerned with the young people's context and their needs and what could be done to address them in a system that tends to ignore the voices of young people. Therefore, the method was not the main concern (although care was taken to fit with what was already familiar to them), but rather the question of how a goal identification process and communication with others in their wider community improve young people's situation. The approach operationalises that the start point of epistemology is the *doing* rather than the thinking (Macmurray, 1993; Reason, 2003).

Doing is important; however, how we discuss the action needs clarity because the research question is in a specific context, so social constructionism needs consideration (discussed in sections 2.2 and with youth in 2.2.1). However, a lack of space prohibits a lengthy discussion of language and power as presented by Bernstein (2000). Rorty supports the focus of inquiry being on language to aid people in new ways of thinking about their situations; however, he does not fully support the relational thinking aspect of social constructionism (Reason, 2003). The relational aspect can be key, as seen in the relationship between young people and the decision-makers during the research project, which exemplifies a lack of relationship between the two groups. (see section 6.4).

If social work can build a bridge toward solidarity and social justice so that decision-makers increase their sensitivity to marginalised groups, then, as Rorty believes, solidarity will increase as the sensitivity and responsiveness to more and more groups of people increase (Rorty, 1999). Reason (2003) adds that this keeps democracy at the forefront and that action and not theory needs to be the focus in arguing that democracy is a good thing, supported by action research.

Critical pragmatism aids the CBPAR approach for the project on a few levels. First, because it does not focus on following the theory rigidly but on answering the research question. Second, it is focused on knowledge generation in a context that is important to those asking the questions and in a manner that is comfortable for them. With this approach to research, the young people were able to participate in decision-making throughout the process.

3.3 CBPAR framework

CBPAR is considered an orientation rather than a method because different methods can be used. CBPAR is designed, implemented and disseminated with the community's input on topics of importance to them (Banks *et al.*, 2019; Craig, 2002; Durham Community Research Team, 2012; Hacker, 2013; Hall and Tandon, 2017; Israel *et al.*, 2012; Israel *et al.*, 1998; Leavy, 2012; Lepore *et al.*, 2021; Lightfoot *et al.*, 2014; Melro *et al.*, 2022; Mance *et al.*, 2020; Minkler, 2005; Openjuru *et al.*, 2015; Pettican *et al.*, 2023; Rae *et al.*, 2023; Salsberg *et al.*, 2017; Shadowen *et al.*, 2020). PAR, as an orientation more than a method, does bring challenges. It can be described as complex and non-linear or 'messy'; however, '… messes can be attractive and even exciting' (Brydon-Miller *et al.*, 2003, p. 21). 'Messy' is a description similar to 'wicked' problems, which describe complex, difficult-to-solve and usually system-level problems (Lehtonen *et al.*, 2018). It is important for qualitative research that the researcher is open to reflecting on intermediate results. This openness allows for the research pathway to change, which can also be unnerving, but like 'messiness' can be exciting. Section 3.7 discusses ethical processes which are beneficial when building relationships within PAR.

CBPAR-informed research requires that the people being studied are also the same people who control the research design (Banks *et al.*, 2019; Israel *et al.*, 2012; Hacker, 2013). Therefore, the uneasy feeling I experienced when I realised that the research project could end before enough data was collected to inform a PhD thesis was a good indicator that

power was truly in the hands of the participants. The experience was an example of community development in practice and research, evolving from helping or empowering to using critical social theories to build solidarity. For example, Mullaly and Dupre (2018) argue that structural social work can be viewed as a critical social theory. Critical social theory uses modernist and postmodernist contributions to respect various voices while committing to solidarity with those finding and expressing their voices in socially unjust systems/structures (ibid.). Co-researchers being 'in solidarity with' instead of 'in control of' is one way participants maintain control of research design.

Action research is defined as, '… building democratic, participative, pluralist communities of inquiry … only possible *with, for* and *by* persons and communities' (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p. 2). The democratic underpinning of action research is supported by other authors, including but not limited to Borda and Rahman (1991); Greenwood and Levin (1998); Heron (1996) and Kemmis (2006). Action research is related to pragmatism in that, as Reason (2003) notes, '… action research is an orientation to inquiry rather than a methodology' (p. 106). Having broken down the components of the CBPAR definition, the attention turns to implementation.

The stages, steps or phases of CBPAR can vary; however, there were some core components that led to a comparison of the different phases used in CBPAR and 'youth as researchers' literature, as summarised in Table 2: CBPAR Process Comparison Between Literature and Community-Based Project (CBP). As demonstrated, there is no agreement between the authors on an exact process, so the common headings of 'Engagement and Planning', 'Research Question', 'Designing', 'Generating Data, Analysis and Feedback' and 'Dissemination' were created. A last category for 'Ongoing Throughout Process' was added since two sources mentioned the phase, and the research group implemented it. Each row in the table starts with the author and their steps in the CBPAR process in the order specified to the right. The columns aim to show the overlap between different approaches. In a table format, it is easy to assume the process is linear; however, as mentioned previously, PAR is usually iterative. In section 3.4.7, I detail the implementation activities by phases.

Table 2: CBPAR Process Comparison Between Literature and Community-Based Project (CBP)

Authors or Group	Engagement and Planning		Research Question	Designing	Generating Data, Analysis and Feedback	Dissemination	Ongoing Throughout Process
Hacker (2013)	Defining the community, engaging the community, assessing the community needs, identifying the research question			Design/hypothesis testing, roles and responsibilities in the conduct of the research	Analysis, interpretation and results, dissemination and action		
Israel *et al.* (2012)	Forming a CBPR partnership	Assessing community strengths and dynamics	Identifying priority health concerns and research questions	Designing and conducting etiologic intervention and/or policy research	Feeding back and interpreting research findings	Disseminating and translating research findings	Maintaining, sustaining and evaluating CBPR partnerships
Centre for Social Justice and Community Action & National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (2022)	Preparing and planning	Developing a working agreement	Designing the research		Generating and analysing data	Sharing and making impact from the research	Engaging in ongoing dialogue and ethical reflection during the research process

Dolan P. *et al.*, (2015)	Deciding on a research topic	Finding out about the topic	Planning for change	Writing a research question	Research design	Research ethics	Reporting research findings	Dissemination	
Community-Based Project (CBP)	Assets-Based Community Assessment	Developing a working relationship between young people, youth workers and an academic researcher evolving into one research group		Research design evolves as the research group's capacity builds and discusses their experiences			Data generated and feedback in map creation, discussions about map creation, and videos with young people and adults	Dissemination – press release, input to regional strategy, policy brief and academic conferences and papers	Ethical questions, maintaining relationships and young people guiding design decisions

The first row in the table summarises Hacker's (2013) phases of CBPR. The second row in the table also focuses on CBPR. Israel *et al.* (2012) expanded the process to six phases with an additional ongoing phase regarding relationships. The third row summarises the approach of the Centre for Social Justice and the Community Action and National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (2022), with the additional ongoing phases along with five others. The authors for this row were more focused on ethical questions throughout the phases (ibid.). Regarding toolkits and handbooks on research projects with young people, Dolan *et al.* (2015) outline a detailed approach to research design, included in Table 2 as the fourth row. The last row of the table is the steps taken during the present research project, outlined in the next section.

3.4 Implementation of the CBPAR Process

3.4.1 Engagement and planning

The first phase of the CBPAR process, Engagement, started before I met the group by conducting a community assessment. Both Hacker (2013) and Israel *et al.* (2012) include community assessment in their CBPAR process. Although I conducted it on my own without the group, it can be a way to develop a connection with a community (Chatterton *et al.*, 2007). The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach is used in social work community assessment (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; Pitzer and Streeter, 2015).

3.4.1.1 Case study group and location context

For logistical reasons, the research project location was Northeast England (1.4). Ethical Approval for the fieldwork was tentatively granted by the Department of Sociology at Durham University in May 2022, with a review required once a group was identified. The complete Ethical Approval process and challenges arising are covered in section 3.6. By the end of May 2022, I had contacted a few community groups in Northeast England, all of which declined to engage in research. It was not clear at that time whether the ASTRA Project would require adult research participants only on ethical grounds. Later in June, after my engagement with a youth group was approved, I contacted the manager (referred to as W2) of a nature-based youth organisation to ask the young people in his organisation if they were open to meeting me.

As mentioned in the Introduction chapter (1.4), the youth organisation is situated in a large seaside town and the surrounding areas in Northeast England. The total population of the seaside town in 2023 was 147,800, with 26.8% under the age of 24. This percentage is similar to other regional and national areas in England [confidential – local council website, 2023]. The area surrounding the town's park, which the research project used, is in the second-highest area of deprivation for the region in 2019 (ibid.). Governments use areas of deprivation to measure well-being (ibid.). For ease going forward, the term 'the Park', capitalised, refers to the park used during fieldwork.

The youth organisation focuses on young people having fun outdoors; however, it is not a sports or leisure club. It uses Nature-Based Intervention (NBI), which is broadly defined as 'programmes, activities or strategies that aim to engage people in nature-based experiences with the specific goal of achieving improved health and wellbeing' (Shanahan *et al.*, 2019, p. 2). The youth organisation has two mission statements that both fit the NBI definition [confidential – youth organisation website, 2025]:

- To promote physical and mental health and well-being and to advance education and personal and social development for the benefit of the public through youth and community work, training and the use of the outdoors
- To provide an effective model of engaging residents in disadvantaged areas in youth and community work, based around healthy outdoor activities (ibid.)

The youth organisation meets weekly in the Park, necessitating that members live within cycling distance, which, as mentioned, is an area of high deprivation. The youth organisation comprises participants aged 12–24 and two youth workers who share an interest in cycling and outdoor activities. Once the research project began, youth organisation members were invited to join the smaller research group, referred to going forward as the Community-Based Project (CBP). The CBP expressed an interest in cycling, which necessitated learning about the policies and organisations that shape cycling in England.

In 2017, the English Department for Transport (DfT) published the first national Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Strategy. The CBP's local council declared a Climate Emergency on 18 July 2019, pledging to be carbon neutral by 2050, and then developed a strategy to align with the national plan to increase bike use and walking [confidential – local council website].

The local council published their Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for 2021–2036. This plan later informed the regional active travel strategy. Active travel addresses sustainability issues by increasing walking, cycling and the use of mobility devices in conjunction with public transport, thereby reducing the number of carbon-emitting vehicles (DfT, 2020).

In England, the primary funding for the LCWIP implementation is through External Grant Funding from Central Government Departments such as the DfT, Department for Housing, Local Communities and Local Government and the Energy Savings Trust. Therefore, a successful funding application should demonstrate that local efforts are aligned with the policies and priorities set out by Active Travel England, as they are recognised as national leaders in this area. Furthermore, a regional government organisation works for the seven local councils, including the one where the research project took place. This allows the region to better compete with larger, more urban and more densely populated parts of the country when making funding applications. An opportunity to address active travel in the CBP's location arose when the planning body of the regional government organisation initiated a new regional active travel strategy consultation period, which coincided with the fieldwork timeframe.

Two organisations in England that promote cycling are of particular interest to the CBP. Sustrans is a volunteer organisation created to build and maintain cycle lanes and address policy-related issues throughout England, Scotland and Wales (Sustrans, 2025). Cycling UK (trading name of Cyclist Touring Club) is a charity that promotes cycling, runs community activities, and develops campaigns to increase cycling resources (CTC, 2025). The youth group is a member of this organisation, which provides training for older young people on leadership skills and bike maintenance. The youth group community contact for Cycling UK was interviewed as part of the research project.

3.4.1.2 Case study: Group fit with research aims

The fieldwork for the research project needed to take place in Northeast England near Durham University. This was due to my need to be in England near the University. My travel options were restricted by a combination of other travel demands as part of the ASTRA Project, residency requirements and the lengthy fieldwork timeframe to develop relationships typical of PAR projects.

The youth group fit the location requirement. More importantly, the group's interest in cycling as part of an active travel strategy made it possible as a case study on sustainability and urban transport. The group was open to gathering data that aligned with these interests and activities. Combining their interest with openness to new approaches, the group facilitated the examination of broader issues. As the findings demonstrate in Chapters 4–6, the young people, as a marginalised group, had valuable experiences resulting in evidence on social justice, counter-power and youth and adult relationships.

The young people had experience giving input on funding priorities and were supported to communicate their learning. Therefore, their interests (active travel for fun, cycling for socialising and BMX biking) would overlap with those of the commissioned project (sustainability and co-design). I was delighted to see a goal in an application that encourages and supports young people to share their learning through video and photos on social media. The willingness to share research is a key component of the PAR process, which aims to effect social change, another example of the fit between the group and the PAR approach to research.

After W2 spoke with the youth organisation members, the young people agreed to meet me in July 2022. I moved to live near the Park. I stayed in the area to better relate to the community group and conduct the community assessment. The assessment consisted of walking in the area, becoming familiar with the services available to all segments of society and learning the area's history. I approached the process as an inquisitive visitor. A search was conducted online to answer my questions and interests; however, my social work practice experiences were that walking on different days and at different times is still the best approach to gaining a sense of community and how people live their daily lives. The assessment continued as I learned from the young people what it is like for them to live in the area. In the first month of the fieldwork, I had completed the first part of the Engagement phase of CBPAR. I continued to deepen the engagement over time, leading to the second part: developing working relationships.

3.4.2 Developing working relationships

The weekly meetings in the young people's usual place were important in building trust within a PAR project (Salsberg *et al.*, 2017; Banks *et al.*, 2013). The ethnographic field notes

captured detailed observations of interactions between the young people and the youth workers, between the young people and each other and between the young people and me. There was no pressure from me on the young people to engage in research; however, W2 and I (referred to as W3 in transcriptions), along with the other youth worker, W1, often asked them what they were interested in doing. I did explain, though, that it needed to be around climate action issues, as that was a requirement of the ASTRA Project. I related the process to scientific inquiry, substituting social scientists for regular scientists looking at problems and conducting experiments to find solutions to the problem. When the adults started to ask what problems they saw relating to climate change, they started talking about their inability to get around on their bikes.

I learned over the first few meetings that the young people's interests included cycling for social reasons, BMX racing and more challenging biking like using mountain bike trails or going on longer journeys and the barriers and social injustices they encountered. Although the process of building relationships had only started and would continue through the CBPAR process, the group formed an Instagram group after agreeing to commit to the project (Instagram process explained in more detail in section 4.4.4.5). I appreciated that it was a form of communication they already used for other group activities (Giddings, 1895; Chriss, 2006). With the young people's participation in the project secured, the CBP was composed of two youth workers, five girls and seven boys aged 12–22, with a good mix of genders and backgrounds (upon observation, no self-identifying took place); however, they were all local to the Park, and all had an interest in cycling.

Some made videos, some gave feedback in the de-brief session, and some did extra activities like attending a stand at a school mental health day. The time they spent on participation also varied. Some made only very limited contributions, while others were involved throughout. The project was designed so that young people felt no pressure to attend activities and could stop at any time if they wished. There was no need for the composition of the group to be the same at the start and finish.

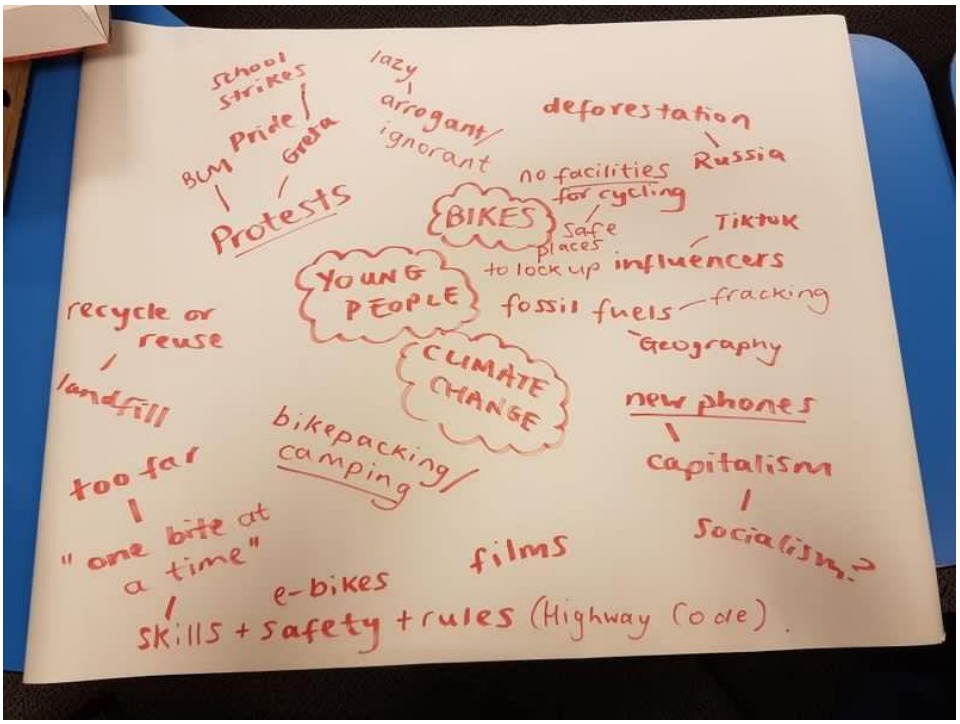
3.4.3 Research design

The start of the following CBPAR process, Research Design, began in July as the young people suggested surveying other young people in third-level education to explore their feelings

about climate change and travelling to and from classes. I also asked them about mounting cameras on their bikes to film some of the issues they mentioned in our conversations, which could also be another part of the research design.

When I returned in September 2022, we reengaged our relationships and reopened the discussion on design. I also did a study visit to Edinburgh, as it was listed as a pro-bike city in the United Kingdom. The research design moved forward when the youth workers organised a group discussion at the end of September. The meeting's purpose was to engage young people on their issues on climate change for the youth organisation funding applications and for my research project, as there would be an overlap. Since it was not my meeting, I did not record it like I did in later Group Sessions; however, W1 did gather the young people's feedback on flipchart paper, which the group agreed I could use as well. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Group discussion on Climate Action from 22 September 2022



As a result of our discussion at the meeting, the group decided to focus on bikes, young people and climate change for the research project. In early October, W2 was contacted by the planning body regarding attending a forum meeting of special interest groups on active travel. The planning body represents seven city councils to coordinate regional strategies and funding applications to the national government on travel issues. The research group talked about the barriers to the whole group cycling to the meeting, approximately ten miles

from the local town. The young people were interested in the topic but were told by the planning body that a large group could not be accommodated, so they agreed that I attend on their behalf. This was a key point in the relationship-building because I felt I was contributing to the group and not just an observer.

I led the second Group Session by preparing a discussion with the young people and youth workers about their vision for their lives by 2035, because that is when the planning body's active travel strategy will end. We also discussed making a map of places they had been sharing with me. By the end of October, the group had research questions and a design plan in place. We would film the items identified on the Map and share them as part of the planning body's public consultation on the regional active travel strategy. By taking part in the consultation, the research design included dissemination for social change, which is a component of CBPAR (Hacker, 2013; Israel *et al.*, 2012; Chatterton *et al.*, 2007). Having completed the CBPAR phases of Engagement and Planning, Research Question and Design, across all types of CBPAR from Table 2, the next phase was the data generation and feedback cycle using methods appropriate for the group's needs.

3.4.4 Data generation and feedback cycle methods

The process between data generation and feedback was circular. There was also an overlap between methods, acknowledging that the PAR approach typically employs qualitative methods (DeOliveria, 2023). This section summarises the different research methods used to generate data while building the group's capacity for knowledge production along a CBPAR orientation and answering their research questions.

3.4.4.1 Field notes

Data generation for the research project had already started with the field notes I had created of the weekly meetings and study visits since July 2022. Ethnographic field notes (referred to as field notes going forward) were chosen as they best described the situation of my keeping notes on activities new to me (Emerson *et al.*, 2011). The research questions asked for young people's experiences, so the field notes were a way to accomplish this, especially combined with other data. Collecting data through different approaches is an established approach to research, allowing for triangulation of data (Heale and Forbes, 2013). For the research project, field notes aimed to capture information on social injustice,

well-being and interactions with stakeholders regarding active travel and young people. There were 37 field notes generated in total. (See Appendix E for a summary of the project field notes.)

3.4.4.2 Group session transcripts

The Group Session method differed from field notes in terms of activity type, participant composition (limited to CBP members), and the process of recording. The sessions were similar to a focus group structure, intended to be a conversation with the young people as opposed to the extraction of data (Powell and Single, 1996). Instead, with the democratic and solidarity-oriented PAR approach, the sessions were dialogues with the young people. There were six Group Sessions transcribed, averaging two hours in length. A summary of the session topics and attendance is in Appendix F.

The Group Session activities covered questions and conversations between the young people and workers on their lived experiences, facilitated by the workers. This data-collection method aimed to capture social injustice and well-being aspirations expressed and explore with the young people how they wanted to interact with policymakers about active travel in their communities – in other words, the group's community action plans. There was an overlap with the field notes on the topics, allowing for the organic nature of a conversation starting during the weekly sessions and carrying over into the Group Sessions and vice versa. Because the Group Sessions took place outside of the Park and the young people's normal activities, they did provide a dedicated focus on the project and the research questions.

The Group Sessions were scheduled for weeks when the young people had a BMX race the weekend before, or there were bank holidays when they normally might not meet on a Monday. By taking this approach, the research project did not take away any of their usual fun time on bikes, while having focused discussions and good reviews of the videos. The primary location of the Group Sessions was the local community centre, located within a four-minute bike ride of the Park. The community centre had Wi-Fi, which we needed to build the Map (explained in 3.4.4.4), with a large-screen TV, which we connected to a youth worker's laptop. In April 2023, the youth organisation's shop across from the Park was secured, so we used that instead for the last two Group Sessions.

3.4.4.3 Go-Along Interviews combined with Photovoice

Carpiano (2009) explains that Go-Along Interviews are a method used in social sciences when the aim is to capture data with people and place, with the following components:

- An in-depth interview between the researcher and the participant in a locality
- Modes can be walking, biking, riding in a car or a mixture of one or more modes
- Location sizes for the interview can vary depending on the mode and the participant's mobility levels
- The interview topic is the lived experiences of the participants connected to the area when travelling through it

Although it was not known before the research project was designed, camera use in Go-Along Interviews as a research method has been used before (Carpiano, 2009) with adults (Adlakha *et al.*, 2022) and younger children (Ghekiere *et al.*, 2014; Tupper *et al.*, 2024). The Photovoice method typically means use of still cameras by participants to capture images after which they discuss what the images mean to them (Wang *et al.*, 1996; Sutton-Brown, 2014). The Photovoice goals of people recording and reflecting on their community, promoting dialogue and communicating with policy makers, align well with CBPAR goals (Catalani and Minkler, 2010). Combined with Go-Along Interviews, Photovoice is powerful because the images can be used in focus groups (Carpiano, 2009) or to promote community change (Wang *et al.*, 2004).

For the CBP, the Go-Along Interviews for the dedicated Map point nights were combined with Photovoice when filmed, as outlined in this section. The Go-Along Interview transcripts are incorporated in Group Session transcriptions when the group met to discuss the footage. They are included in this manner instead of being separated because the Go-Along Interview for our project was a continuation of other activities. There were two nights of filming Map points in the community, and there were de-briefs on the videos across three Group Sessions. A timeline of the group's activities is in Figure 2: Timeline 2022–2023 – Group Sessions and Video Filming in section 3.4.4.4.

The process to combine Go-Along Interviews and Photovoice was organic for the group, yet follows the CBPAR use of arts-based methods (Melro and Ballantyne, 2022; Leavy, 2022; Domínguez and Cammarota, 2022). There are empirical studies that have combined Go-

Along Interviews with GoPro cameras (Vannini and Stewart, 2017). Other studies used GoPro cameras with post-visit interviews to map space in a museum (Burbank *et al.*, 2018) and to map experiences in a library (Kinsley *et al.*, 2016).

In our study, the individual young person who recorded the footage may not be the individual young person making the analysis in the Group Session. The result is that the data was more collective and less individualistic. Also, the CBP workers did shape the conversation at times by asking open-ended questions to encourage the young people to stay on topic or to think through their perspectives; however, the focus was on capturing the young people's experiences.

The group's use of Go-Along Interviews was not typical. The starting point was the group identifying places they wanted to film. As used in our project, the interviews were not the start of exploring the environment from the participants' viewpoint, but the documentation of the young people's experiences as a group that had already been expressed. The purpose of the interview was to communicate the group's issues to people outside of the research group, including policymakers, as part of counter-power and community action activities.

Another aspect of the Photovoice/Go-Along Interviews combination was that the videos were incorporated into the Map and shared online. I will discuss this platform in the next section. With their approach, the group generated quantitative data on the Map platform and, at the same time, qualitative data through thematic analysis of the Group Session transcripts, which included both the Go-Along Interviews and Photovoice video footage.

The video camera used for Photovoice in our project is a second-hand GoPro HD HERO 4 camera and accessories, including a chest mount and weather protection case that still allowed for audio capture. It is small and light (can fit in the palm of your hand) and inexpensive, with the camera, accessories and memory card totalling less than £100. We used the camera mounted on young people's chests and recorded their views of the environment as we cycled and occasionally stopped to chat. During our two filming nights, I carried the list that the group had generated earlier of places to film. Therefore, I would cue the young person on when to turn the camera on and off. Photovoice is not commonly used this way because the goal is for the participant to decide what to film/photograph in the moment; however, our project's goal was to film what the group had decided.

There are some challenges to combining the two methods. The main issue is that the exploratory nature of both Go-Along Interviews and Photovoice is lost because our participants were not exploring their surroundings in the moment. Some may argue that this approach stifles discovery and new ways of perceiving their environments. However, the discovery phase has already taken place because the group is filming their environment, which they have often explored on their own and as a group.

Another aspect of the combining of the methods was that some capacity-building needed to take place so that young people could fully participate. Most young people did not have camera and editing experience, so some on-the-spot training took place with me and W2 sharing our experiences. The capacity-building is presented in detail in the Findings chapter (5.2.3). Combining my past video training (Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Film and Television) and social work training with the Go-Along Interview method, namely, listening and asking questions to draw out internal narratives, served the research project well. While filming, I listened to young people's reactions and asked questions. As a filmmaker, I noticed that the first videos the group recorded primarily involved one youth worker explaining the road dangers to young people. Since the aim of the project was to have young people speak on the video recordings as much as possible to reflect their lived experiences, the focus was subsequently shifted to the young people being 'on camera'.

3.4.4.4 Mapping data as a method

The overall research design outlined in section 3.4.3 demonstrates the cyclical nature of PAR throughout the process, which is discussed in further detail in section 3.4.7. As part of the design, I have shared how the group combined Go-Along Interviews and Photovoice with variations of both to suit their needs. Combining methods is only one aspect of the CBP design. The next component was selecting platforms to develop and later share the data, considering methods that best fit the group's needs. The process led to a new way for marginalised groups to work and communicate their community action or counter-power goals with entities that prefer Geographical Information Systems (GIS).

The idea of using GIS in social science research is not new. Steinberg and Steinberg (2006) wrote a book introducing the application of GIS as an analytical tool. Carpiano (2009) proposed combining the quantitative data of GIS with the qualitative data gathered in Go-Along Interviews. Six years later, Sianko and Small (2017) outlined the uses of GIS for social

scientists and the barriers of the cost of training and software. Kwan (2012) details how geography research struggles to connect people and place, suggesting that using GIS with qualitative methods and web-based platforms provides more detailed insights. Using GIS in a social science project, therefore, was well established.

To better understand how we could use GIS in our research project, I met separately with two PhD students in the Durham University Department of Geography during the initial stages of the research design. It was thought that if the young people created a map like those used by city planners, their work might have more gravitas. However, once I understood the complexity, the learning curve to GIS maps was too demanding for me, first to teach myself and then to teach the young people. More importantly, the young people were not willing to meet weekly in a room to tackle this process. Importantly, this also illustrates the wider point that to be seen as facilitating participatory modes of inquiry, resources and techniques must be accessible for research participants. Further issues around Participatory GIS maps were discussed in the literature review in section 2.3.4. The result was that the CBP needed an alternative to GIS maps.

We started in Group Session 2, asking young people where they see themselves using bikes in 2035. The year was chosen as it corresponded to the end date of the proposed new active travel strategy. Building on weekly meeting discussions, everyone shared experiences across three categories in relation to where they:

1) had a near miss or felt unsafe cycling
2) felt something could be improved so they could cycle more/more safely
3) liked to go on their bike.

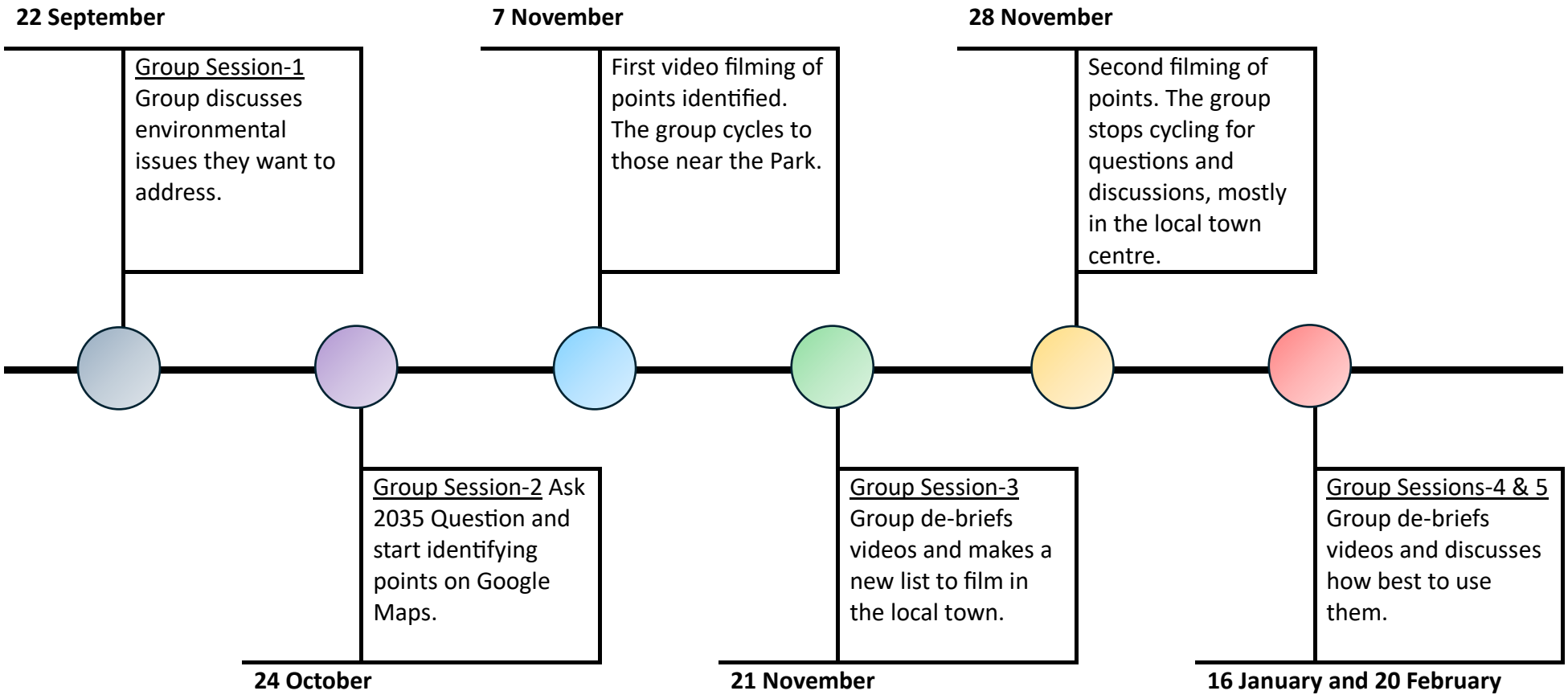
Google Maps was selected to gather their replies because it was familiar to the group and had no restrictions on pin locations (with the whole world as a possibility), unlike a printed map, for example, which would have limited boundaries. In a later literature search, it was found that other researchers used similar methods (Gordon *et al*., 2016). Google Maps is cluttered, though, with advertisements, and it was not as intuitive to add data. Later, we switched to the Padlet (Padlet, n.d.) online platform, which was approved in Group Session 5. Padlet Map templates are easier to create and edit than Google Maps and have no advertisements. They are often used in education settings. Like Google Maps, Padlet maps are free to use. The group's Map was given a Creative Commons copyright to protect the

group's work and make it useful to others. More information on the Map's use is in section 3.4.6.

Each Map pin had text and, in some cases, a video clip. The text was generated from the Go-Along Interview and group de-briefs, and the video was taken from the Photovoice material described in the previous section. The pins were designated a colour by the categories mentioned, and the group confirmed that their experiences were reflected in each pin. Therefore, although not all individual members had the exact experience the pin represented, they all agreed that they experienced something similar. The Map points thus became data points of experience arising from new combinations of methods to collect data.

Because the Padlet Map template points have longitude and latitude coordinates, the data could be included in GIS programmes, which, as discussed, did not suit the group's needs; however, it is preferred by other disciplines like urban planning. The group's approach to using a map was a good solution to the technical and communication issues they identified with the planning body (5.3.2). Additionally, the activities needed to build the Map were similar to the group's everyday activities, with the Group Sessions the only additional task required. Combined with the low cost and relative ease of the process to build the Map, the new method addresses some of the issues with GIS maps not reaching MIG raised in the literature review (2.3.4). To protect anonymity, a pseudonym map was created with pin examples and can be found in Appendix I. The technical details on how YouTube and Instagram were used are detailed in Appendix L. Figure 2: Timeline 2022–2023 Group Sessions and Video Filming demonstrates the relationship between the data generation and feedback between the Group Sessions, Map development and video generation.

Figure 2: Timeline 2022–2023 – Group Sessions and Video Filming



3.4.4.5 Stakeholder interview transcriptions

The CBP aimed to conduct interviews with people outside the CBP to gather information and answer questions raised by the young people. In this way, the interviews supported a pragmatic approach to inform me and the CBP on the topics that arose of bike use, community resources and public health initiatives. Semi-structured interviews were an appropriate method because the young people had specific questions with the aim of gathering additional information on topics on which the interviewees are experts (Humphries, 2008; Smith, 2009).

The original design of the research project was to include five stakeholder interviews. One of the two that did not occur were with an engineer in the local council's transport department. It was intended that the interview would answer the young people's questions on how cycle lanes are designed. The other interview that did not take place was with a community member who was trying to create a new BMX track near the Park and the barriers they encountered.

The three stakeholder interviews that took place online in March 2023 were recorded and transcribed in the same manner as the Group Sessions. The person and topics to cover were discussed at the 20 February Group Session (a summary of the people and goals of the interviews is in Appendix H). Young people were invited to join me for online interviews; however, none of them did. The three people interviewed were staff from a community biking charity and the local Health Promotion Unit, and a university staff member promoting cycling for university students.

Arising from questions raised in the Group Sessions, the young people, through the youth workers, invited the Neighbourhood Policing Service to attend one of their usual Monday sessions in March. This interview was not recorded; however, notes were taken, and it was de-briefed at the 3 April Group Session, and so the key points are included in that transcription. The young people had questions regarding the correct use of paths and bike security.

3.4.4.6 Youth worker questionnaires

Questionnaires are a similar method to semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data; however, questionnaires are more structured (Humphries, 2008). For the project, questionnaires were used to:

- collect information from the project workers to capture their thoughts about youth work and research processes to assist young people in expressing their needs and wants regarding active travel to decision-makers and
- learn how youth workers can aid youth development through community action activities related to active travel.

I produced the questionnaire with topics chosen based on the research questions. Unlike the semi-structured interviews, the questionnaires were not driven by young people's specific questions for the workers, since they had ongoing access to them. Instead, the purpose of the questionnaires was to inform my understanding in preparation for data analysis.

The original research design was to schedule a joint online interview with the workers while I was away in March. However, due to time constraints, I asked if they would complete a questionnaire emailed to them instead. They were open to this, and both completed one separately with the questions in Appendix G.

3.4.5 Data analysis

Data Analysis is a phase of CBPAR, so it is included here; however, a more in-depth presentation is in section 3.5. In the context of including young people in research, data analysis can be challenging to organise and structure without tokenism (Horgan and Martin, 2021), resulting in young people often not being included in the data analysis phase of PAR (Atweh, 2003). However, there are PAR projects that included analysis with individual older young people's input that could be replicated (Jobson, 2025) and creative approaches with younger children (Shamrova and Cummings, 2017). There was an effort to include the young people in this project; however, they were not interested in an additional task. The group agreed to my completing an initial findings stage, followed by a meeting with them to confirm that the findings accurately represent the young people's experiences. That meeting took place in January 2024 and is discussed in the Findings and Discussion chapters.

3.4.6 Dissemination

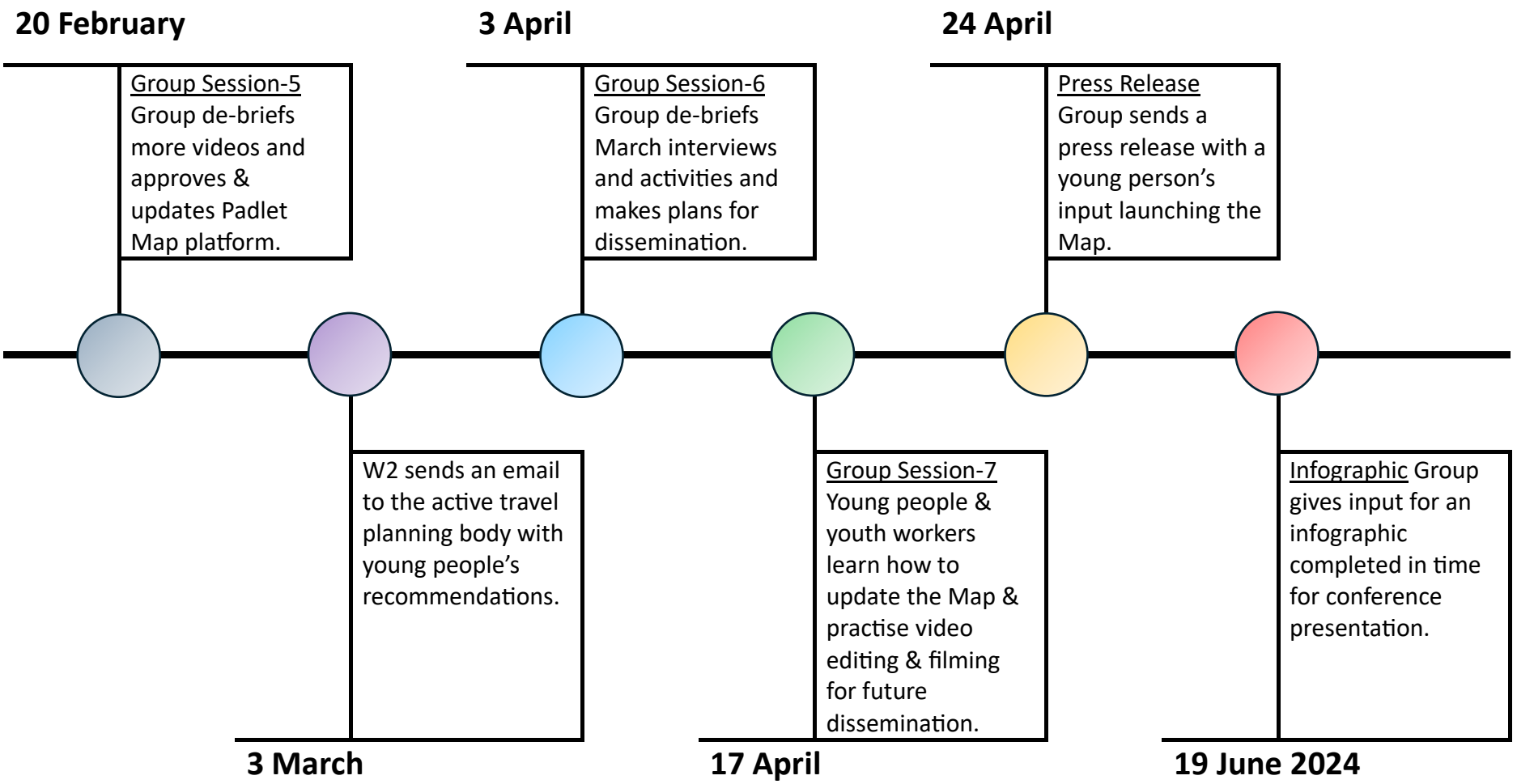
The research project had two layers of dissemination. The primary one was disseminating the Maps and recommendations to policymakers, other charity groups and the public. The other is dissemination through academic outputs. Both layers will be discussed in this section. The semi-structured interviews were also part of the dissemination, as they took place after the Map was created. I explained the Map to the interviewees for networking purposes and hoped for support from their organisations for the group's next steps after the fieldwork ended.

3.4.6.1 Dissemination activities from CBP

As a phase of CBPAR, dissemination is more than academic output because of the sharing of power during design. Respect for the lived experiences contained in the data and the need for dissemination in the community where the research took place are also priorities (Costa *et al.*, 2012; Vivona and Wolfgram, 2021; Chen *et al.*, 2010). In the engagement stage of the project, I took time to think through and explore new ways of gathering lived experiences where the young people could maintain control of their narrative. When the Map started to evolve, it was clear how the platform could be under the group's control for dissemination and community action. As mentioned in section 3.4.4.4, the group has a Creative Commons copyright for the Map, and participants were trained to update and edit it after the research was completed. More on controlling the narrative is covered under the ethics section (3.7).

During the fieldwork, the group disseminated their recommendations based on their experiences to the planning body via email and to the public through a press release (section 6.7.2). After the fieldwork was completed, the group continued dissemination activities through an academic conference presentation, which included the distribution of the group's Infographic (Appendix K). A summary of the dissemination activities implemented with the group is in Figure 3: 2023–2024 Timeline – Map and Recommendations Dissemination.

Figure 3: Timeline 2023–2024 Map and Recommendations Dissemination



3.4.6.2 Dissemination of research for academics

The other layer of dissemination was sharing the research results with academic networks. This was through the usual channels of conferences and publications. The research project was first discussed through a workshop at the International Federation of Social Workers conference in May 2023. The focus at this juncture was on the Map methods and technical processes. The conference was a good choice as the audience consisted of practitioners and researchers interested in social work and the use of technology. The next presentation of the research project was at the ASTRA Project Summer School, followed by the End of Project conference. At both presentations, a broad overview of the project was given, again focusing on the methods used, with feedback from social work PhD students and academics. The last presentation on the project was in a PAR symposium at the European Social Work Research Association conference, where initial findings were presented.

In a forthcoming book, the research project is discussed in two separate chapters, Shackelford *et al.* and Närhi *et al*. When asked, one of the youth workers said they would be interested in contributing to a joint journal article with me. From the presentations so far on the research project, there is interest by practitioners and academics in the details of how it was conducted. Therefore, another future written dissemination document could be a handbook on replicating the use of maps, video and process as demonstrated in the research.

One significant activity that straddled both the group and academic dissemination was the group's presentation at an academic conference. Young people who took part were able to speak directly to social workers at a conference with a sustainability theme. The experiences of the event are covered in the Findings chapter 6.7.1.

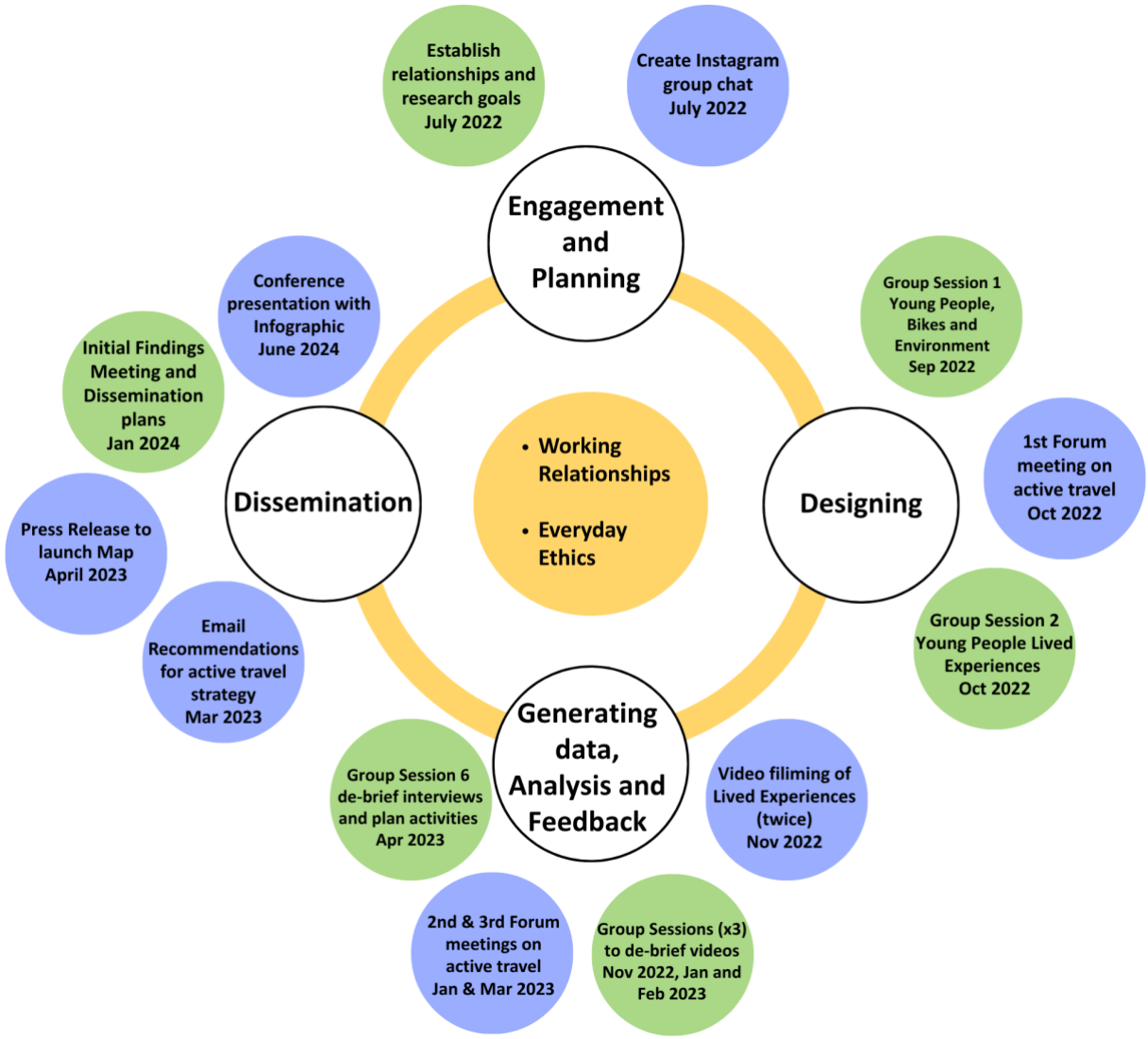
3.4.7 Throughout the process

Some of the CBPAR approaches in Table 2 include a phase running throughout the process. For the CBP project, the activities in this phase were developing working relationships and everyday ethics. Consistent with the PAR approach, the research design and data generation were cyclical and changing throughout the research project.

The research project was funded by and executed under academic institutions, requiring adherence to Ethical Approval processes. Concurrently, my role as facilitator was to bring principles and critical self-reflection, consistent action and clarity of expectations, all leading to relationship-building and trust (more details in 3.7). It is not unusual for CBPAR projects to have both regulation and relationship ethical standards, as the group dynamics, decision-making and social action aspects define the projects as they unfold (Banks *et al.*, 2013). More details on ethics are in section 3.6. However, it is mentioned here because maintaining good ethical relationships based on trust requires effort throughout the project.

A summary of the CBP tasks and reflection throughout the research project is encapsulated in Figure 4: CBPAR Action and Reflection Cycle. Blue circles represent group action steps, green represents reflection on topics, and orange represents activities throughout the process. The cycle is based on similar PAR cyclical models (Israel *et al.*, 2012; Pain *et al.*, 2008; Kindan *et al.*, 2008). Noone and Kong (2025) noted that individual members of a research group may not move through the cycle in unison and added the concept of individual change within the group cycle process.

Figure 4: CBPAR Action and Reflection Cycle



A caution is needed when creating figures summarising events to avoid giving the impression that a PAR project was neat and tidy. On the contrary, the term 'messy' would also describe the CBP. List (2006) notes that human learning often occurs in a repeating cycle.

3.5 Data analysis: Process

There are many issues connected to the PAR research approach, including how data is analysed. My explicit assumptions about and specific approach to the thematic analysis are derived from Braun and Clarke (2006 and 2021). After reading their 2021 article, I incorporated their emphasis on reflection while coding data. Another author whose work influenced the analysis process was Mason (2002), who detailed different types of data and 'directing your gaze' during analysis (ibid., p. 89). This means being reflective on the items

that receive focus. From Miles *et al.* (2014), I incorporated their suggestion to test the validity of the coding by recoding a few days later and reviewing whether it matched the first round of coding. Braun and Clarke (2021) informed the iterative approach taking care not to see data as emerging, but instead making connections through themes.

Themes were connected from the data set after considering interesting points related to the research questions and theories. The analysis was not semantic. I did not consider words or language and instead conducted the analysis on the latent or interpretive level, looking for meaning and even what was not said in the conversation transcripts. It was phenomenologically based on experiences of and relationships between young people, workers and communities in Northeast England. The approach was theoretical and not inductive. The aim was not to generate new theories, as with Grounded Theory, but to compare the data to existing theories.

The initial data review occurred during the transcription and cleaning processes for the Group Sessions (which incorporated video transcriptions), as well as the Interviews and Questionnaires. An additional step was needed for the Map points. They were converted to a PDF document first and then entered with the other text data. The last text documents added were the field notes. Once prepared, the documents were added to the NVivo© platform for coding along with photographs. During training, NVivo was recommended for use with qualitative data.

The photos that were included in the thematic analysis were:

1. Group editing in the van at the Park
2. Local Council resolution for a new BMX track
3. Flipchart paper after the discussion at Group Session 1
4. W2 and a teacher
5. Copy of a news article on young people's behaviour
6. Shop door sign limiting the number of young people allowed to enter
7. Landing page of the group's Map

By January 2024, the initial findings were identified. A meeting was organised with the research group for their feedback and input.

Reflective Thematic Analysis is the best fit for the research project. This is because the research questions were designed to find the young people's experiences and opinions within a PAR approach to research. Thematic analysis can do this because it looks at data sets, that is, a combination of different data types. Common themes can be extracted across all the different types of data. Another reason Reflective Thematic Analysis was chosen was that the research questions aimed to connect the project to existing social work and social science theories.

3.6 Ethics: Process and considerations

The ethical considerations for the research project were based on social work professional standards. Documents that informed the process and decision-making were the PAR Ethics Handbook (Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, 2022) and training with the Department on Continuing Academic Development at Durham University on Ethical Considerations. Lastly, as part of the ASTRA Project, ethics training was provided and consultation services were available. A copy of the Participant Information Sheet is in Appendix B, and a blank Consent Form is in Appendix C. A summary of the ethics approval process is in Appendix D.

3.6.1 Everyday ethics

One aspect of PAR that has not yet been discussed is its approach to research ethics. Advantages and challenges arise because of PAR's emphasis on following the group's priorities in design and fieldwork. The everyday ethics approach involves negotiating daily with the people co-designing the research project (Banks *et al.*, 2013). The approach

> … stresses the situated nature of ethics, with a focus on qualities of character and responsibilities attaching to particular relationships (as opposed to the articulation and implementation of abstract principles and rules) (ibid., p. 263)

As discussed throughout, social work is concerned with ethics and social justice, with Kong (2016) stressing that social work ethics make the profession accountable to practical and ethical approaches. As a professional working with vulnerable groups, sometimes extra care is needed. In a scoping literature review of 17 articles focused on ethical concerns when conducting research with children, Dubois *et al.* (2021) agreed that a participatory daily reflection and flexible approach is encouraged in everyday ethics. They added that it is best

to include parents in the process when working with children, if possible (ibid.). Lenette *et al.* (2019) use case examples to illustrate that moral dilemmas arise. They suggest that when conflicts occur, community relationships should be balanced with the demands of academic rigour (ibid.). In the findings chapters, data demonstrating the reflections and decisions of the young people with the adults charged with their safety and academic requirements are presented.

3.6.2 Ethical issues specific to the research group

There were a few ethical issues connected to the youth organisation. First, they have safeguarding policies for under-18s, which require that I do not engage a young person on my own. Another adult was always present. Second, if a young person contacted me through social media or any other way, I would notify the manager immediately. Both policies were followed during the fieldwork.

The location around the Park is an area of high deprivation. This classified the young people as a vulnerable group in addition to being marginalised in the community due to their age. The experiences they shared of discrimination, verbal and physical incidents, and personal concerns were all treated with respect and confidentiality. At the same time, as reflected in the field notes, most sessions were de-briefed with the youth workers who had built relationships with the young people over more extended periods than I.

The young people always decided whether they were in or out of the research project. No conditions were placed on their participation, nor were there any rewards or punishments for non-participation. This approach follows PAR-informed research and social work values, which respect individuals and their autonomy (BASW, 2021). Lastly, by not having exclusion factors within the group, everyone from the youth organisation was invited to participate if they wished. Other non-profit charities were excluded from the research project once the youth organisation committed to it.

The research project was designed to preserve anonymity through collective action. This was accomplished in two ways. First, the Map provides statements of cycling experience without identifying the person contributing. However, the wording was done either by a young person directly or by their approving the phrasing used to populate the early map drafts. Second, when collecting feedback on the videos, the person who made the video was not

necessarily the one who de-briefed it. The flexibility in the feedback process created a more diverse map that maintained the lived experiences of young people without compromising confidentiality or anonymity. Lastly, anonymity was protected through collective action, as the group's commitment to maintaining confidentiality ensured that individual members' identities remained private. Throughout the fieldwork, the workers, young people and I discussed issues on confidentiality and anonymity in general, with some aspects specific to the type of media used (Banks *et al.*, 2013).

3.6.2.1 Printed data confidentiality

A printed hard-copy transcription section was shared during the group de-brief session on 20 February 2023. It was generated with line numbers to give an example of redacted statements from a young person who never joined the group but attended a de-brief in October 2022. The sample showed that all the statements from young people used an initial instead of their full first name. The initial of their first name is used to decrease confusion during transcription. The young people agreed that this was fine with them. However, for the thesis, the initials are randomly anonymised to numbers for the young people and workers to aid my clarity while writing.

3.6.2.2 Video, still photos and social media platforms

Another area of concern regarding confidentiality was the video footage. All video footage was uploaded to the group's YouTube Channel (more details are in Appendix L). The channel was created specifically for the research project. The only people with the username and password for the channel were research project workers. We discussed with the young people that the access information will not be shared widely because when too many people have the information, the password will likely be changed by mistake, and then no one can access it.

The video footage was edited based on the requests from the young people in it. For example, one young person did not want to talk to the camera. Another young person did not mind their voice in the video if their face was not seen. All young people in the video footage used for the Map were consulted in either a de-brief session, in person or through Instagram. If they did not confirm, the footage was not used. In the de-brief Group Session 5, we debated using emojis or blurring to hide people's faces. The young people were open

to these options; however, the discussion concluded by editing out people completely as a conservative measure. One young person asked if editing them out would compromise the research project. I quickly replied that it was not the issue and that their comfort was the utmost concern. They said that since that was the case, they preferred to be edited out, which was done without hesitation. Since the young people have complete control through the youth workers, all the footage can be re-edited at any stage if a person changes their mind about themselves in a video.

Some still photographs were taken during the research project; however, some were used in the youth organisation's social media posts as well. The young people were familiar with and understood their options on participating in the photos in both instances. Verbal approval of using photos was secured by those present. The dedicated Instagram group chat for the research project helped share pictures. The youth organisation has a Facebook page and other Instagram accounts; however, the research project did not engage with them.

3.7 Reflections on the PAR facilitation role

In preparation for the Findings chapters, pausing to reflect on the PAR approach as experienced in my facilitator role is helpful, specifically, reflecting on building relationships, acknowledging power dynamics, and facilitating social change. The use of first-person pronouns in this section is to differentiate my reflection on my activities connected to the project. The reflections are informed by critical appraisals of PAR in the literature (Healey, 2001; De Oliveria, 2023).

3.7.1 Building relationships

Building relationship activities were covered in previous sections (3.4.2; 3.4.7). Taking a broader view, I start with considering the skills and experiences brought to the research project. For example, I have found that when working with young people, asking them questions and being willing to be silly was effective. In practice, it gave young people the sense of 'knowing better than me', thereby giving them more power, as discussed more in the next subsection (3.7.2). The other work experience I drew from was working with groups, including young people, to communicate their identities, thoughts and feelings through video and other media creations.

When reflecting on my PAR facilitator role with the young people, my first thought is that they did not provide any personal reflection materials for analysis, so I cannot say for certain whether adultism was avoided completely; indeed, it probably was not. They were able to reveal their thoughts through their actions. If young people engaged in research activities on a completely voluntary basis, I interpreted that they felt sufficiently included, respected and part of the process to continue their involvement.

Consideration was needed on another level of relationship-building with the charity organisation. It was fortunate that the youth organisation from which the research group formed had a staff member and Board of Directors knowledgeable of PAR and supportive of the approach. A new role for me in these relationships was that of a university researcher. In this capacity, there is a need to establish and then develop trusting relationships throughout participatory research projects (Armstrong *et al.*, 2022; Christopher *et al.*, 2008; Israel *et al.*, 1998; Jagosh *et al.*, 2015; Plowfield *et al.*, 2005). As Jagosh (2015) noted, however, healthy scepticism is positive for community groups as it signals that the group is not being taken advantage of by a larger institution.

Before and during the fieldwork, I internalised some possible challenges for the organisation. For example, human service organisations are concerned about how service users are treated, so they act as gatekeepers to any activities that might cause stress or harm to the service users, volunteers or staff members. There may also be a trepidation about ownership of any items arising from the research. Another concern for charity groups partaking in research may be the impact on their budget. Increasingly, funders may insist on goals and activities being completed before funds are released, or only fund very narrowly defined activities, which tend not to include research activities. As a co-researcher with a background in social work administration, I made a conscious decision to conduct research that would enhance a charity's output with minimal demand on staff time.

The approach in literature to developing complex relationships and keeping them positive, where trust is a natural component, is to maintain communication (Armstrong *et al.*, 2022; Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, 2022; Israel *et al.*, 1998; Johnson *et al.*, 2009). Another approach a researcher can take is familiar to a social worker because it calls for the use of the self. A reciprocal 'we-orientation' (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973) arises from shared experiences and openness with each other, while recognising the accepted limits of

mutual sharing. Similar terms such as ‘stranger to non-stranger’ and ‘outsider to insider’ convey the movement of trust in relationships. As noted by Armstrong *et al.* (2022), the relationships do not have linear development. Factors such as time and distance away from the research group can call for extra effort by the researcher (ibid.).

3.7.2 Power dynamics

Healey (2014) asserts that there is a need for more research on power dynamics and the facilitator role in the literature. In a democratically based approach, the issues of power dynamics within the group are lessened. The emphasis is lessening and not eliminating, as this would be an ideal situation that is difficult to obtain. Maintaining a critical reflection is helpful, both of others and of oneself. My self-reflection skills have been developed through social work practice over many decades, especially while employing a solution-focused, strength-based approach (De Shazer *et al.*, 2021). This approach to people, the notion that ‘they know better about their situation than I do’, is ingrained in all areas of my life. In fact, it was a challenge during the research to insert more of my ideas and make more requests of the group, always understanding that they could reject them.

Reflecting on my learning process, typical of all researchers embarking on large research projects for the first time, the roles of facilitator, advocate and trainer needed development. One of the first learnings was to insert myself into the PAR process instead of staying objective and neutral. One hesitation was that aiding capacity-building would be a manipulative dynamic. However, the awareness evolved to understanding that everyone gains skills that facilitate better or richer communication. In that case, I, along with other PAR researchers, am not dictating what should be said; instead, we are making it possible for the expression to come from the co-designers.

Another example of hesitation on my part was connected to the public consultation process, outlined in more detail in the Findings chapter (6.4). In this instance a conversation with one of the staff members generated action with the group. The exchange with the staff member raised my concerns because I could see that if our group did not formulate the young people’s recommendations and put them in an email before the public consultation period ended, their voices would not be included in the draft active travel strategy document. I was also inspired because I did not want to see the same demographics as from a previous local

online survey (i.e., no input from young people). When I next met with the group, I explained the rush and took the step of starting to draft recommendations. Healey (2014) may classify this as an example of power imbalance by the initial researcher in PAR. I agree that it would have been better if the prompt had come from the group; however, I saw this as an example of social work advocacy without manipulation, so the group did not miss an opportunity. It was an attempt to address the young people's exclusion up to that point. It is also an example of sharing my community action knowledge, which others in the group may not have had, thereby building group capacity for future public consultations.

Using the facilitator examples provided, I agree with Healey (2004) that issues of power are present, given my role as an adult and more educated person compared to the young people. However, social work practitioners are trained to be aware of these power dynamics. In both practice and research, awareness is a crucial first step, followed by critical self-reflection to address uneven power levels. During the project, awareness of adultism (2.2.1) was incorporated into self-reflection. It is possible that my facilitator role was more directive at times, drawing on my experience in higher education and as an adult; however, ongoing discussions with colleagues and CBP workers aimed to minimise the shift.

3.7.3 Facilitating social change

When considering the use of findings to effect social change, a claim of PAR, Healey (2001) concedes that local change is often addressed; however, lofty claims to making structural changes are an overreach, needing more critical reflection. Trained in community organising in the 1990s, I was taught my role was to be a change agent and to empower people. My experience over the past 30 years has led me to adopt a position of solidarity, believing this to be more respectful of client self-determination than empowerment. Instead of being a change agent, making decisions as Healy (2001) suggests on when to take social action, I instead support the group that is feeling the effects of social injustice to decide what action to take and when to take it. In the case of the CBP, the workers and I acknowledged the young people's frustrations, but did not promise structural change. However, we did raise awareness and build capacity so they could express their voice, if they chose, for this project and in the future.

De Oliveria (2023) suggests that PAR is limited when it does not work closely with local organisations to build long-term solutions, thereby creating false hopes for macro-level change. However, working together is not always possible, as exemplified by the research group's experience, when the young people attempted to engage with local adult decision-makers and were left wanting (6.4). It is this situation of not having their voices considered that led to the group creating an alternative avenue, or counter-power initiative (Castells, 2007).

Another learning example for me during the project was the dynamic between the funder and the co-researchers on future social change as a result of the dissemination of the findings (3.4.6.1). In our case, the PhD project format allowed for flexibility in scope, despite being a commissioned project. There was a conscious choice to copyright the group's Map as Creative Commons so that the project funders and the University could not claim intellectual property. There were two outcomes resulting from the group maintaining control of the narrative. The first was power and control over their narrative and how it was used going forward, and the second was that any commercial gain would also be in the group's control. I believe this approach was helpful for youth agency and development, with an additional benefit that research does not require a 'return on investment' or 'monetisation of outputs'. Following my social work values, the client's best interest must take precedence over personal or professional gain.

Methodology conclusion

The Methodology chapter aimed to present the rationale for the match between the research questions and the group of young people. Concepts in literature on social work values, pragmatism and democracy set the stage for discussing the CBPAR process in general. Since there is no one approach, a table gathering the key components of several authors was discussed as the implementation process for the CBP was explained.

The methods used during the project were primarily qualitative; however, a new combination of methods led to the production of quantitative data through the Map. Overall, the process was a counter-power one where the network of young people and workers disrupted the institutional barriers to young people's voices in research and the community. Once initial findings were formulated, they were discussed with the group.

Throughout the fieldwork and data analysis process, ethical considerations were discussed as issues arose. Some of the issues specific to the group were due to the vulnerability of the participants and the creative tools used.

A reflection on my role as a facilitator completed the chapter. The subsection provided space for considering relationship-building, power dynamics and facilitating social change as part of the project. The next chapter is the first Findings chapter, commencing Part Two of the thesis.

4 Findings Theme 1: Experiences of young people who bike

Introduction

This Findings chapter concerns participants' experiences and explores knowledge gained through field notes, transcribed Group Sessions, questionnaires and media such as annotated graphics. The research project participants were ardent cyclists. All cycled for leisure and occupational purposes (school/college/work), undertaking shorter (2 miles) and longer (2+ miles) rides. Meanwhile, some, mostly older, members and the two youth workers (W1 and W2), also cycled more extensively. Regardless of their motivation and age, they faced barriers to cycling and were exposed to safety risks. These ride characteristics led directly to the two main themes of Cycling Motivation and Barriers, with two and five sub-themes, respectively, presented below.

4.1 Cycling motivation

As a group of keen cyclists, the question was not *if* the group would cycle but *when*. It follows that the data contained many examples of young people sharing where they like to cycle. As an adult in solidarity and a new group member, I purchased a second-hand bicycle to join the activities. Over time, I gained insights into and appreciation of cycling in the young people's community, as well as their motivation and the barriers they experienced. The starting point for exploring the data on young people's cycling experiences is the two primary motivators for them: fun and functional transport.

4.1.1 Fun

The reason they cycle, or the group's motivation, provides context for discussing the results. Given their worldview and priority of doing fun things, the group's definition of fun needs clarity. During the review meeting of the initial findings, they listed fun things to do on their bike:

- BMX, pump and mountain bike tracks
- rough trails
- gravel paths
- downhills

- winding paths
- stairs

Field Note (15 January 2024)

The first month I met the young people in the Park (for clarity, Park refers to the public park where the group held their weekly meetings), it was summertime, with the last fieldwork meeting the following spring. Over that time, the routine was for young people to choose and lead games from 6pm to 8pm. The group had a selection of games that they often requested, reflected in the field notes.

- The group played a game where they had to find a list of objects, take a photo and upload it to the group's Instagram group chat. The person that posts the most objects wins. It was also clear from the game that they are happy to go out and take pictures and share with others in a group chat so technology won't be a problem. Field Note (4 July 2022)
- Once in the Park, the young people decided they wanted to play what they call spotlight but it is basically hide and seek (on bikes). So that was arranged and they played that, which was great. Field Note (7 November 2022)
- I did play one game of Foot Down which is where the person who puts their foot down (while cycling slowly) in a small area is out. The last person remaining wins. I found this harder to do in long grass. We did it on cement once before which made it a little bit easier. Field Note (13 February 2023)
- (Tonight the group played) Bike golf. Field Note (26 September 2022)

The group was open to trying new games. Sometimes, a young person created a new one and other times the youth workers would contribute. A young person creating a game is significant because the youth workers encourage the older members of the group to take leadership roles.

- The only other thing to add after YP11 (Young Person) and YP9 left (the worker de-brief) was that we were delighted that YP9 created a new game that everybody seemed to like. Field Note (14 November 2022)
- W2 asked the group if they wanted to try a new game called Camouflage. We decided we would. We went to another part of the park where he explained the

rules and we played two rounds of that game. In it, there is much more physically demanding activity. Young people must hide, comeback, tag the person that's counting down, and then run off again. It was good fun, and people seemed to enjoy it. And at this point, it was almost 8 o'clock so we hurried back to the car park. Field Note (30 January 2023)

The group did activities inside and outside the Park, like longer cycle rides. Some of these were just for fun and not part of the research project filming. They also did non-bike activities, joining with others in the youth services.

- After the bike repairs and conversations, we went on a 3-mile cycle in the surrounding area. I joined in on a borrowed bike. The cycle took 30 minutes and the group said they enjoyed it. Field Note (3 October 2022)
- We decided that we would just do a cycle around the park and YP10 would be the leader. We did that which was great. As usual, I was the slowest one and struggled the most with it. I did see parts of the park that I hadn't been to yet so that was good. After that, we stopped and had some races, two at a time. Field Note (5 December 2022)

The last activity to mention is BMX ramps and the BMX track in the Park. The ramps are made by young people in their own time using scraps of wood. The track was created 40 years ago by the local council to give young people a fun amenity. For reasons explained later, the track has not been maintained. I learned that one of the fun aspects of BMX tracks is the series of small hills, which gives a sense of speed.

- YP6 and YP13 talked about building ramps to practise BMX jumps in the woods and the city council taking them down. For them both they put a lot of time into building them to have them gone in seconds. Field Note (12 July 2022)
- The next place the group wanted to go was the BMX track. We did not use it during the winter because we couldn't see overhanging branches and glass on the trail in the dark. Field Note (17 April 2023)

The examples of building ramps and using the track support a point the young people made in Group Session 4, which is that what they considered fun others may see as anti-social.

Healthy youth development calls for young people to take calculated risks, push boundaries and break from constraints (Sharland, 2005). The conversation below demonstrates the young people's understanding of the dilemma.

YP6 (05:37): I don't think there's anything that encourages cycling so then that leads to the more anti-social behaviour.

W2 (05:48): What do you mean, YP6?

YP6 (05:49): There's like nothing in terms of if you're gonna do something on a bike, it would be classed as anti-social or just a boring, you know, ride.

W3 (06:03): So in other words, if you wanna have fun, you're doing things like popping wheelies.

W1 (06:06): Yeah. Okay.

YP6 (06:10): Just what people would complain about.

W3 (06:12): Yeah.

W1 (06:13): Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because there's nothing else available.

YP6 (06:16): Yeah, there's nowhere for them.

Group Session 4 (January 2023)

W2 amplified the young person's view by sharing a recent news story on the fire brigade and anti-social behaviour. The Police Commissioner's response was positive because she recognised an underlying issue supporting the young person's view.

> What she's also saying is that there's not enough for kids to do so, sort of thing, which is really good to hear is like she's saying from two, two points of view, we'll punish those that we catch, but we'll provide those that we want to stop people falling into that situation where they think in order to have fun, they've gotta do something that is, well they're just making their own fun and it's usually they're kind of pick[ing] the wrong thing to do with it. So what YP6 is saying is, is much the same thing, is that there's not enough to keep you entertained on your bike creatively and positively. So actually what you tend to do is just do the things that [start] off getting, getting [you] into trouble like popping wheelies in the shopping precinct and stuff like that.

Group Session 4 (16 January 2023)

This exchange highlights that young people are aware that their actions/experiences may be perceived differently by some adults. It also points to a need for acceptance and shared places to practise fun activities that push boundaries (5.2).

Three categories of fun connected to experiences were identified in the data. Two were based on the distance to the Park. Items within a 2-mile radius of the Park are considered 'local' and more than 2 miles 'further away'. For consistency, the distance was measured from the Park instead of the young people's houses. Youth Organisation membership required that the young person live within cycling distance of the Park, with some closer than others. The last category, called 'fun wishes', captures infrastructure or activities that do not currently exist but that young people would like to see in the future. Data points for 'fun' related to relationships and communication are covered in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively.

4.1.1.1 Local

The young people enjoyed fun local activities that other less keen cyclists could embrace. During the group discussion of the initial Map points, one example was raised of wanting to cycle from the town centre to the coast; however, the young people were hampered by a lack of space for bike use. The data emerged from a discussion of places the group felt needed a cycle lane. The location below is a road connecting the town centre to the coast.

YP11 (28:16): [Town to Coast] Road needs one of [them].

YP3 (28:21): Yes.

W3 (28:21): So [Town to Coast] Road and like the, the area you can, let's say outside the [the town's] [main train] station.

YP11 (28:26): Yes.

W3 (28:27): We need cycle lanes in there.

YP11 (28:28): Because [Town to Coast] Road is ridiculous.

YP3 (28:30): It really is.

YP11 (28:37): It's so bad.

Later in the same conversation

W3 (29:28): Can I just ask YP11, why do you think [Town to Coast] Road needs a cycle lane?

YP11 (29:32): Because it's packed.

W3 (29:33): Cause it's packed with people.

YP11 (29:34): People and cars. Yeah. So loads of people always on, on both sides of the road and paths. And then there's always cars.

Group Session 2 (October 2022)

Four months later, at Group Session 5, the group discussed in detail why Town to Coast Road is a problem. We reviewed the video footage of the location filmed in November 2022:

YP7 (26:22): <unclear> <crosstalk in the room> because, like the amount of people that walk on them during the summer.

W3 (26:45): That's what he's saying (YP11 in the video).

Video Audio (26:46): (**YP11 in video**) everyone gets in the way. (**YP9 in video**) I go down the road. <crosstalk in the room> in the cold weather not many people will come down here.
(**YP11 in video**) until the fair opens.
(**YP9 in video**) yeah when the fair opens. That's when it's more busy down there cause everyone is walking there and then back.

Group Session 5 (February 2023)

A field note from the filming in November 2022 paraphrased one young person saying,

> … they (the young person) really enjoy going to the coast, and this road is the main route from town. Once on the coast, where there are cycle paths, it is an enjoyable cycle to take just for the fun of it.

Field Note (28 November 2022)

All the text for each Map point results from the PAR process of action and reflection over time. The final Map point description for Town to Coast Road the group agreed upon was:

> When [Town to Coast] Road is busy young people can't cycle on the path. The road is narrow with no cycle lanes, so they don't like to cycle there. Designated cycle lanes are needed.

Pin Identifier: Orange-I

The example demonstrates the frustration of the young people in negotiating infrastructure that does not seem to consider their bike use. It also shows the prioritisation of tourists and vehicle traffic over bike use. Lastly, it is an example of a young person refraining from something they enjoy due to how the infrastructure impacts their safety. The sub-theme of safety is discussed later in this chapter.

The more local the point, the easier it is for young people of all ages to access independently. The distance to non-local fun activities is a barrier, especially for younger people in the group, as they will need age-appropriate supervision to access them. Additionally, the farther away the item is, the greater the cost, which is a barrier for all age groups. All three chapters of the Findings discuss travel costs, such as public transport.

A local council health promotion worker explained their priorities, which include promoting equality and recognition of the challenges involved.

Council Staff Member (03:01):

> Yeah, so basically obviously my role as a public health practitioner within my portfolio, one of the key things is physical activity. So obviously within physical activity I focus quite a lot on active travel and within the public health realm, one of our key aims is about reducing health inequalities. So we wanna make sure that everybody has access to say active travel, you know, whether that be via like equipment or whether they having the, you know, the capabilities to take part in it. Um, because I feel sometimes you see that children who come from a family that might have a lot of money, like it's just easy to get a bike or they live in an area where there's lots of cycle routes and, or there's access to cycle clubs like easily, that kind of thing. But unfortunately that's not the same for everyone, particularly people that are from deprived areas. So initiatives for one example, like school streets, again, if we're looking back to, so again, we kind of refer to the wider determinants of health. So within the wider determinants of health, you've got aspects like kind of the social aspects.

Interview (17 March 2023)

4.1.1.2 Further away

The next aspect of fun that the data reflected was logistical issues for fun 'further away' items. As mentioned, older members prefer taking longer journeys independently, while younger members depend on supervision and support to make similar journeys.

An example of organising a longer journey is a point on the Map where the research group and another group of young people in the same youth service combined to best use resources. The details are summarised in a field note.

> This long cycle happened because the young people in (the other youth group) suggested a trip to the [Large Cycling] Park Pump Track. Since it's a school holiday all the young people are off, so it makes sense to do a long trip like this to the track. The arrangement was that the (research group) would meet in the Park, their bikes would be loaded onto a rack and they would drive to (the other city), meet the others, park the van, and then cycle the rest of the way to (the track) and back.

Field Note (3 April 2023)

After the long trip described, the research group members returned to the youth service's new bike shop. When telling me about the day, they highlighted aspects of the long cycle they enjoyed.

YP11 (37:21): I'll definitely be going around that dirt track to get there again, like.

W2 (37:26): Yeah, yeah, yeah.

YP9 (37:27): It was nice <affirmative>.

W1 (37:30): Which bit?

YP9 (37:31): The bit to get into [Large Cycling Park],

W1 (37:34): Oh right, yeah.

YP9 (37:34): To get to the pump track.

YP11 (37:34): No, no, I'm about like do you know where we stopped for the picnic and then we came back that way.

YP9 (37:39): Oh yeah, yeah.

YP11 (37:40): We were about to get to [Large Cycling Park]. I'll definitely go that way again because that was much better.

Group Session 6 (April 2023)

Another data point exemplifying the planning requirements for long cycle trips is a field note about organising a filming night in order to illustrate the points raised in Group Sessions. In this case, the goal was to plan the route between the Park and the town centre. The field note summarised the group's plan made during one of the weekly meetings.

> (At the mid-point between the Park and town centre) We would have hot chocolates near the ferry port and then try to film some of these points that were mentioned both tonight and at the last (Group Session 2) in [local community centre].

Field Note (7 November 2022)

These examples demonstrate the logistics of planning longer journeys to achieve healthy and safe rides. Additionally, they illustrate enjoyable aspects of those journeys and how they might appeal to all ages.

4.1.1.3 Wishes

The third category of 'fun things that do not exist' that young people would like to do extends the first point made in this sub-theme, namely, that what they like to do can be considered anti-social. The frustration of the group is better understood with some background information on their efforts to address the lack of activities they like.

The Park has a BMX track created 40 years ago to support young people with things to do instead of turning to anti-social behaviour. Since then, it has fallen into disrepair with little or no maintenance, pruning of overgrowth or clearing broken glass. There were efforts to increase public awareness through a documentary on BMX tracks (Flint, 2015) and a request for the local council to support the track repair (Sinclair, 2020). A response from W2's Questionnaire summarises the situation:

> **Question 2. Before our project, what social action/community development/political action had [the youth group] done with young people? A few lines of who, what, when and the result would be great.**
>
> Answer: As mentioned above, the BMX track project should have been a great project for the local community. To reopen a once-loved local gem for young people and to help more young people get into cycling. Previous examples of the work had been celebrated in the local press and within the local community. However, local opposition managed to de-rail this and together with local councillors and council officers managed to demonise the project, project staff and young people. Attempts to engage the local council in potential developments to create better cycling

infrastructure (bike trails, race tracks or pump tracks) for young people received either no response from some, curt and rude responses from others.

Youth Worker Questionnaire (March 2023)

The Map contains the best examples of places and activities the young people enjoy or wish would materialise. The Map has a total of 31 locations identified during the fieldwork, grouped into three pin colours [blue for fun, orange for concerns and red for unsafe or dangerous locations]. The 15 points connected to Fun are grouped in Table 3: Summary of Map Points and Fun.

Table 3: Summary of Map Points and Fun

Type of fun	Pin Identifier	Pin Text Agreed by Research Group Young People
Local	Blue-A	Here there is a skate park where many BMX riders and skate boarders come to have fun but if you do get bored you can rent out the football pitch next to it.
Long Distance	Blue-B	Young people rode to [a significant and popular modern art installation] and enjoyed lunch admiring this monument, then headed back along a railway trail.
Long Distance	Blue-C	This cafe has toilets, good food and good coffee, perfect for a mid-ride break. Young people stopped off here and had a break before heading back to [the group's town].
Long Distance	Blue-D	This place is great for anyone who has an interest in any cycling discipline. Free and full of fun for any age group.
Local	Blue-E	Many incredible people meet here to fix their bike before going to [the] Park to go on a bike ride or to play many amazing games. The shop is opening soon to the public. We are also going to sell, fix and help you fix your very own bike.
Long Distance	Blue-G	The young people like to stop here for a quick stop and energy boost. It's also a great place to stop for a toilet break.

Long Distance	Blue-H	Good for everyone, also got a play park right next to it. It also has a white pump track for people taking it easy. It has an intermediate track for pros and those trying to have a challenge.
Local	Blue-I	During the summer, this park is busy with lots of young people, from very young children to older young people and adults. Suitable for BMX, skateboards, scooters and roller skates. Also available are: basketball, football and parkour areas.
Wish	Orange-A	Built in 1983 following a petition from parents to request a BMX Dirt Track for young people to ride their bikes. The track is not maintained and is worn and overgrown in places.
Local	Blue-J	Young people like to go to [food shop]. This one is open later in the evening. Cyclists are allowed to bring their bikes into the building as long as they dismount first.
Long Distance	Blue-K	Young people like to go here for the mountain bike trails. [One trail] is a red-grade-very technical. [Large Mountain Bike Trails] is far away so a train journey from [Regional Train Stop] to the [National Train Stop] might help. It is a two-hour one-way bike ride from [research group's town], at least.
Local	Orange-F	This track is great fun for young people but needs maintenance.
Local	Blue-L	Young People like to cycle along the coast with their friends.
Local	Blue-M	Young people like to go here to get food and drink.
Local	Orange-I	When [Town to Coast] Road is busy young people can't cycle on the path. The road is narrow with no cycle lanes, so they don't like to cycle there. Designated cycle lanes are needed.

All ages in the research project group identified and supported a focus on fun to encourage bike use. The young people created a list (4.1.1) and gave feedback throughout the fieldwork on activities they hoped to do. Some of the findings were not obviously related to sustainability issues. However, active travel goals do include increasing bike use, and fun emerged as an essential aspect of this for the young people.

4.1.2 Functional transport

The findings theme raised another motivation for cycling for the group: transport. Cycling for transport is vital for the group, as its members find biking to be generally accessible and affordable. Additionally, cycling is carbon neutral, aiding environmental sustainability. However, using a bike for mobility raises barriers with additional consequences. Ironically, one transport challenge for the group was when they wished to attend a community forum organised by the government body designated to form a new active travel strategy, up to two hours away by bike.

One logistical issue was the need to increase the fitness level of less experienced cyclists to make the journey successfully. Another was public transport for a group when only two bikes were allowed on a regional train carriage during designated hours, and no buses with bike racks were available. When the topic of attending the meeting was raised during one of the weekly meetings with the young people and youth workers,

> The group discussed the possible long cycle (10 miles) to [the meeting location] for an event on the 10th. It was decided that the next session would be a longer cycle than usual (about 5 miles) for practice. We talked about logistics and the possible use of the [local public transport train] for part of the journey.

Field Note (26 September 2022)

The interaction is a good example of the extra effort and planning required to meet a group's transport needs and to participate in formal events such as this important strategic planning meeting, whose purpose was to formulate an active travel strategy for the region!

These logistical difficulties led the group to agree to send me to represent them instead. It is also a good example of how policy restrictions for transporting bikes on public transport hinder longer journeys. Another restriction for young people in the group, some of whom

lived in deprived areas, was the cost of public transport. One of the older young people talked to me about their challenges when the group discussed public transport.

> This conversation sparked another young person to say that they cycle everywhere except to college in (city) because it is too far. This is a problem (barrier) because the (regional train service) for them is too dear so they use a younger teen rate for it to get to college and hope to not get caught.

Field Note (3 October 2022)

Barriers have been mentioned when discussing why young people like to cycle, whether for fun or transport, so the next sub-themes are on barriers and how young people address them.

4.2 Barriers to fun and transport – safety

Safety was a common topic of discussion and probably the most emotive during the fieldwork, reflected in the group discussion transcripts and field note observations. Along with the young people, the adults in solidarity with them facilitated addressing the barriers that arose, for example, the youth workers undertook health and safety risk assessments of longer routes beforehand. In general, though, feeling unsafe remained the largest barrier for the young people cycling where and when they wanted – further, the level of feeling safe varied for the individual participants. Because of the differences, reaching a consensus in the group discussions was a goal in the Map-creation process.

Another contextual factor to mention here is the difference between young people's and adults' perceptions of safety. While conducting the community assessment, I encountered some adults (who were bike-related service providers) who felt the number of cycle lanes was good and that the public transport options benefited active travel. These findings are contrasted with the young people's evaluation that cycle lanes and public transport are inadequate and, in some cases, result in more dangerous cycling. In some cases, the young people agreed with the adults; in others, they clearly did not. The young people's examples of poor infrastructure are to be found across the three Findings chapters because infrastructure impacts different aspects of cycling.

The safety sub-theme is interwoven with the others and is further divided into smaller sub-themes to aid discussion. Because of the high level of interconnection to other issues, the

data presented usually raises multiple issues at a time. Safety is part of communication with other road users and the relationship young people have with their community; therefore, safety in these contexts is discussed in more detail in the respective findings chapters.

As a marginalised group, young people will have different experiences from adults. As was the case when discussing fun versus anti-social experiences, the young people raised cultural issues like driving culture, the treatment of young people in their area as troublemakers, and the low priority assigned to their needs and wants from the public purse when discussing road safety. It is difficult to evaluate topics like these with any degree of certainty. However, the advantage of qualitative data is the richness of the experiences recorded. The young people's (un)safety experiences were pervasive throughout the fieldwork, as seen in some examples below.

4.2.1 Safety of self and others – infrastructure

The safety sub-theme finding starts with safety for oneself and others. Safety in this sub-theme encompasses both physical and mental well-being. Therefore, the data will show times when young people felt anxious or nervous about a situation. Most conversations quickly proceeded to what the young person could do to address the safety issue.

The first example demonstrates the issues and how young people navigate infrastructure designed to prioritise car use. Not everyone may be familiar with the saying 'playing chicken'. As the young people describe it, it refers to crossing a road before a car approaches or taking the space before the car does, without knowing the intention of the driver. The young people shared that uncertainty about the car's direction is a factor. In this example, the group discussed the busy roundabout near the Park, where they identified a point on their Map and later filmed it. The group agreed that some junctions on the roundabout are safer than others.

W1 (16:09): Oh I'm sorry. And why does it feel safer for you YP2? Is it cause of the view?

YP2 (16:18): No cause actually cars do stop there. Whereas [with] the other ones you usually got to play chicken.

W3 (16:22): Mm. Okay.

W1 (16:25): So cars can see you better?

YP2 (16:27): Yeah.

W1 (16:27): As well as you seeing them better.

W2 (16:31): You, YP6, mentioned that on from, we're talking about the roundabout when we were crossing there. It's just like sometimes you just have to just go. It's a bit like as YP2 said just it's like playing chicken, you just have to go for it and kind of almost make the car stop because you just don't know.

YP6 (16:50): You can still see them from off the roundabout from there as well. So you just got more time to get back across.

W2 (16:56): Yeah.

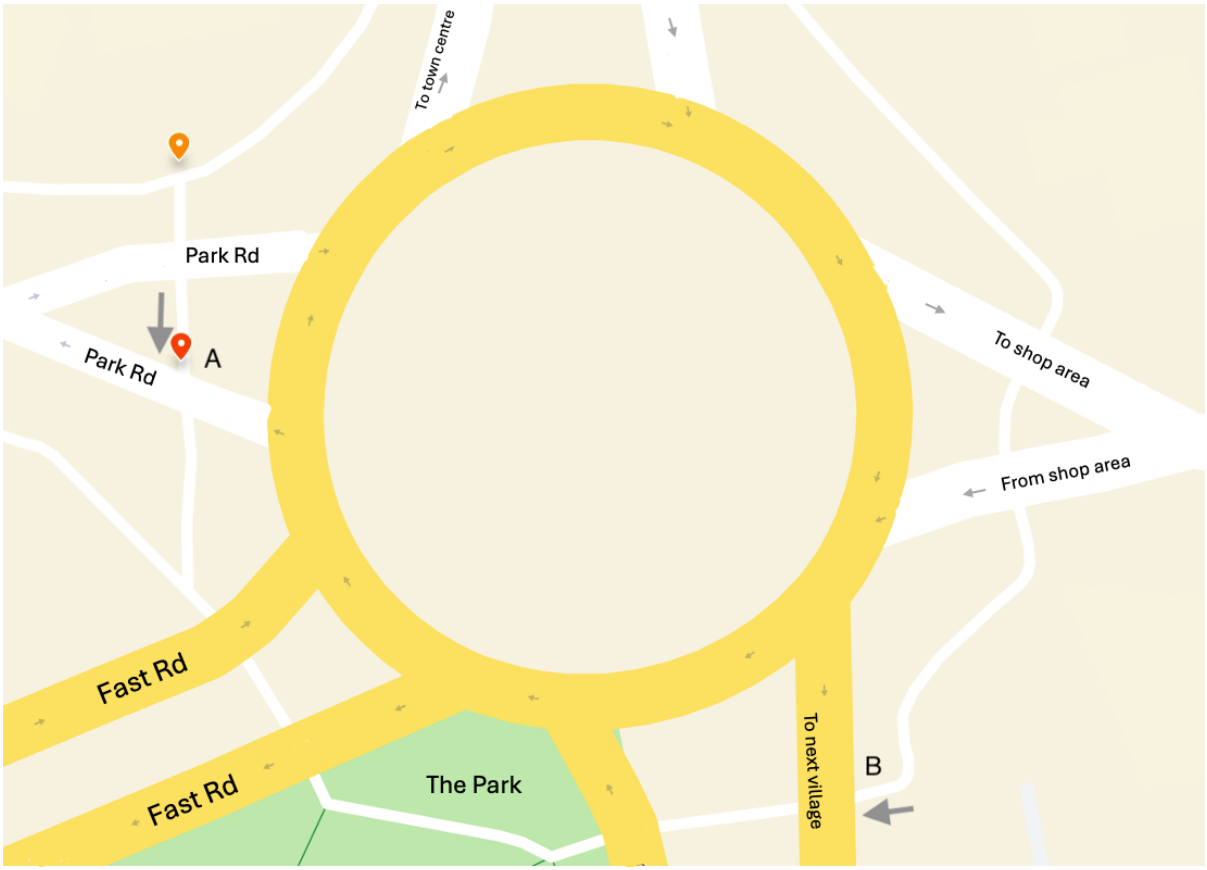
W1 (16:56): Yeah. I think it's that. It's that you know you've got enough time.

YP6 (16:59): Yeah.

Group Session 4 (January 2023)

An illustration of the different points on the junction from the discussion will demonstrate the young people's dilemma and why cycling on the roundabout instead of the pavement is safer, as the Highway Code, 2022, Rule 73 suggests. References to the Highway Code are from March 2022, during the fieldwork timeframe. Figure 5: Park roundabout is a screenshot of the young people's Map with annotations. The thinner white lines are the pavement. The thicker white and yellow lines are the road with small arrows indicating traffic flow. The grey arrow next to points A and B indicates the direction in which young people are crossing the road.

Figure 5: Park roundabout



Point B is the one the young people identified as safer in the dialogue. The vehicle drivers have more time to see the young people waiting to cross the road using the pavement, so they can respond by stopping to let them pass. There is also space for the driver to safely stop as they are not blocking the roundabout when they do. The young people at point B are also clear that the car has chosen that arm of the roundabout and can see them waiting so the young person does not have to guess or 'play chicken'.

In the dialogue, W2 refers to point A as less safe, and young people agree because the distance between the crossing point for bike users and the turn-off from the roundabout is shorter, making it less safe for cyclists using the pavement. At point A, the cyclist is unclear whether the driver intends to exit or continue on the roundabout because the roundabout arms are closer together, not giving the driver time to indicate appropriately. There is no space to negotiate who is going in what direction, so the cyclist must guess as some cars will signal a turn-off while others don't, resulting in the young person having to 'play chicken'.

Points the young people deemed dangerous were coloured red. Consistent with the other Map point text process, the group discussed, reflected and agreed upon point A in the graphic as,

> Young people find this arm of the roundabout dangerous because the distance between [Fast] Road and the turn for [Park] Road on the roundabout is short. It is not always clear whether a car will turn down [Park] Rd.
>
> Pin Identifier Red-G

The Highway Code suggests that cyclists should travel on the roundabout like a vehicle, which is safer than using the pavement as they are more likely to be seen. Being in the middle of the lane prevents the vehicle from overtaking the cyclist. The older, more confident cyclists in the research group agree (while younger, less confident ones said they would still use the pavement). One young person shared that having a disability complicates using cycle lanes.

W2 (07:50): Okay, so YP3, you are saying you feel that cycling lanes are too dangerous. Why is that?

YP3 (07:56): Because you got cars parked on one side and I'm very dyspraxic and I will crash into them.

YP11 (08:01): Yep.

YP9 (08:01): Right. Actually she crashed on the way here.

YP3 (08:02): I crash into parked vehicles. It happens very often.

YP10 (08:07): You're crashed into a fence.

YP3 (08:08): It [happens] like really, really often. Like most times I can count on two hands. Right. And I won't be <unclear> for three years.

W2 (08:15): Okay.

YP3 (08:17): Beside the point. So you've got cars parked, cars, park cars, parked cars, there, then you've got a bus stop. So I, I say I can pedal in the middle of the road. The cars can see you if you've got reflectors as on the back, they have to see ya. Right. So then like it's, it's actually safer to be in the middle of the road then it is to be in the cycle lane.

W3 (08:39): Wow.

YP3 (08:39): Especially if you've got dyspraxia.

YP9 (08:42): And car doors can just open on you cuz you'll go bang.

YP10 (08:45): Yeah, that's what you gotta be careful of. <crosstalk>

Group Session 3 (21 November 2022)

Under the adult perceptions sub-theme (4.2.5.2), I discuss how differences of opinion regarding the Highway Code impact young people's safety. In the above example, the young people agree with the Highway Code.

4.2.2 Safety of self and others – attitudes

The young people recognised that one barrier to personal safety is the belief that taking safety measures is not considered 'cool'. Their or other young people's attitudes can contribute to feeling unsafe.

W2 (03:22): What is it about young people cycling that you think actually we've not touched on yet? Not covered.

YP10 (03:56): Not many of them think it's cool to cycle, safely, safely.

W2 (04:03): Expand on that a bit. So it's not cool to cycle safety.

YP10 (04:06): Yeah.

YP10 (04:07): Like they like to wear all black.

YP10 (04:10): No lights, no helmets.

YP10 (04:15): And bong around on roads, popping wheelies.

Group Session 4 (16 January 2023)

Based on the above conversation, the group decided to ask the local police to attend one of their weekly meetings to ask questions. Two Neighbourhood Police officers attended in March 2023 (while I was away). The group updated me in April.

W3 (01:51): YP7, were you there when the police came?

YP7 (01:52): Yeah.

W3 (01:53): And did you get anything from it? Do you remember anything?

YP7 (01:55): Yeah, like <unclear> he said put like a light on <laugh>, like, like, like being seen and that.

W1 (02:11): So they gave us some good advice, didn't they? Like Yeah. Don't wear all black, lights did you say.

YP9 (02:18): Even if we don't think we need the lights on, put the lights on.

Group Session 6 (3 April 2023)

Table 4: Summary of Map Points and Safety collates the locations the group identified as having serious issues. Points coded as Red indicate that a young person felt unsafe. Items in Orange are locations that need improvement to be safer.

Table 4: Summary of Map Points and Safety

Pin Identifier	**Pin Text Agreed by Research Group Young People**
Red-A	Young people are forced to use the pavement in the [shop area] nearer to the [Park]. The road direction is one way in the wrong direction for them. Young people said that the path could be busy during the day. Adults have yelled and pushed them to get off the path; however, this section has no place for them to use instead.
Red-B	A young person was on the zebra crossing, looked both ways, and a bus honked at them.
Red-C	A young person said, 'A car did not indicate they were turning and pinned me against the side of the road.'
Red-D	A young person found that the path narrows at this point, and they are forced onto the road during busy summer days.
Red-E	One young person was gaining speed, was inexperienced with their gears and almost hit a bus.

Red-F	Some young people have dyspraxia and would not feel safe using a cycle lane like this one on the road. Others said using the pavement is also a problem because people come out of their driveways without looking.
Red-G	Young people find this arm of the roundabout dangerous because the distance between [Fast] Road and the turn for [Park] Road on the roundabout is short. It is not always clear whether a car will turn down [Park] Rd.
Orange-C	If the trails [originally for horses] had lights, they would be a good route between [the Park] and [nearby town].
Orange-E	Cycle lanes are needed to connect to the ones near [seaside park]. The path is wide, but there is no room for bikes with pedestrians and cars.

As mentioned, the topic of safety was emotive during the fieldwork. The next sub-theme on barriers to fun and transport considers the safety of the bike and not the person.

4.2.3 Bike safety – repairs

During a conversation about longer cycles, two young people shared their experience of cycling along the coast to the next major town. One of them had a tyre puncture, and so they both had to walk a few hours back home for a repair as they did not have any repair kits with them. This led to a group discussion about what precautions to take on longer cycles compared to shorter ones. The experienced cyclist workers summed it up well.

W2 (**13:24**): Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Yeah. I mean things happen like the bikes break and you've gotta be prepared there's something, so always carrying a multitool always carrying a, a spare tube if you've got one or, or at least a puncture repair kit or both. Yeah. Depending on the journey. Of course. So, cause if I decide I'm actually, I'm just gonna nip down the road two miles away. I need to get there back quick. I'm not gonna worry about a puncture repair kit, kind of thing and put me rucksack on and stuff like that. Just grab me helmet, grab me bike and I'm gone.

W1 (**13:52**): Depends if it's walkable.

Group Session 4 (January 2023)

By the end of the conversation, the young people identified that they needed to learn how to use repair tools for a longer cycle. The group decided at the next weekly meeting to film how to make a repair to share with other young people.

4.2.4 Bike safety – security

The Map facilitated identifying problem areas and discussion. One exchange demonstrates solidarity with the young people as they try to find ways to cycle with friends while keeping their bikes safe. The young people identified that they are not able to move freely due to a lack of secure bike racks. Bike security is a high priority for young people, whereas it might not be an issue for others in the general population:

W3 (50:22): But YP6 was saying he would, he wouldn't leave a bike there cuz they'd just get nicked too easy. When you guys go to [town centre], where do you park or where do you lock your bike or what do you do?

YP5 (50:46): Don't know.

YP7 (50:46): Just ride through.

W3 (50:46): Just ride through. You don't stop.

YP7 (50:49): No.

W2 (50:50): I think that's the other thing is you can't park your bike anywhere to go anywhere cause you don't trust leaving your bike, that whole thing of,

YP5 (50:58): You're probably gonna end up getting your bike pinched more outside some <unclear> areas, you know what I mean?

W2 (51:00): You can go on your bike into town as long as you don't want to leave your bike anywhere. And almost defeats the object. Really.

W1 (51:07): Yeah. Or maybe you need two of you so someone can stay outside with the bikes while someone goes in the shop. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Which is a shame.

Group Session 4 (January 2023)

During the discussion, the adults in the room empathised with the young people's lack of support or priority of public funds to keep bikes safe. During the meeting with the police in March 2023, the officers confirmed that a good number of closed-circuit security [CCTV] cameras in the town centre are monitored.

W1 (02:22): Mmmm. What did they say? <unclear> What did they say? If you turned up somewhere and you didn't think the bike parking was very secure?

YP9 (02:29): Don't leave it.

YP7 (02:29): Go look for cameras and take it there.

YP10 (02:34): There's a camera there. Hello [to the camera phone making the audio recording].

W2 (02:39): They did say that the [CCTV] cameras in the town are really good.

Later in the same conversation

W1 (02:52): Yeah. So the CCTV is on it apparently. It's nice to know.

Later in the same conversation

W1 (03:03): And yeah, they said they contact the police if they see things happening and direct them where to go.

W3 (03:08): Okay.

YP11 (03:09): So I feel a bit little bit better locking me bike on [Town Pedestrian] Street.

Group Session 6 (3 April 2023)

Some of the young people in the research group owned what would be considered expensive bikes. However, no one would want to experience a bike stolen or damaged through vandalism or an attempted robbery, regardless of the bike's value. It is helpful to learn that parts of their local town have CCTV-monitored bike racks. One of their Map points

evolved from a filming night, before the meeting with the police. During filming, the group did not see any cameras.

> The young people say they wouldn't use the outdoor rack in the front of the [regional train main station] for fear of theft. It would help if there were CCTV used there.

Pin Identifier Orange-J

Another issue for the young people was the number of bike racks available in busy locations. For example, in a local shopping area, the group filmed that only two racks were provided. This is not sufficient when they are travelling as a group. When we reviewed the footage, the young people added what they do instead.

W2 (41:15): And interestingly that is the only one that always has a bike on it (small bike rack we filmed). There's somebody cycles to, I'm assuming, cycles to work and there's always a bike attached to that. <crosstalk> None of the others ever have or rarely have cycle things, cycles attached to them.

YP3 (41:32): Do you know what it is? What is it? It's the same as my work. There's no space for the workers to store their bikes. I had to lock my bike off to a lamppost.

W3 (41:41): Yeah. And I think on the night (we were filming) people were saying that that's what they would do. They would lock their bikes to a fence nearby and other places.

YP9 (41:48): Yeah. I,

YP5 (41:48): You just got no choice otherwise.

Group Session 3 (21 November 2022)

Another older young person had a similar experience.

W3 (33:45): But would you rather be cycling to work if you could?

YP2 (33:48): No, because where, where like, I do up at work around my community doing uh, care work and it's not like a nice community because people will steal your bikes and stuff. Even with locked up, they'll still come if I then yeah. Gone.

The group felt secure bike racks needed to be on their Map, so the pin text they agreed to was,

> There is a severe lack of bike racks in this area. Young people often have to use the nearby fence or a lamp post instead.

Pin Identifier Orange-B

In addition to inadequate bike racks, the group found that some that are provided do not fit their needs. For example, the research group found a design flaw with the lockable bike boxes provided by the regional train stations. Some young people like mountain biking, meaning their bikes have wide handlebars. When the group filmed near the bike boxes behind a regional train station (all stations have the same boxes), they found that their bikes would not fit into the boxes, there was a shortage for group use, and although there is no charge to use the bike box, you need a card from a subscription to access it.

Video audio (39:22):

<W2 in video> so if I put my bike there it only just fits in.

<W3 in video> Just fits in. How about yours, YP9?

<YP9 in video> Not a chance.

Later in the same video

<W2 in video> There's only three (bike boxes).

<W3 in video> There's only three.

<W2 in video> And if a group of four come, what you going to do?

<W3 in video> And that's assuming that somebody isn't already using one of them.

Later in the same video

<YP11 in video> You're gonna haven't you gotta have

> <W2 in video> Smart card. (Then reads sticker on the box) The smart card that's been activated by (regional train company). There's no charge for that either. And then you can, store your bikes purely at any locker with a green light showing at any station. <unclear>

Group Session 4 (16 January 2023)

The dialogue demonstrates a lack of consideration for young people's needs, as the boxes were possibly designed for commuter bikes with narrow handlebars. The situation raises the question of adultism because the design decision was based on adult needs, not those of young people. The young people included this situation on their Map, summarised as:

> The bike boxes are similar to most near [regional train] stations. They are 1) too small for the bikes 2) Require a [train company] subscription first before getting a card to open the boxes and 3) There are not enough of them when a group of young people want to be out.

Pin Identifier Orange-G

The group also noted good places for bike security. One location some of the older, more experienced cyclists identified was a multi-storey car park with monitored bike storage in a nearby city. They created a Map point to share the resource with other young people.

> Multi-storey car park with secure bike storage for cyclists. You must ask the attendant for details on this, however it is free.

Pin Identifier Blue-F

The barriers to fun and occupational travel for the group of keen cyclists demonstrate their experience. They are a group that has tried different ways and approaches to getting to and from places.

4.2.5 Preparation, safety and adult perceptions

One aspect for both fun and safety was the differing opinions the young people and adults not in solidarity with them had concerning some of the young people's activities. As mentioned previously, one of the ways young people test boundaries and develop independence is through fun activities (Sharland, 2005). Unfortunately, activities identified as being fun for a young person may be considered too risky by an adult. Throughout the

research project, the young people were guided and encouraged by the CBP workers to build their safety awareness, reducing risk.

4.2.5.1 Confidence

One national membership organisation that the youth group availed of before the start of the research project has a remit to help community groups increase their cycling activities. The organisation recognised the need for safety while cycling and offered the following services, outlined during an interview with one of the staff members.

Staff member (19:43): Um, so what the funding, um, sort of provides is things like training, so the training side of things, we've got group leader courses, um, which sort of our, myself in the Northeast, it's also basic bike maintenance courses. Um, and there's also first aid courses. Um, so they tend to be the three main ones that we run with community cycling clubs. But we do also offer, so potentially getting someone from [youth group] on a mountain bike trail leader as well.

W3 (20:53): Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

Staff member (20:54): Um, cause obviously I know they (the research group) like going to sort of [regional mountain bike trails] and, and a little bit further afield from [young people's town]. So I'm hopefully getting someone from [the youth group] on a, on a trail leader course. Um, so that's the training. And then the other funding is for things like materials, um, so bikes, helmets, safety equipment, um, any costs to storage as well.

Interview Transcription (13 March 2023)

Another resource aimed at improving young people's confidence when cycling is Bikeability (2.1.6.2). This national programme is offered to primary schools to improve bike skills (Active Travel England, 2025). The local Council Staff Member in the Health Promotions Department explained it:

Council Staff Member (11:10): … the Bikeability instructor takes a selection of Year six pupils and they go out on local roads, fairly quiet roads, um, and, you know, practise like hand signals and.

W3 (11:30): mm-hmm. <affirmative>

Council Staff Member (11:31): You know, where to cycle on the road and what, what they should be aware of, like <unclear> perception, that kind of thing. Um, and I think a lot of it's to do with children getting confident on their bike.

W3 (11:43): Mm-hmm.

Council Staff Member (11:44): Um, cuz that's a, obviously that's a barrier. If people aren't confident in cycling, then they're not gonna do it. So yeah, it's, it's a really good programme. We are looking to try and see what else we can do with it and making sure that we're reaching all children that would benefit from it. Um, so yeah, it's, it's really good.

Interview Transcription (17 March 2023)

Programmes like Bikeability and the knowledgeable workers on the research project aid safety by training and practising bike skills.

4.2.5.2 Parents

Later in the same conversation with the Council Staff Member, we discussed their wish to bring Family Bikeability to the area (Interview Transcript 17 March 2023). Family Bikeability teaches parents bike skills to reduce fears and increase parental knowledge of safe biking. The contradiction between parent knowledge and experience and recommended safe approaches was discussed in the literature review (2.1.6.2). For example, many parents would perceive a child cycling in the middle of the car lane on a roundabout as dangerous. The research project findings have an example of young people navigating a busy roundabout (4.2.1). In such situations, the Highway Code recommends that cyclists use the road and cycle in the centre. Since parents' fears may contradict the Highway Code and some of the young people's experiences, some misunderstandings of the Code will be explored more in the Findings chapter on the Communication theme. The weekly group cycles, both in the Park and on longer journeys, incorporate the same bike safety principles as in Bikeability, with W1 and W2 being well-informed and continually identifying skills the group may lack, which they then practise at weekly meetings

When reviewing the filming of W2 explaining driver expectations on a busy roundabout, the young people commented that most parents would not take the time to explain this to their children. In the video, W2 explained that before a young person leaves the path at a roundabout, they should make eye contact with the driver, especially if the driver has not signalled which arm of the roundabout they are exiting.

YP10 (25:47): Most parents can't be bothered though.

YP9 (25:51): Oh yeah, that could be happens.

YP10 (25:52): Just stand there and go, right, you can't do that. You can do that. You can.

YP9 (25:56): Oh you can do it if.

YP11 (25:57): You catch, catch their eyes. You think oh. Most parents can't be bothered.

Group Session 3 (21 November 2022)

These young people seemed to be aware of their parents' lack of interest in cycling in general. On the other hand, the keen cyclists of the research group would use their bikes for transport to school if the conditions were supportive.

4.2.5.3 Schools

A lack of school infrastructure prevented some young people from cycling to school as often as they wished. In one conversation, the group was discussing what extra clothes they needed to cycle. This raised the question of what to do with the clothes once in school. One of the youth workers asked the group if lockers would help.

W1 (00:05:10): Well, would somewhere for cyclists to get changed or somewhere for cyclists to leave the reflective gear and helmets.

W3 (00:05:17): Umm hmm <affirmative>

W1 (00:05:17): Be helpful by the school? I dunna know.

YP7 (00:05:19): But my mom bought like an ASDA bag but I can't use mine because every time I go it keeps on like breaking and that, so.

Later in the same conversation

YP9 (00:05:33): Yeah lads, <unclear> you had lockers in school. You had lockers. I had nothing I carried it all around with us …. There was not one person in my school that had a locker.

Group Session 5 (20 February 2023)

The issue of good facilities for cyclists is also significant in higher education. One of the three members of the larger community interviewed by me online, with the young people's approval, was a university staff member tasked with increasing staff and student sustainable travel. They explained that they conduct a survey every two years to identify barriers. One barrier is the lack of facilities for cycling in poor weather. Some newer buildings already have good facilities.

University staff member (06:26): Yeah. So, um, for instance, um, the, um, the shower in the office where I am, um, the shower facilities downstairs are superb. Um, we have dedicated lockers for cycle clothes. So it's a vented locker.

W3 (06:41): Okay.

University staff member (06:41): So the idea is that you've, if you get wet on your way in, you know, um, your, your clothing will dry.

The survey also informs new builds.

University staff member (07:06): So that was, that was one of the big asks for, for that new building.

W3 (07:10): Okay.

University staff member (07:10): Um, is, um, decent changing facilities, lockers to store your stuff, um, and somewhere secure for your bike.

Interview Transcript (29 March 2023)

The above seems to show that facilities used by those over 18 years old can be provided if prioritised. As mentioned previously, many of the research group members live in deprived areas, so it could be that priorities requested by university staff and students for 'decent changing facilities, lockers to store your stuff … and somewhere secure for your bike' are beyond the reach of schools that do not have funding for vented lockers for students or similar pro-cycling innovations.

4.2.5.4 Weather and dark evenings

Previously, a young person expressed their opinion that parents would not bother explaining the rules of the road to their children. In addition to time, weather and conditions seem to

be a factor that adults and young people share regarding feeling safe. As a non-keen cyclist, I reflected on my own resistance to cycling in poor weather and dark conditions.

> Given that it was cold and misty, I was not looking forward to a long evening of cycling. I don't have proper clothes and I just find it challenging. Psychologically I would much rather be indoors, so I do struggle with the weather as we go deeper and deeper into winter. However, as a community developer, I'm asking and looking for the public to make lifestyle changes to activities and approaches to active travel, so I really have no choice. I must get out and do these things myself.

Field Note (28 November 2022)

Not all young people like cycling in all conditions, either. In this example, the workers discussed the lower participation rate during the winter and gained some insight.

> W2 and W1 thought that the last week's cycle was a good activity and that the older young people particularly enjoyed it. There is still concern that people like YP1 and YP8 are not attending and we are thinking it is because of the bad weather and dark evenings. W2 talked to YP1's granny. The granny said that YP1 doesn't like to cycle in the dark and so W2, W1 and I talked about how we can encourage YP1 to come out and build confidence around cycling in the dark. For example, one of the items that YP1 identified to film was near her/his school which isn't too far from [the Park]. We could encourage her to attend to film that journey and hopefully, she will realise that being out in the dark isn't so bad.

Field Note (5 December 2022)

During the interview with the Council Staff Member, we discussed that the dynamic of initial resistance diminishes once the decision is made to partake in an activity.

Council Staff Member (26:44): Yeah, I think it's, I mean like when I go out on a run on a winter's evening, there's always that, that moment as I'm getting ready to go, I'm like, oh, do I go when it's horrible and dark and cold? But as soon as I'm out there, as soon as I get back I'm like, I'm so glad I went.

W3 (27:01): Yep.

Council Staff Member (27:01): You just feel so much better and we need people to, it's that barrier. It's like, well that, sorry, not barrier. It's like that first step in the behaviour change process and then [for] it to become like a routine as well

Later in the same conversation

W3 (27:39): Yeah. And there's something about doing it [cycling in poor weather] as a group as well.

Council Staff Member (27:43): Yeah.

W3 (27:43): That that's, you know, you're less likely to bail on a cold evening if you're gonna let somebody else down. So yeah, um yeah,

Council Staff Member (27:49): There's a, and that social element as well, isn't it? It's like nice to see their friends and you know, they're getting their benefits from it as well in terms of health and fitness, that kind of thing. So,

Interview Transcription (17 March 2023)

Physical activity outside in unforgiving weather can be a challenge. However, the interview highlighted that there are positive benefits, both physical and mental, for all ages.

Findings Theme 1 conclusion

The data analysis on the Experience Theme revealed that young people's motivations for cycling were primarily fun and transport. However, activities that young people considered fun were deemed unsafe by adults, and transport options for longer journeys, such as using public transport, were often costly.

For both fun and transport motivations, the main barrier for young people was safety. They identified two aspects – their safety and the safety of their bike. When viewing safety issues from a young person's viewpoint, the solutions include:

- Better infrastructure that makes space for separate bike lanes
- Better-informed drivers regarding the Highway Code
- Informed adults on the young people's capacity to cycle safely
- Secure bike storage that meets young people's needs
- Facilities such as lockers for cycling gear (standard and ones with ventilation for wet clothes)

The findings also highlighted some social justice issues, specifically that younger students were not being identified as having cycling-related requirements or asked for input on facilities, unlike their older counterparts at a nearby university. Nor were young people's priorities for age-appropriate destinations a consideration for adult decision-makers, it would seem.

Overall, the Experience Theme findings highlighted the contradictions and challenges faced by young people as they sought to find a route to improving active travel in their community. The findings on experiences suggest that the group has priorities and desires that differ from those of adults, and as such are often hidden from view as far as decision-makers and resource holders are concerned. The Discussion chapter provides an in-depth examination of the challenges raised.

5 Findings Theme 2: Supportive and unsupportive relationships around young people

Introduction

Moving on from the discussion on young people's experiences while biking and the barriers encountered, this chapter explores young people's relationships with two groups. The first group comprises peers and adults supporting youth development and independent group cycling activities. The second is relationships that do *not* support youth autonomy.

The Literature Review chapter discussed youth agency and relational autonomy (2.2). Revisiting these concepts, the findings demonstrate how approaches were reflected in practice. First, I considered inclusive youth interactions with peers and workers. Next, relationship aspects supporting autonomy are explored. Through a CBPAR approach based on relational autonomy to effect change, the findings next considered the second sub-theme of non-supportive or non-existent relationships between the group and adults in the community. The relationships in the second sub-theme are opposed to those in the first because of the seeming lack of trust and understanding. The chapter ends with young people's examples of conflicts in spaces and with (contested) resources that young people feel entitled to use.

5.1 Inclusion by the youth group and members

Young people can gain autonomy through both peer and adult relationships. Beneficial relationships can encourage safe boundary exploration. The findings included examples of young people interacting with each other and adults through inclusion, thus expanding the group's boundaries. As a youth service, membership is limited to ages 12–25. However, a member could be an adult volunteer, which was how the group saw me.

In the first example of inclusion, YP5 needed a bike repair while cycling with another group of young people, not connected to the youth group, in the Park. YP5 was aware that the research group repairs bikes near the Park's car park each week, and YP5 asked for help. As a youth worker with an aim to support youth learning and development, the worker did not fix the bike *for* YP5. Instead, they actively included them in steps taken for the repairs.

> YP5's bike needed major surgery. I observed the more YP5 was engaging with W2, who was showing YP5 how to fix the bike instead of just fixing it for YP5, the more YP5 seemed to relax.

Field Note (14 November 2022)

Next, another worker offered to include the new person immediately in group activities with no conditions.

> W1 offered YP5 a helmet to join in one of the games that was starting but YP5 declined at first but then YP5 asked W1 for it once YP5's bike was fixed.

Field Note (14 December 2022)

With the welcome of YP5 by all members into the group's games, a shift in YP5's group identity later occurred.

> YP5 did play a game with the group. It was interesting to note that later when YP5's friends that he had been with before, were asking him from the [pavement] 'why you wearing a helmet' and generally trying to tease him that YP5 ignored them.

Field Note (14 December 2022)

The group also accepted new adult members. I purchased a bike to better participate in the group's activities. I shared photos of the bike on the group's Instagram chat. I summarised one reply from a young person in a field note.

> I posted a photo of it (the bike) just fitting in the hallway of my flat on the Instagram group. YP11 replied that he loved 'new bike day' which I thought was nice. YP11 had recently bought a new bike and was very happy with it.

Field Note (29 Oct 2022)

There were also examples of individual young people connecting with their peers. An example of a young person being better able to support a peer to feel included than adults were, was a young person attending the weekly Park session:

> YP7 said that YP5 was also going to be attending but YP5 will be a little late. W2 was surprised to hear this because earlier YP5 said s/he wasn't going to attend. But YP7 said that s/he talked YP5 into it so that's why YP5 was going to come along.

Field Note (30 January 2023)

Without the encouragement of another peer, YP5 might not have attended that evening.

In a group with a range of ages, opportunities arose for older young people to learn and practise leadership skills with an underlying inclusive approach. The dynamic reflected the group's philosophy of how the adults, as group members, support all ages, in this case by not taking the lead on activities. This example demonstrates two aspects of inclusion. First, the workers encourage youth development by enabling them to practise new skills like leading a tyre repair. This approach helps older young people bridge the gap between youth and adult roles by practising an adult skill. Secondly, it demonstrates that an older young person (YP9) can increase the opportunity for younger members to develop. While demonstrating how to fix a tyre puncture for the video the group decided to create, YP9 included others, was supportive of their efforts and encouraged them to try it themselves. Later, in the de-brief for the weekly meeting, the workers all commented on the approach, which included worker support of YP9 in the background.

> The last item to mention during the repair time was when YP7 and YP12 had finished the patch and put the tyre back on. YP9 started the process but left some to do for YP7. W1 was in the background giving encouragement. YP9 also gave good direction and encouragement to YP7, giving pointers in a kind way and saying well done when YP7 completed the task. I thought YP9 did a great job of leadership.

Field Note (23 January 2023)

Supporting autonomy in this example is evidenced on a few levels. First, one young person is aiding less experienced cyclists in independent travel so they can cycle more confidently with knowledge and experience of fixing a flat. Second, the older young person gains confidence that they have knowledge and experience to share. Lastly, the workers support the older young person by noting and praising the positive and inclusive approach demonstrated. The data has more examples of adults supporting youth autonomy.

5.2 Workers supporting youth autonomy

As the adults in the research group relationship, workers aimed to be in solidarity with the young people while increasing group collective input and creating a safe space for issues as they arose. The data in this subsection supports this dynamic. Young people are a marginalised group who need to feel safe, and the workers are responsible for creating that atmosphere when the group meets. The support increases social inclusion and social capital.

5.2.1 Group facilitation

One area where workers' skill and training aids research with marginalised groups is group facilitation. The field notes and group discussions have examples of workers challenging young people to practise mental rehearsing. There is a skill in challenging people of all ages to think differently while being respectful. Often, humour and gentleness, combined with probing dialogue, are needed. The example below discussed barriers to cycling longer journeys. The young people previously identified a bike breakdown as one barrier they encountered [with key points in bold].

W2 (14:51): **So you[r] chain snapped while you were on a bike ride to [nearby town area], what would you do? What could you do?**

YP10 (14:56): **Um, call me mom to pick me up.**

W2 (14:58): <laugh**> Call your mom to pick you up. So moms, right, moms and dads having cars have been banished from this equation. <laugh>, right? You have to because you, you haven't got a phone, for example, your phone has died. Yeah. How, how do you, yeah, how do you sort yourself out?**

Later in the conversation

W2 (15:34): Yeah, yeah. You can't phone home, no ET phone home. What do you do? What's your option?

YP2 (15:38): Scream. Send a messages in a bottle.

W2 (15:41): <laugh>, **Come on. There must be easier options. Let's just think. I,**

YP5 (15:44): **You also wanna ring the police and get,**

W2 (15:46): **so you could just, right, I'm gonna walk. It's two hours home. I'm gonna walk it.**

YP2 (15:50): **If you're nearby someone then,**

YP5 (15:53): or if you buy chocolate, you'll get your bike fixed.

YP2 (15:55): **No, because if you, sometimes you get the generous members of the public who's got <unclear> and see you out there struggling.**

W2 (16:01): Right.

YP2 (16:01): Then they may help you.

W1 (16:02): **Oh, so ask a fellow cyclist,**

W2 (16:03): **So ask a fellow cyclist. Cause someone like me or W1 struggling ask me or W1 and we'll say, Yeah multitool, we've got one of them. Yeah. Yeah. Pump. Yeah I've got a pump. Oh yeah,**

Group Discussion 4 (16 January 2023)

Another aspect the above dialogue illustrates is the encouragement of adults for young people to engage with the community of cyclists. Children may have learned terms like 'stranger danger' or otherwise been taught not to approach people they don't know. In the above example, the workers suggest approaching adults like themselves who are willing to help, aiding independent travel and increasing confidence.

Group facilitation also requires skill in addressing sensitive topics that young people raise. For example, youth and social workers are trained in basic counselling skills. This incorporates a non-judgemental stance that young people and marginalised groups learn to trust over time. Therefore, sometimes, a sensitive topic arises that must be responded to in a clear, kind and caring manner. The following section of a group discussion regarding where people see themselves in 2035 demonstrates the workers' counselling skills. YP3 had just said they would have children with a partner in 2035. YP3 wondered how they would transport children on a bike. The group then considered cargo bikes as an alternative, discussing their advantages and disadvantages. It was surprising, therefore, when YP3 directed the conversation to what was most concerning to them.

YP3 (05:11): Just to clarify. I am a lesbian. I probably won't have a family.

W2 (05:15): Lesbians can't have families?

W1 (05:18): Yeah, it doesn't have to stop you from having a family.

YP1 (05:20): (crosstalk) Don't doubt that you can have a family.

Group Discussion 2 (24 October 2022)

The data also reflects the workers' quick responses and supportive comments. The interaction had the added benefit of other young people witnessing it. In this example, young people can learn to react positively to each other based on the workers' behaviour.

Another aspect of worker group facilitation is ensuring awareness of activities and dynamics so everyone feels included. The group has members of various ages and bike confidence, so the workers must consider this when planning activities.

> The main people that benefited from this outing (filming locations near the Park) was the less experienced bike riders, namely YP8, YP12 and YP4. YP9, YP11, YP6 and YP10 cycle a lot and are very confident road cycle users. W2 being aware of this bought donuts for everybody at a local shop because the older young people were probably getting bored at this stage.

Field Note (7 November 2022)

Awareness is the first step for a worker to effect change. Once aware of young people's dynamics, moods, concerns and needs, the worker can formulate an appropriate reply.

5.2.2 Awareness

Awareness of a young person's thoughts and concerns can aid relationship-building. I experienced this when the young people chose to share a story or photo with me.

> Later in the session, YP8 was sharing photos on YP8's phone and was showing me nieces and nephews, which I take as a good sign that YP8 wants to engage with me. Other engagements during the sessions were with YP9, who talked to me about my new bike and asked me how I was getting on. I still find it hard to have conversations with YP6 and YP10 as they tend to be very quiet, but they are definitely part of the group and I might get to know them more in the future.

Field Note (7 November 2022)

As a worker, a balance is created so the other group members do not feel there is favouritism. This was an issue when one young person mispronounced my name.

> Over the course of the evening, YP12 was calling me Alaleena. YP12's brother corrected him, which I didn't like because it feels like YP12 is always being told that he was wrong. So, I made light of it and said that I kinda liked the name I thought it sounded really nice. The group laughed. I said, but only YP12 can call me that. This

> prompted somebody to say, oh favouritism and again, we all laughed. When I thought about it some more, I decided that I will ask YP12 to try and call me by the right name, even if they were joking; I don't want any sense of favouritism or anything like that in the group.

Field Note (23 January 2023)

Another example of worker awareness skills supporting young people is to ensure they hear positive feedback. In this example, another worker and I share our observations with the older young person on their interactions with younger peers the previous week when fixing a flat.

> YP9 does an excellent job of explaining things to YP7. I was praising YP9 and saying that that's not something you can teach somebody and that it showed real leadership. W2 agreed and gave an example of some other event that W2 was on with YP9. And W2 gave YP9 a compliment. At first, YP9 wasn't able to really hear W2 and take it on board but W2 said again you know that you did a really good job there. This is an example of Youth Worker and social work skills.

Field Note (30 January 2023)

The data supporting youth autonomy showed youth and social worker training, skill and experience within the group. It also exemplified youth peer support within the group.

5.2.3 Workers supporting capacity-building

Another skill that workers can use to benefit young people's autonomy is capacity-building. Workers trained in youth development acknowledge that the first step is to recognise the levels of competency the young person has and then help them to build confidence as they develop experience and knowledge. There were several instances of capacity-building during the research, which are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of Youth Capacity-Building activities during the research project

Development Area	Activity	Examples of Youth Capacity Changes
Interpersonal skills	Public speaking	Three young people spoke at conference presentation.
	Group Sessions challenging	The group positively challenged one member's thoughts that they could not have children.

	individual youth perceptions	
Leadership skills	Older member created a new game and led the activity	This was the first time the young person had taken on this role.
	Older member led a learning session giving good supportive feedback to other members	Older member demonstrated how to fix a tyre to two less-knowledgeable members.
	Older member offered training and volunteer opportunities to lead group cycles	Young people registered and attended additional training.
Independence and confidence in bike travel	Weekly bike repairs and maintenance	Young people learned how to fix and maintain their bike from youth workers and older members, some of which are certified bike mechanics.
	Bike tyre repair	The young people identified they need this skill for longer journeys and recorded a video, learning how to make repairs in the process.
	Bike breakdown on long journeys	Young people learned how to prepare for longer journeys and ask for help during them.
	Bike security	The young people learned that there are CCTV cameras in the town so if they park near them their bike is less likely to be damaged or stolen.

	Addressing road infrastructure issues	From older peers who cycled more, young people learned group cycling in the park and surrounding area, and from knowledgeable workers learned how to navigate road infrastructure issues.
Social skills	Cycling safely with a group	The young people practised how to communicate while cycling, taking care to warn of pedestrians sharing the space. They also took part in shared activities such as going to BMX races or for ice-cream and filming their Map points.
	Inclusion	Young people accepted new members into the group.
Technological skills	Camera	Young people wore the GoPro camera during filming. Also discussed how to film commentary on a long cycle. They also recorded a short film on tyre repair.
	Video editing	Young people learned on youth worker's laptop how to edit video at start of a few weekly meetings and in the bike shop.
	Map editing	Two young people attended a workshop to learn how to edit their Map with new points and comments.
	Community organising	Young people gave input on how to use the Map and Infographic and gave their voice to the new strategy with email, press release and networking.

Other adults, in addition to the CBP workers, contributed to youth autonomy through welcoming messages. The action demonstrated that the young people are valued members of the community.

5.2.4 Adults in other roles supporting youth

As mentioned in the previous chapter and later in this one, two members of the local Neighbourhood Policing Service visited the young people at their weekly meeting in March 2023 to answer their questions. I was away on a required secondment, so the young people and workers gave me a de-brief at a Group Session when I returned. Two statements evidenced the police's support of young people cycling, summarised by one of the workers.

> **W1 (05:55):** Yeah. I would say they seemed quite positive about cycling and young people cycling to school and they accepted that it's difficult to like always wear high vis or whatever. It's difficult to always cycle on the road. They seemed to be accepting of that.
>
> **W1 (06:15):** They were a bit sad weren't they? That … they like shared our sadness that there wasn't great bike paths everywhere when you were talking about places that are difficult to cycle.

Group Session 6 (3 April 2023)

Some adults wish to support the group's efforts and think of them when opportunities arise. In this case, a health worker directed a skate shop owner to donate stock to the group. After one weekly session, W2 distributed t-shirts, water bottles, helmets and backpacks from the closing shop, which the young people appreciated.

> The contact for the shop was through the Health Promotion Unit. W2 and I had a meeting with her and the woman was very supportive of the health benefits of the activities that we were doing.

Field Note (5 December 2022)

The last example of adults in the community supporting young people's inclusion and development was when the board members of the youth organisation hosting their Annual General Meeting (AGM) welcomed me and the young people to attend. Like most AGMs, it is an adult space with expected norms and activities. For example, this AGM included reviewing the previous year's activities, challenges and financial status. After each submission, attendees were welcome to comment. After the meeting was over, there was food and time for informal conversations. The AGM demonstrated an open and transparent relationship between the organisation workers, me as the researcher, and the young people as service users.

> I was happy to attend as I think it's part of community development and assessment to be there for this event. I also thought it showed transparency on W2's part that there are no qualms or questions about me speaking with trustees directly. It also showed that I have transparency and willingness to answer any questions from the trustees.

Later in the same field note

> There's nothing really to note from these conversations (with two young people together and separately). It was great to see young people at the AGM. I think it says something about their willingness to participate.

Field Note (21 January 2023)

These findings demonstrated that workers and professionals other than youth and social workers also support young people. A message of seeing and hearing their concerns and treating them with respect is evident. The selected examples also illustrate efforts to include young people in adult spaces, including perhaps unexpected settings such as the AGM, thus both living up to their principles and assisting young people with learning how to navigate these types of spaces. In the remainder of the chapter, the focus turns to relationships that are restrictive and less inclusive.

5.3 Youth autonomy not supported

This level of commitment demonstrated by the group workers and other supportive adults is not always possible. Some adults lack the skills and experience to understand what is needed to support young people so that they can be included, and in other cases, young people are not considered.

5.3.1 Relationships with adults in school settings

When discussing relationships, some findings imply that young people might feel unsupported by their schools. For example, a young person struggled to use public transport to travel to their education provider because of the cost (section 4.1.2). When discussing schools specifically, the issues of safety for the young person and the bike were similar to those outlined in the previous chapter. The interview with a key staff member suggests that those in higher education were more likely to be asked for their opinions than those in school settings, and efforts were made in higher education settings to implement changes

regarding cycle use (section 4.2.5.3). However, this raises the question of whether students in primary and secondary schools are also consulted on changes to their schools.

Regarding relationships, the young people in the research group shared that the institution or decision-makers at their schools either didn't hear or simply did not ask what they needed to use their bikes safely. Some examples emerged from group discussions. Cycle to School Week is an initiative to encourage biking instead of car transport to school.

W2 (00:01:07): Yeah. There was post on social media saying we're supporting Cycle to School Week, um, from the (Local) Council.

YP11 (00:01:13): I remember you asking YP3 and YP10 and all that.

W2 (00:01:14): Yeah. And, and so what I did was ask everybody had they seen anything, had they stuff. So there was, nobody had seen anything. So YP6, who goes to your school. He said he hadn't seen it. Um, YP10 who goes to (local primary school), he hadn't seen it. YP1 I think she had said she hadn't seen anything at (another local primary school), so.

Group Discussion 5 (20 February 2023)

Later in the same discussion, one young person said their school did do something for the Cycle to School Week. However, it only lasted two days, and there were no incentives for young people to participate.

5.3.2 Relationships with regional planners

There are other settings besides schools where young people have experienced relationships (or their absence) that do not support their desire to cycle more. Decision-makers choosing not to engage with young people is also a way of relating; it sends a message that adults or their organisations are not interested. As was the case with the school setting, we have already observed that young people want more, and more accessible, fun activities (4.1.1).

Below are some additional observations focusing on the relationship between adults and young people.

All workers on the research project observed young people not being heard, for example, in the questionnaire addressed to them, there was an open question on social justice issues:

> **W2**: I have lots of thoughts on all of these, particularly the lack of real voices from disadvantaged and excluded communities. I am optimistic about the future for young people's inclusion in policy development, it's just the pace that frustrates me.

And

> **W1**: Young people (like some other groups) often seem ignored or overlooked by the establishment or those with decision-making power. A key example was when I attended the Active Travel Forum and they hadn't managed to capture many views from young people.

From Youth Worker Questionnaires (March 2023)

The Active Travel Forum mentioned was a series of three meetings organised by a regional transport authority to gather input from special interest groups. As previously mentioned, the group could not attend to give their input directly (4.1.2). I attended two meetings on the young people's behalf, and W1 attended the last meeting, which shared a draft of the new strategy. Despite the group's efforts to engage, their viewpoints were not fully reflected in the final document. For example, there was no mention of the importance of cyclists needing fun things to do on bikes in addition to using them for transport needs. There was also no mention of young people using bikes outside of school contexts.

The regional body organised local 'Question and Answer' sessions to gather public input on the strategy. The one organised for the group's local area was held in a library during school hours. One of the workers from the research group shared their interaction with the planning staff at the event.

> … I mentioned that it (the Q & A session) missed out YP as it finished at 2pm and most of you are at school. The reply I got was basically, 'Oh, that's a shame'. They only had small leaflets with a tiny box which I told them was (not) big enough for my response! However, I think it's pants that they've missed young people out, almost entirely. The guy said they aimed this at middle aged adults, which, when this strategy is done, in 2035, some of you will be or close to it …

W2 Instagram post (8 February 2023)

Whether intended or not, young people's voices were not a priority in the local in-person consultation process based on the scheduled time of day and non-school location.

The authority's last effort to gather feedback on the strategy was through an online survey. The issues with this approach are discussed in the next chapter on communication. However, it is an example of the authority again choosing a platform to gather voices which did not suit young people who, like many marginalised groups, do not usually participate in these forms of public opinion gathering. The young people at the initial findings meeting in January 2024 confirmed that none had completed the online survey. The result is a lack of young people's active travel experiences in the public consultation process.

Local and regional efforts to increase active travel could prompt more input from young people by seeing them as valued community members. The research group comprises keen, experienced cyclists with good insights and local knowledge to share. Both young people, and adults in solidarity with them, advocated for more facilities and better infrastructure for independent travel for young people. The group's specific recommendations for the active travel strategy are discussed further in section 6.4. In the following subsection, I present data on the young people's lived experiences that informed their recommendations to the planners. The findings show that they made attempts, with worker support, to manage conflicts with others. The young people's recommendations for increasing bike use do not suggest conflicts with those of other groups. Therefore, gathering information from the research group could have informed the active travel strategy for all age groups and skill levels.

5.4 Young people's lived experiences of contested spaces

As co-designers of the study, the young people chose not to complete journals or diaries to express their feelings regarding relationships during the fieldwork. In this subsection, I present some data indicating young people's reactions to some of the dynamics raised so far. The reactions were primarily categorised as contesting spaces – whether physical or intangible. The 'relationships' identified here are essentially virtual and collective, as between young cyclists as a group, and, say, dog-walkers as another group with an interest in using the same physical space.

The main contested spaces are paths and roads with pedestrians and vehicle drivers. The Map points provide a good summary of the contested spaces. Some points were presented in the experience chapter (Chapter 4) when discussing personal and bike safety. Table 6: Summary of contested spaces gives the number and types of issues based on young people's lived experiences.

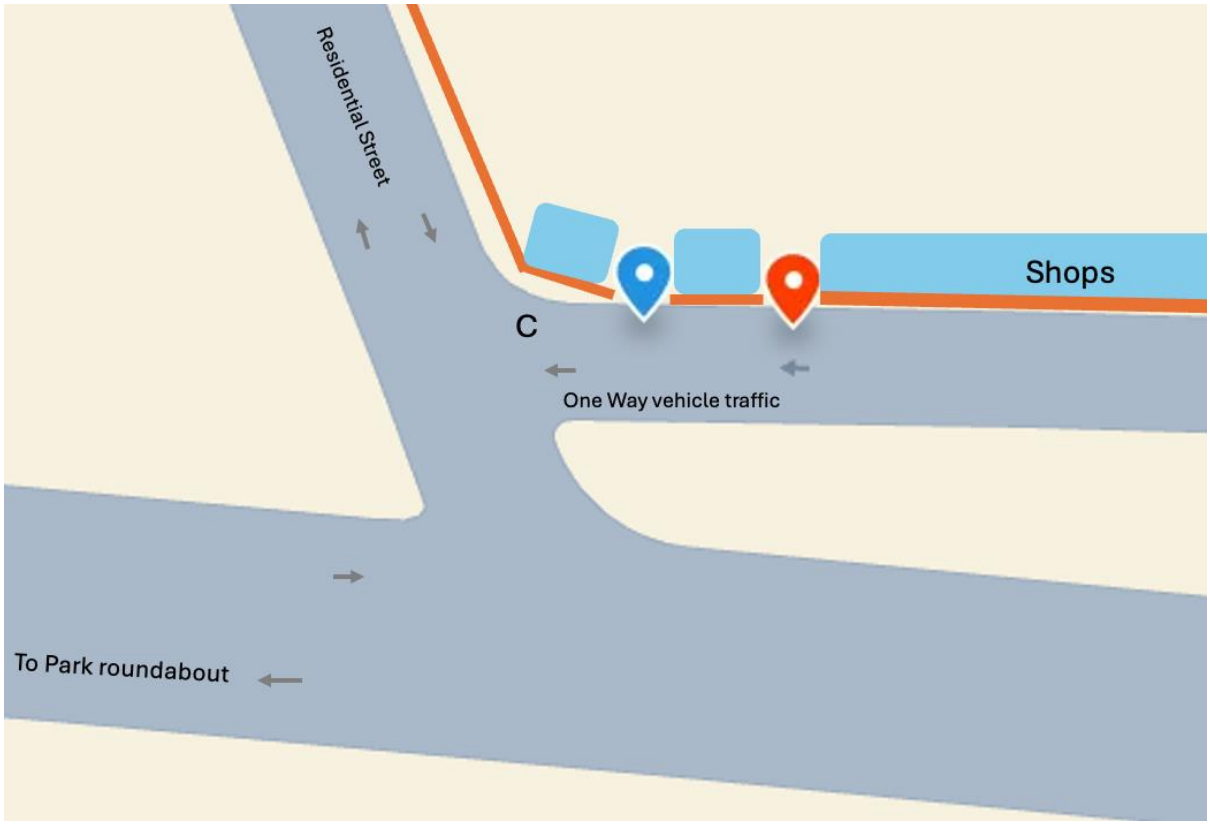
Table 6: Summary of contested spaces

Pin Identifier	**Pin Text Agreed by Research Group Young People**
Red-A	Young people are forced to use the pavement in the [shop area] nearer to the [Park]. The road direction is one way in the wrong direction for them. Young people said that the path could be busy during the day. Adults have yelled and pushed them to get off the path; however, this section has no place for them to use instead.
Red-B	A young person was on the zebra crossing, looked both ways, and a bus honked at them.
Red-C	A young person said, 'A car did not indicate they were turning and pinned me against the side of the road.'
Red-D	A young person found that the path narrows at this point, and they are forced onto the road during busy summer days.
Red-E	One young person was gaining speed, was inexperienced with their gears and almost hit a bus.
Red-F	Some young people have dyspraxia and would not feel safe using a cycle lane like this one on the road. Others said using the pavement is also a problem because people come out of their driveways without looking.
Red-G	Young people find this arm of the roundabout dangerous because the distance between [Fast] Road and the turn for [Park] Road on the roundabout is short. It is not always clear whether a car will turn down [Park] Rd.
Orange-D	Cycle lanes are needed in the pedestrian area. Young people say they cycle in this area without complaints from pedestrians as long as they

	don't race or weave in and out; however, it would help if they had a separate designated lane. A youth worker also talked about their experience in a similar pedestrian area in [large city].
Orange-E	Cycle lanes are needed to connect to the ones near [seaside park]. The path is wide, but there is no room for bikes with pedestrians and cars.
Orange-H	At this junction, the road is quieter, and the cyclist can see cars coming from [Park] Road to [To Town and Shop] Road Roundabout. It would be better if cyclists could safely be on the roundabout, as it is slower to use pedestrian crossings.
Orange-I	When [Town to Coast] Road is busy young people can't cycle on the path. The road is narrow with no cycle lanes, so they don't like to cycle there. Designated cycle lanes are needed.

Pin Identifier Red-A is the same area discussed in the previous chapter regarding the lack of bike racks (4.2.4). The issue is the road layout, which favours vehicle use over bike and pedestrian use, illustrated in Figure 6: Traffic flow issues near shops. If a young person uses the road as a vehicle, as suggested in the Highway Code, they travel the wrong way on a one-way street to the right of point 'C' in Figure 6. If they use the path as a pedestrian (represented by the orange line in Figure 6), then they must dismount and walk their bikes. However, this is a long stretch of road with many shops (represented by blue squares in Figure 6), so that option is a poor alternative. The conflict over space on the pavement is interesting because, for both young people and pedestrians, the path represents a safe place; however, both groups seem to view the other group's presence as threatening their own safety.

Figure 6: Traffic flow issues near shops



During a Group Session reviewing the video we filmed of the pin Red-A area, the young people shared times they were yelled at or physically shoved by people on the path.

W2 (26:40): Somebody mentioned about should we be on the path?

YP9 (26:44): Yeah me. Can you cycle on them, no? I mean I do regardless <unclear>.

YP5 (26:51): Are you allowed, like are cyclists allowed to ride on the path? Cause I normally get told to get off the path when I ride on the path.

W1 (26:56): Humm.

YP3 (26:56): Yeah. I get screamed at by old ladies.

YP5 (26:58): Yeah,

W2 (26:59): Old old ladies tell you to get off, <unclear><crosstalk>

YP3 (27:04): <unclear>No old ladies pull at my shirt and like 'get off the path'. I'm like,

YP5 (27:08): I've had one trying to push us off me bike for being on the path.

YP3 (27:10): An old man, push me off me bike and told me to go on the road. I was like, I'm like I've dyspraxia, I can't go on the road.

YP9 (27:15): And you cannot pedal on the road the whole time because of different ways. And that path in there is confusing for the.

YP5 (27:22): Oh yeah. Not this one, yeah, cause like the cars going,

YP9 (27:24): Cause one minute it's just you go one way and then the next minute like going both ways and then the next minute you can only go that way or whatever.

W3 (27:32): Yeah. The biggest problem with these paths is that somebody could come out of a door any minute. That's, that's what makes it so dangerous.

W1 (27:38): Yeah. So yeah. (in the video) YP12 goes on the road. Some people cycle on the pavement. Me and YP8 I think are walking on the,

YP9 (27:45): Yeah and YP11 is half on <unclear>

YP5 (27:48): That's why I ride on the little bit on the other side.

W2 (27:51): That's where all the, all the bins and lamp posts are.

W1 (27:57): So yeah, who's right? What's right?

YP5 (27:59): <crosstalk> I think we should be able to go out on the path.

YP3 (28:03): And it's probably the opposite of what everyone does, but,

YP9 (28:05): I mean if you're not flying past people and like making them get scared and,

YP3 (28:09): If you're not endangering people, then.

YP9 (28:11): Yeah, that's what I mean.

Group Session 3 (21 November 2022)

Later, in the same discussion regarding the same location and issues, the group thought that where they cycle on the path might help. As in the previous exchange, the worker aims to ask questions to help the young people mentally rehearse situations.

W2 (35:32): If you are going cycling down there, would you be cycling right next to the doors?

YP3 (35:37): Yes. Well, <crosstalk>

YP5 (35:38): No cuz you're supposed to cycle right in the middle of the path.

W2 (35:41): Well.

YP5 (35:41): That, that's the main area where you can cycle in the middle of the path, or on the right hand side far away from the shops, but the middle part is more safe cause people could walk out of the shops and people can leave their car <unclear> right.

W3 (35:51): Humm.

YP3 (35:51): So it gives them both options.

YP5 (35:53): Yeah, so I'll be cycling in the middle.

YP3 (35:55): <crosstalk> you've got one risk on one side and we've got both risks being in the middle <laugh>…

YP10 (36:06): <crosstalk> Be aware of your surroundings.

Group Session 3 (21 November 2023)

In these situations, a member of the public who does not have a relationship with the young people may complain that cycling on a path or in a pedestrian area is anti-social behaviour.

However, in their meeting with the Neighbourhood Policing Service, it was confirmed that young people are allowed to use paths and roads. According to their own account of the meeting, the young people felt the police were actually quite permissive:

YP10 (04:07): If you can go on the road, go on the road, but if you can't it's fine.

YP11 (04:14): Like, and then, and then like here (Pin Red-A) there's a one-way system so you can ride on the, uh, on the path but just gotta be, you know, mindful of pedestrians coming out of shops.

W3 (04:24): Mmmm. Okay.

W1 (04:28): Yes. Would I be right saying, they sort of gave us the green light if you feel unsafe on the road, use the pavement. Just be respectful.

YP11 (04:34): It is against the law, is against the law to be on the path here and stuff like that, but at the same time it's not <unclear>.

W3 (04:42): And tell me again. So [Pin Orange-D], they were saying you're not allowed to, but if you do it's no big deal? Yeah,

YP11 (04:48): Yeah, pretty much.

YP9 (04:49): As long as you're,

YP11 (04:50): not being an idiot, like driving really go really quick going in between everyone just, you know, nice and slow.

W3 (04:55): That's what you guys said, isn't it? (when we filmed in that area)

YP11 (04:58): Which it is the same with [nearby large town], as well in the [town's shopping] Centre. Like you do get told off and you can't park, you get fined there as well to ride your bike there. But it's never happened to me. I have been told off going a bit too fast there, so whenever I go in there now I'll just go slow.

Group Session 6 (3 April 2023)

In addition to raising a relationship discord, contested spaces demonstrated poor levels of understanding, as the public does not seem aware of the young people's permission to use paths if needed, and that this is not viewed as anti-social behaviour by the police. The young people shared experiences of poor treatment and dismissal of their needs, all reflective of poor relationships between them as a marginalised group and some adults among the population in general.

Findings Theme 2 conclusion

Relational autonomy and its limits were evidenced by young people's experiences of inclusion or exclusion in adult spaces. These inclusions and exclusions are significant because decisions affecting young people's present and future biking experiences are made in adult spaces. Additionally, there were examples of young people and workers in the group being inclusive. The young people demonstrated support for new members, whether they were another young person or an adult. The workers supported youth inclusion through counselling skills, awareness and group facilitation skills.

On the other hand, the findings provided examples of non-existent or non-supportive relationships in two areas that impacted the group's biking experiences. The first was schools, where the young people found minimal initiatives that included their feedback. The second was the public consultation process to inform the development of the regional active travel strategy. Young people evidenced their input being excluded from or hampered by the process. This evidence sheds new light on a typical planning process – the approaches used to gather data, rather than being adequate, contained significant flaws for at least one marginalised group. The young people's direct voices were excluded from the avenues provided.

The study also showed that the young people experienced conflict between themselves and adults. They were both explicitly and implicitly denied access to so-called 'adult spaces' to which they were actually entitled, according to police sources. Even while knowing they were being problematised, they recognised the need to respect others when sharing limited infrastructure. They raised concerns in group discussions and brought their questions to the proper authorities to clarify their rights to use common amenities, such as a public path, which had been questioned by apparently ill-informed adults.

6 Findings Theme 3: Young people's communication challenges and responses

Introduction

The young people engaged in community action, which involved communication challenges for them. During the fieldwork, the group had few conversations explicitly about these topics; however, the action taken, presented in this chapter, will demonstrate their approaches to the same, grounded in their experiences and aspirations. During the fieldwork, all three CBP workers raised ideas and gave information and support on conveying young people's lived experiences to regional planners, local council staff members and decision-makers.

The findings on communication are framed in the phases of the CBPAR approach used in the research, demonstrating how young people, as a marginalised group, attempted to communicate what they had learned to others. The specific tools and approaches are presented with a focus on skills learned. Most activities revolved around the development and use of the Map, shared in the map process subsection (3.4.4.4.). The chapter ends with a discussion of the networking and transdisciplinary attempts by the research group. Adults supporting youth autonomy is further evidenced, building on the relationship findings, and informs the next chapter, where the project findings are discussed in their totality.

I chose to conduct an ongoing community assessment as a key contextualising element of the study to better inform my understanding of the young people's lived experiences during the fieldwork timeframe. As part of the assessment, I observed examples of messages the wider community was sending to the young people, whether explicitly or implicitly, and by commission or omission.

6.1 Community assessment – situating young people's communication in a hostile environment

In section 4.1.1, the young people shared how their fun experiences on bikes are sometimes interpreted as anti-social. This falls within a broader ethos of suspicion and rejection directed towards them, such as the sign in a local shop window (see below, Figure 7). I did not ask the shop owner why they felt the need for the sign, but it implies that, unlike other

groups of people, a limit is placed on young people because they cannot or will not behave appropriately in the shop.

Figure 7: Photo of shop sign limiting young people

When I asked the young people about signs like these (at the initial findings meeting in January 2024), they gave examples of other signs in their area with similar wording.

Another poster I discovered as part of the community assessment was in a local community centre's front window (see below, Figure 8: Photo of Dr. Bike Sessions poster in the local community centre). It was a local council-funded service to promote bike use through a once-off free bike repair session for the public. It also mentioned that on the day of the event, they would have information regarding other initiatives to promote active travel.

Figure 8: Photo of Dr. Bike Sessions poster in the local community centre

I asked W2 (who is familiar with local history and community initiatives) for more information about the Dr. Bike Sessions. I shared that it seemed to be a service that some of the older young people could have provided since they are certified bike mechanics. As a local community service, the group is arguably better positioned to support the council's ongoing active travel initiatives. W2 agreed and added three critical points,

> 1) (The person who fixes the bikes and runs Dr. Bike) is very good; however, s/he is not from the area. 2) (The local) Council pays her/him to provide the service but the poster implies that it is 'in association' or unpaid. 3) That this is an initiative of (the local) Council to look like they are doing something about active travel.

Field Note (3 Oct 2022)

Although I did not ask the young people about this situation, the failure of the local council to consider or invite them to help repair bikes sent a message that they are not valued as part of the community, or rather did not send a message that they are valued as contributors to community well-being and sustainability.

I attended the event and found no local council representative to ask about active travel initiatives (although the poster said they would provide the information). Instead, the person providing the bike repairs said that sometimes there are additional pamphlets in the

community centre. I inquired, and there were only two cycle lane maps available (Field Note 3 October 2022).

The last community assessment item to report was my learning of the group's experiences with two previous projects of interest to young people. The group attempted to learn about and repair the BMX track in the Park as part of an archaeology project (more details in section 4.1.1.3). Their efforts were not supported, and the track was unusable for most of our fieldwork.

When reviewing the findings and recalling the characteristics of epistemic injustice, as discounting, ignoring and minimising a person or group of people's knowledge emanating from their lived experiences, it is clear that these have been the experiences of the young people in the research project. There was an exception. In an experience with a public health strategy, the young people were treated as valuable participants because the researchers met the group afterwards to review the results, and their names were included in the strategy as developers. (Scoping interview with W2, 15 June 2022.) The young people were also given vouchers as part of the project. The positive experience of inclusion and valuing their input was contrary to other more hostile or indifferent messages received from elsewhere in the community.

Overall, messages regarding the young people's value or marginalisation as community members were communicated to them before and during the fieldwork; and it is important to note that these collectively inform the young people's 'habitus', constituting a broader sense of 'the way things are around here' (Bourdieu, 1986). Recalling the introduction to the young people's region (1.4.2), the region's history and generational economic and health challenges are other examples of the structures the young people act in and react to. The remainder of the chapter presents evidence regarding communication between young people, workers and community members across the Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) approach.

6.2 Engagement phase: Instagram account and control

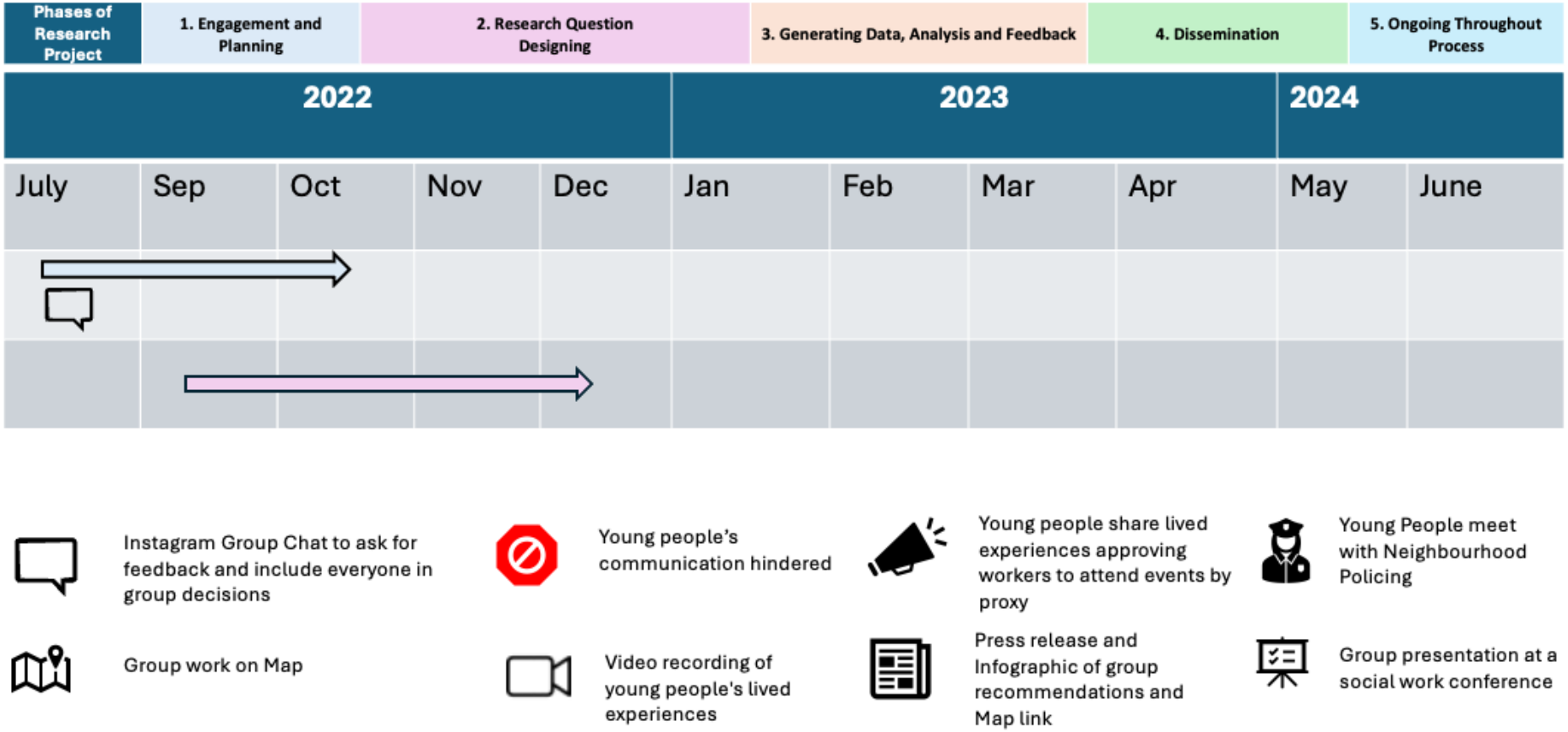
There are examples of communication and power connected to the phases of the fieldwork; see Figure 9: Young People's Communication Timeline – Fieldwork Phases One and Two. In the first phase, *Engagement*, I met with the young people in the Park during their weekly

activities. The conversations grew as we became acquainted and as they decided whether to participate in the research project or not. By the end of the first month, the group decided they would contribute and created an Instagram group chat. This mode of communication used throughout the fieldwork was an inclusive model that consisted of members, shared information and feedback on discussions. Anyone who gave consent for the research project was included in the group messaging. Since the group created this form of communication, they maintained administrative control. This gave them control over this mode of communication, rather than me:

> They all seemed in agreement about the Instagram account and it was created there in the Park. The administration is by [the youth organisation]. I will create my own work Instagram account just for this project and will be invited to join the group chat.
>
> Field Note (18 July 2022)

In Phase Two, the group settled on researching active travel, specifically increasing bike use, through the group's participation in the regional planner's efforts to gain public input on a new strategy.

Figure 9: Young People's Communication Timeline – Fieldwork Phases One and Two



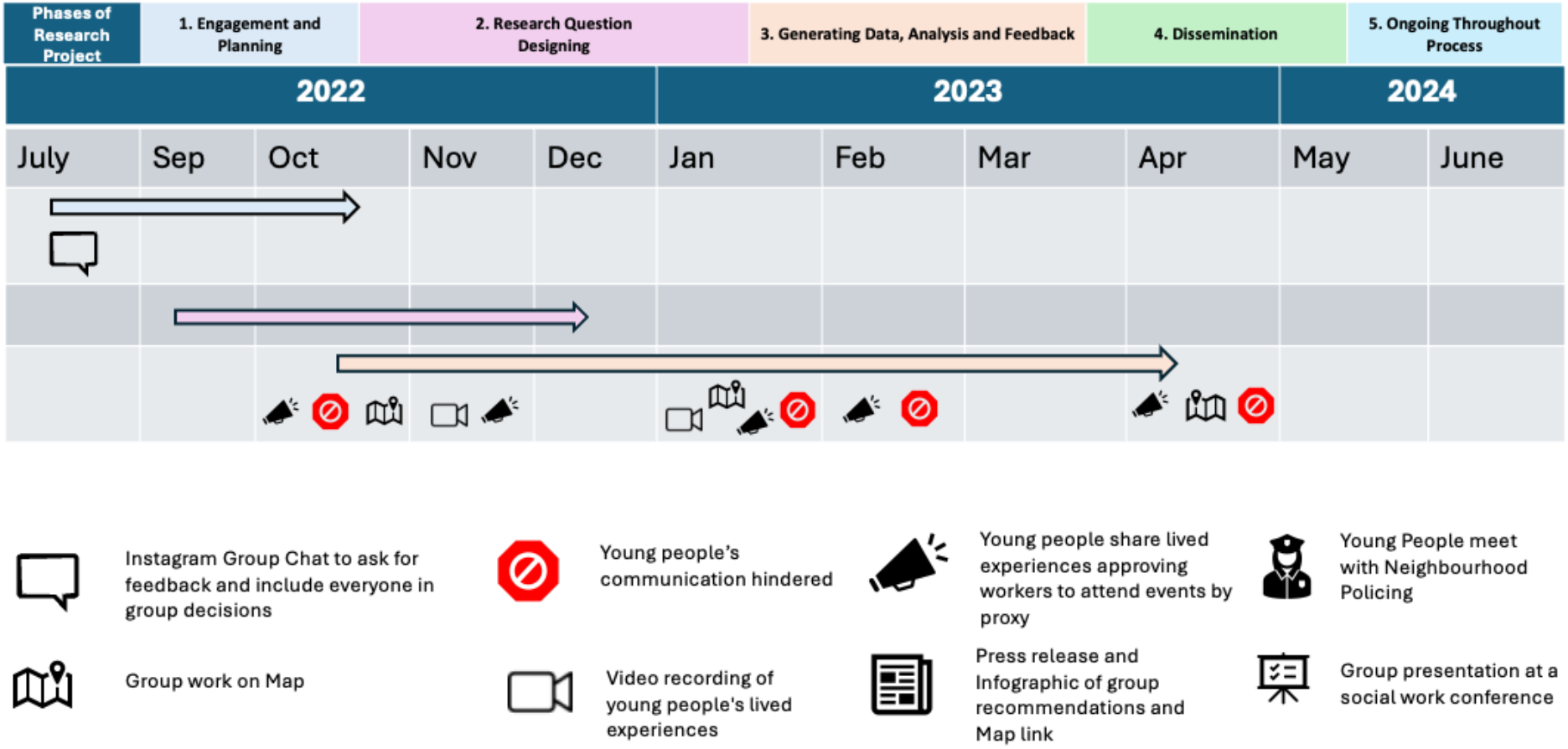
6.3 Generating data, analysis and feedback phase

The research project followed democratic and pragmatic values throughout. Both approaches were needed as the young people transferred their lived experience data into recommendations for the regional strategy on active travel. During Phase Three, *Generating Data, Analysis and Feedback,* the group started the map process, which became their main vehicle for sharing lived experiences and generating data (See Figure 10: Young People's Communication Timeline – Fieldwork Phases One, Two and Three). This was their route to addressing cycling issues in their area, thereby exercising their autonomy and agency on matters that concerned them. Furthermore, the group chose to use communication methods that aligned with their usual routines to analyse what they gathered. For example, during the *Engagement* phase, I learned that the group was comfortable with cameras, apps, social media and Instagram group chats (Field Note, 4 July 2022).

The regional planning organisation offered two ways for the public to give input to the new strategy – an online survey and local face-to-face question-and-answer sessions. Similar to other special interest groups in the region, the youth organisation was invited to attend three forum meetings. However, the young people could not attend the forum meetings as a group in the location (4.1.2), or the face-to-face consultation as it was during the school day (5.3.2). I discuss how the workers attended by proxy next and in section 6.8.2.

Given the challenges of providing feedback to the active travel strategy, the group began collecting data on cycling lived experiences by creating a Map. The map process (6.6) was closely connected to video filming (6.5), requiring some capacity-building (5.2.3). The group learnings created alternative ways to express their lived experiences, as they began to exercise counter-power. The group created and controlled both the Map and video materials, thus addressing agency and autonomy issues.

Figure 10: Young People's Communication Timeline – Fieldwork Phases One, Two and Three



6.4 Approaches to communication challenges

In addition to creating new ways to communicate, the group asked workers to attend events with the young people's input. Completing an online survey as individuals was another option for participating in the regional strategy public consultation; however, the group also wanted to give a collective response. We decided to send an email with the recommendations of young people to the planning organisation staff before the end of the public consultation period in March 2023.

A brief re-cap of the research group's activities leading to their email might be helpful. Before a Group Session to formulate their recommendations for the strategy, some background work was needed, which is summed up in one of the field notes.

> I brought together all the information that the young people have been giving over the last few months and tried to distil it into recommendations to give the [regional planning] staff…. I will post the recommendations on Instagram account after discussions in [Group Session 5 with young people].

Field Note (20 February 2023)

I posted the recommendations with input from Group Session 5 in the Instagram group chat (copied below) so those who did not attend could give feedback.

> *W3 second post on 21 February 2023*
>
> The suggested recommendations are:
>
> • Include young people in consultation of future strategies and plans.
> • Include all the needs of young people – travel to work and higher education, in addition to primary and secondary schooling.
> • Young people may use a bicycle as their main mode of transportation. Therefore, the more they can connect with public transport, the more activities they can access.
> • Young people, and other cyclists, need safe, secure facilities for their bikes.
> • Young people and other cyclists need safe infrastructure, especially at junctions and roundabouts.
> • In addition to bike hire schemes, support low-cost second-hand bike purchases.

Most of the young people chose not to complete the online survey (based on feedback at the initial findings meeting in January 2024). Therefore, the email with their recommendations was the tool for giving input that functioned for them. The youth organisation sent the email on behalf of the young people, so the organisation's trustees

needed to approve it. They approved it without changes, and the email was sent to the planning body before the public consultation deadline. By establishing their own source of counter-power, however modest it may appear, the group circumvented the barriers to inclusion in a strategy that will impact their lives and those of other cyclists in the area, young and older, exercising their autonomy and agency in a communication setting. The following subsection details the two main ways the young people responded to barriers: learning new skills and creating the Map. Details on how workers supported young people's communications are evidenced across the chapter, with further details in section 6.8.

6.5 Young people's skill development: Videos and editing learning

Some young people in the group had video and editing experience, while others did not. Filming requires planning and deciding as a group how to communicate a concept. A good example of planning is when the group decided to create videos for young people to learn repair skills (4.2.3). The group needed to break down the steps. The first was to choose a place and time to make the video.

YP5 (24:19): We should start doing it at 5:30 to get that half an hour extra instead of doing bike repairs.

W1 (24:25): Okay.

W2 (24:26): Oh we need to do bike repairs as well. Cuz if somebody has got a bike repair, they need their bike,

YP5 (24:30): Yeah.

W2 (24:30): in order to do the session.

YP5 (24:31): Sure, we can do it in between them.

W2 (24:32): Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

YP5 (24:33): We're like half an hour for bike repairs and learn like how to fix bikes as well.

W1 (24:37): Okay. Yeah, I like that idea.

Later in the same conversation

W3 (26:04): But anyways, but what we could do is we could start at half five, film something, let's say a repair, go into

the Centre, sit down with a computer and edit it and have it up on YouTube within a half hour.

W2 (26:16): Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

W3 (26:16): It's very doable.

W1 (26:18): Yep.

YP5 (26:18): I don't even know how to edit properly.

W3 (26:20): But we can show you that part.

W2 (26:23): It's dead easy.

W3 (26:23): Yeah.

W1 (26:27): Ooo, you're going to learn puncture repairs and video editing. <laugh> very exciting.

Group Session 4 (16 January 2023)

During the fieldwork, young people were offered the use of the group's video camera for solo journeys. One of the more experienced cyclists asked about filming a longer journey to a mountain bike track. The journey requires using public transport, so a narrated video might help other young people who want to make the same journey.

YP11 (46:55): I was gonna say cause I wouldn't mind maybe doing something like that. I maybe pedal from [local area] to … [Mountain Bike park] and then do like a round of [named bike trail] and then come back.

W3 (47:05): That'd be great.

W1 (47:06): That would be great.

YP11 (47:06): I I would could comment on certain things.

Group Session 5 (20 February 2023)

In Group Session 5, when the group discussed using videos with the local council or any organisation, we debated how videos can demonstrate young people's experiences and whether what is shown is a true reflection. The video we discussed is of a very busy road during the summer months (4.1.1.1).

W3 (<u>00:30:38</u>): Um, the other thing that shows though is that none of the pedestrians had an issue.

W1 (00:30:42): Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

W3 (00:30:43): There was a guy with sight impairment that walked right alongside no issue. So it kind of shows that. It demonstrates that.

W1 (00:30:49): Yeah. That it's wide enough.

W3 (00:30:51): That as long as young people are cycling, you know, carefully and watching out for people that it's fine.

YP11 (00:30:56): Oh, and we weren't there prime time.

W3 (00:30:58): Exactly.

W2 (00:31:00): It can be really, really busy. Can't it?

YP9 (00:31:01): Especially in the summer,

Group Session 5 (20 February 2023)

Group Session 5 included the group's debates on ethical issues with the videos (3.6.2.2). The group agreed that we would only use videos for which young people had given permission. Communication through Instagram was an avenue provided for those who were not at the Group Session to give input to the debate.

W3 post in Instagram on 21 Feb 2023

> Last night, we discussed the Padlet Map [referred to as the Map in the thesis] with points on places young people like to go, places that need improvement, and places with issues. We did link some but not all of the videos we filmed. Some of you saw them, and some haven't. If you are in the background, are you ok with us using the video? Can you tell W2 or W1 if you have any questions or tell me here by next Monday? We hope to use videos 1) going to (local shop) in the (shop area), 2) discussing the bus stop, and 3) crossing [Park] Rd on the roundabout near [the Park].

The examples here and in the next two subsections are provided to demonstrate the communication paths the group used. More on capacity-building in general is in section 5.2.3.

6.6 Young people's skill development: Map process supporting young people

The Map creation process is explained in the Methodology chapter (3.4.4.4). Examining the process further with a communication lens, data on how the young people gave input and

their experiences with the process are presented. The first time the group reviewed videos they made was in Group Session 3. Because group attendance was fluid, not everyone in the discussion was present at the filming. This is acceptable because the goal is to gather young people's views on cycling in general. After reviewing the first clip, YP3 had questions about where it took place and how it was filmed. We explained that one of the young people was wearing a camera on their chest.

W3 (03:54): (video finishes playing) So actually YP3 reminded me of something there. So again, for those of you that don't know, so on that Monday night we filmed points around the [Park] where people said that they would have near misses. Do you remember how we did that here last time (Group Session 2)?

YP3 (04:09): Yeah.

W3 (04:09): So this time we were out trying to actually film some of those kinds of points. So that's what you're gonna see is, so

W1 (04:15): That's why we went to this part.

W3 (04:16): Yeah.

YP3 (04:17): So that's the point of the video?

W3 (04:18): Yes, exactly.

YP3 (04:20): Right, Yeah,

Group Session 3 (21 November 2022)

Young people were encouraged to say what they really thought in discussions. In the example below, W1 asked the group if what W2 was saying made sense to them.

W2 (21:37): Um, I, I, the point that W1 trying to make is I don't seem to be making a great deal of sense and that's not just cuz I'm not making sense.

YP9 (21:49): Yeah. I was thinking that on the day.

W2 (21:50): It is extremely complicated. It's really complex.

YP9 (21:54): I'm not going to lie, I was just standing there just staring at you.

W2 (21:56): Yeah and so

W1 (22:02): That's fair. That's useful feedback.

Group Discussion 3 (21 November 2022)

The exchange demonstrated that the workers acknowledged that adultism could lead young people to be untruthful in their feedback. The workers gave young people permission to disagree and, therefore, share power in the conversations.

At one point, I reflected on the process and wondered if it was clear to the group. After the second time we reviewed the videos, I thought a connection was missing.

> One thought I've had since Monday was that I think what I need to do is a video of Google Maps showing the point that the young people are talking about and then connecting it with the video. I think I need to do this because I didn't get the sense that they understood the idea of connecting the dots fully. I also think this might help them to see the value of a series of issue videos that they can share with [the regional planning body] and anybody else. During the discussion, we talked about how their information could be helpful for tourists and other people that want to cycle in the [local] area. Their sharing of their lived experiences is really valuable, and I think I need to do something to help them to see that. I'm hoping that will give them a sense of pride and a feeling like they are contributing to the community with [the regional planning body] and anybody else.

Field Note (16 January 2023)

Before the next Group Session in February, I explored alternatives. I judged that Padlet was a better platform than Google Maps as it carried no advertisements and was more intuitive to edit. Hence, I transferred the pins to the new Map. I then connected a video clip to one of the pins. I shared it with the workers during a weekly session first to get their approval and feedback. This gave me a chance to also talk through ethical issues. For example, a process to include young people in the Map creation had to be timed. So after I shared the Map at a weekly session with the workers, we agreed,

> Between now and then we agreed that I would take screenshots of the Padlet and share them in the Instagram account. The reason for this is that we want to give them an idea of what we're thinking, but at the same time, we are not ready to release it until we have their consent.

Field Note (6 February 2023)

I then brought the new functioning Map to the young people at our Group Session on 20 February 2023. I explained how it works and how to edit it with new posts. Later, when I stepped out of the room to take a break, I returned to find the workers and young people had added new items to the Map (Field Note 20 February 2023). This episode is also significant because it illustrates both the value and validity of bringing established skills and experience as a facilitator to the task of co-producing knowledge in a participatory project.

When placing pins on the Map, the workers themselves needed to ask follow-up questions to obtain clarity on what young people meant, as exemplified in this exchange.

W3 (02:56): And why do you like to go there? Is it a social thing? Is it to practise your skills?

W2 (03:02): What else? What else is good about it?

W3 (03:03): Yeah, what, what's, what do you get from it?

YP7 (03:05): Ramps and that. Like there're loads of ramps. You can practise like bunny hops and that, stunts.

W1 (03:13): Would it be fair to say as well, it's like a designated area that's been given. It's clear that young people are allowed there, are

YP7 (03:20): Yeah

W1 (03:20): invited there. You can hang out there.

YP7 (03:21): Because like there's a football pitch, but it's like not a grassy one. It's like a gravel.

Group Session 5 (20 February 2023)

The group decided they wanted a workshop on how to add the pins so young people could do it themselves. The field note summarised best how it went.

> W1 was helping YP7 to talk through what to write for the pin, and YP6 was clear on what he wanted to say, only double checking locations with W2. There was some time left, so YP7 went to W2's computer and did some editing with him. YP6 looked on as W2 explained how to cut clips and do voice-overs and things like that on his editing software.

Field Note (17 April 2023)

Both workers commented on the Map in their questionnaires, citing it as a positive.

Question 4 asked: *Did our research project reach the ideas and goals you had for it at the beginning?*

> The result with those young people involved is that they found some of the voice and were listened to. The Padlet (the Map) is a great opportunity to develop our work providing young people with a voice about cycling. (W2 Questionnaire)
>
> The project did more than I ever imagined! In the early/ideas stage it was hard to visualise what it would turn into, but the ongoing presence of the Padlet Map [the Map] to use for the future is brilliant. (W1 Questionnaire)

Others outside of the research group also commented on the Map after the link was shared with them.

> **Council Worker (22:17):** Yeah. It's really good to hear their (young people's) views and I suppose again, what the reasons for them, you know, cycling, like what motivates them to, you know, take part in active travel and, and really by hearing their voices, we could use that information to then persuade more children and young people to take part. So yeah, it's [the Map] really helpful.
>
> Council Worker Interview (17 March 2023)

Another person, a staff member of a national community cycling organisation, saw the Map as a way to promote community cycling and the work the young people did.

> **Community Cycling Staff Member (10:42):** Um, and know exactly where infrastructure needs improving. And actually some of them have got like potholes filled in on, uh, cycle paths, like through council, just by themselves, you know, so I think this could be like a great resource for them as well, even for newer groups as well to show where's, where's not good to cycle, where is good to cycle. And again, things like parking and, um, could be really good. So there's that, that sense. And then in another way, this, so we've got a, so (our organisation) is like a membership based organisation. Um, and every two to three months we send out like a magazine to our members, just updating them on everything that's going on within our organisation. I just feel like this could be a very good article to show like an, like the extra things. Cause it's not really like strictly what community cycling clubs do on a day-to-day basis, this kind of thing. So this is like a good thing to showcase that they're (the youth group) actually doing some more good for the area, you know? So like above and beyond what they already do. So, um, yeah, even if it's not in the magazine, it could be a great sort of news piece on the, on the website as well.
>
> Interview (13 March 2023)

This community service person also noted a community bike map was created during social distancing restrictions. In the interview, they said it was a shared online map supported by the local council. People could add points of information to share with others wishing to cycle in the area. However, they concluded by saying,

> **Community Cycling Staff Member: (06:25)** But, um, I saw a news article recently that it had just sort of went to the wayside and all that information's not really gonna be used partly because of the, um, the news last week about the cut to the active travel sort of budget as well.

Interview (13 March 2023)

The quote demonstrates the power funders have over communication when national governmental funding for local government initiatives is cut, the result is reduced resources to support marginalised groups. The young people's Map is not dependent on funding from local bodies, meaning that they retain some control over future use independent of local council or national funding.

6.7 Dissemination phase: communication challenges

6.7.1 Conference presentation and Infographic

Some dissemination activities took place as part of *Phase Three: Generating Data, Analysis and Feedback* during fieldwork; others took place after it ended (more detail in 3.4.6.1). For example, an opportunity arose for the young people to present their experiences at a conference on sustainability. As part of the conference presentation and for dissemination purposes, the group decided to create and print an Infographic on their recommendations for the active travel strategy, and to make soft copies available for other potential uses. A redacted copy of the Infographic is in Appendix K. The group's ideas, captured through Instagram posts and meeting transcripts (January–June 2024), were used to build the contents of the press release, Infographic and conference presentation. The activities were counter-power vehicles for young people to express lived experiences and autonomy when barriers to the official process existed.

The logistics of building the infographic and coordinating with the conference organiser so that people under the age of 18 could attend were some of the challenges. For example, to move the Infographic process and conference planning forward, an in-person meeting was

held with the group at the bike shop on 15 April 2024. Travel arrangements, deciding who would attend and approval of the slides' content were ongoing tasks leading to the conference presentation. Ultimately, three young people and three workers presented the group's initial findings in a parallel session at the conference.

6.7.2 Press release

The press release covered information on the story of the project, the young people's recommendations for the new strategy and a link to the Map, making their voices public. This was a significant act of agency because the group did not feel they were fully represented in the new strategy formation process, so this was their avenue to have their opinion heard by the public. The process of the press release started by writing a draft so that the young people could approve it. Given the goal of including youth voices, I approached one of the older young people who was very active throughout the research project. I learned from W2 that young people are routinely included in communication efforts from the youth organisation.

> I approached YP6 with W2 present about providing a quote for the press release. W2 said that [the youth organisation] usually does this to include young people.

Field Note (17 April 2023).

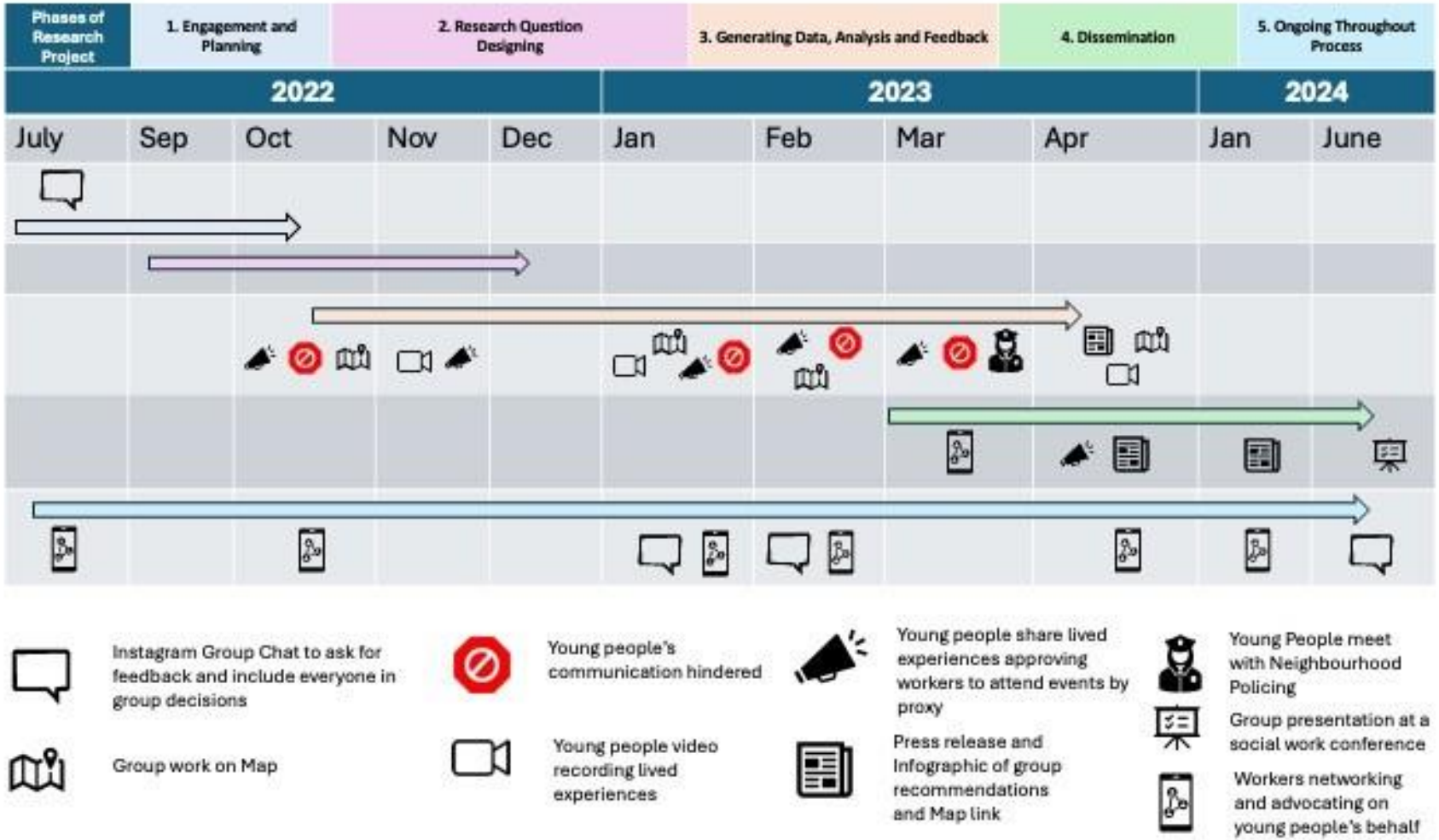
W2 secured the approval of the youth organisation trustees and then disseminated the release through his local media contacts and uploaded a blurb about it to the group's social media. I also circulated it through my network (Field Note 24 April 2024). However, the goal was to increase local interest, so W2's contacts were the most important. To date, no news outlet has published the press release. Not having the press release published indicates the continuing challenges of gaining a hearing and influence for marginalised voices, such as those of young people.

6.8 Workers' roles and ongoing activities phase

Fieldwork activities connected to the last phase of the research process, *Ongoing Throughout the Process*, were evident in the previously discussed phases and are symbolised in Figure 11: Young People's Communication Timeline – All Fieldwork Phases. The data demonstrated the workers' roles in the ongoing activities, such as the leadership roles of encouraging young people to learn new skills (5.2.3) and representing and advocating for

them at meetings and events they could not attend (5.3.2). Other roles utilised networking and community-organising skills to increase resources for the group.

Figure 11: Young People's Communication Timeline – All Fieldwork Phases



The phone icon in Figure 11: Young People's Communication Timeline – All Fieldwork Phases denotes activities when workers actively networked on behalf of the young people. The first, in July 2022, refers to initial meetings with the young people to learn their needs and organise how the research activities and corresponding funding could fit the group's overall goals. The phone icon in the months of October 2022, January and February 2023 represents planning body events when workers attended as proxies for the young people. The icon in April 2023 represents the Map and camera training so young people can better speak for themselves in the future. The January 2024 icon represents meetings with the young people to plan the Infographic and conference presentation.

6.8.1 Group communication

Pathways for communication, with CBP worker facilitation, were created organically, as seen in the process for creating an Instagram group chat in section 6.2. Since the group used this group chat throughout the fieldwork and for socialising and group cohesion on decisions, the speech bubble icon is used in Figure 11: Young People's Communication Timeline – All Fieldwork Phases for key decision points. One example is the two posts below, made right after each other, to encourage attendance at the January Group Session.

> **W3** Hello All – looking forward to meeting in [local community centre] tonight for a viewing of videos you made. All are invited even if you didn't take part in the filming or haven't been to Mondays in the park lately. We'd still like to get your feedback.

Immediately after

> Tonight we'll also make plans for what's next for the research project and your activities. Please have your say. It's really important.

Instagram post (16 Jan 2023)

On other occasions, the workers gathered young people's input for upcoming meetings. During Group Session 4, the workers asked the young people what they wanted us to convey to decision-makers on their behalf at the face-to-face consultation for the new strategy. It was scheduled with the planning body staff in a local library (5.3.2).

W2 (29:01): If we were to, is is this something that you want to say to people who were planning the transport network?

Group (29:11): Yeah

W2 (29:12): So over the next 10 years, make

YP5 (29:13): Make some more bikes. Bike lanes.

W2 (29:16): You want more bike lanes.

YP5 (29:17): Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

W2 (29:18): Okay. Is there anything else that you want to tell people? Is there something, for example, the thing about you saying there's not enough to encourage people to have fun on their bikes.

YP5 (29:31): There should be bike lanes on the roundabouts. Cause that's probably the dangerous place to have one.

Group Session 4 (16 January 2023)

The exchange was typical of conversations, starting with a worker asking a question, clarifying the information given, and then asking if there was anything else the young people wanted to include. The example below is typical of an Instagram post to gather feedback from young people who did not attend the Group Session, in this case, for the same February event.

> **W3** Hiya – I'll be going to a Questions and Answers event in [local library] tomorrow at 12:30 put on by [planning staff]. Don't forget the consultation survey open till 5 March. Link for it above. If you have any questions you want me ask tomorrow though, let me know.

Instagram post (7 February 2023)

In preparation for the meeting, we would ask during the weekly meetings in the Park or as part of the Group Session what the young people wanted us to convey. After the meeting was completed, we would inform the young people what we had learned and, if warranted, ask what follow-up action they wished to take. Whether part of the strategy formation or not, if a meeting or event that pertained to young people, cycling and environmental issues arose, W1, W2 or W3 tried to attend on the young people's behalf because often the young people were not invited to attend (or invited and then not enabled to attend). An example was when I tried to network with the planning body staff during the first forum meeting.

> I spoke to (staff member) of (planning body) afterwards to thank him for his email (He corresponded first with W2 and then me about attending) and he said that once

> the report is open to public consultation we can make arrangements for the young people to give feedback directly as a group.

Field Note (10 October 2022)

The alternative meeting never occurred, so the group submitted their recommendations through email, as described in section 6.4. The second forum meeting was organised for groups to give feedback on the draft plan, which should have included the CBP recommendations. At that meeting, I mentioned to a staff member that the young people are not well-represented, as the focus of the new strategy regarding young people is mostly on primary school-age children using bikes for transportation to school. The staff member's reply was that, for their purposes, they refer to people under 21 as young people (Field Note 12 January 2023).

6.8.2 Worker networking

A good example of CBP workers networking to maximise limited resources among charity groups is an agreement W2 had with another youth organisation that would lend a bike trailer for longer cycle activities. Another example was through a healthcare employee making contact with W2 and a skating shop donating materials to young people (5.2.4). There were examples during the fieldwork of times when the sharing of resources would have benefited more people. One worker in their questionnaire noted,

> I do think others could have done things differently, the active travel consultation for example should have made more of an effort to engage with our project, we reached out to them and they avoided the opportunity. Others, like Public Health could also have engaged in our project more and I hope they take the opportunity at some point in the future.

Questionnaire W2 (Marach 2023)

An attempt was made to connect with a staff member in the local transport department; however, it never materialised.

Local staff member (00:00):	I'll try my best to, uh, help as much as possible. Did you hear back from, uh, [staff member] in transport or not? Because I did send him. Oh, you did?
W3 (00:10):	No, no. I was just gonna say, I, I, I, I didn't, um, that's great that you, uh, passed it on to somebody. No, I haven't heard from them. So

> if you do see them, yeah. Because for them, I'm really just curious what kind of constraints they're under for road development. Um, I can't remember, was it yourself that told me about some roundabout in [a nearby local council] where it is more cycle-friendly, but that the car drivers are not happy with it or something like that. Or maybe you were telling me how they don't like it whenever they shut down a road near a school or anything like that, that the transport department gets all kinds of complaints or, yeah.

Interview (17 March 2023)

Connecting with engineers and other technicians is important as the group's workers can become interpreters of marginalised groups' needs. Some approaches appear to assume that this can be addressed simply through training the technicians. The fault in this thinking is that the engineers may not want to or have the capacity to engage with non-engineers. Money spent by a national organisation to train one discipline when experts in other disciplines with the skill set needed are accessible is a product of silo thinking. The National Active Travel organisation within the Department of Transport proposes to

> … train engineers to become more engaged with the public. We (myself and the local council person) both discussed how this is not helpful because someone in … health promotion or a social worker in the council would be much better at engaging people; however, this is coming from national initiatives, so we don't have much control over it.

Field Note (13 January 2023)

Spending resources on collaboration between professionals rather than training may be more cost-effective in the long-term. As the same local staff member mentioned in their interview,

> … Active Travel England are really influential, so they hold a lot of the funds as well, which is a huge influence on what we can do.

Local Council Staff Interview (17 March 2023)

The data contained other examples of agency representatives giving feedback to the group through networking. During an interview, I asked if there was any local council health promotion work that could enable the research project to help more people get involved to

increase active travel in the area. Responses seemed positive about using ideas and resources generated by the group:

Staff member (28:32):	Um, I suppose that pin map that you've showed us is super helpful.
Staff member (28:39):	Um, you know, just making that maybe an ongoing thing as well.
Staff member (28:43):	Like you were saying, just add into it and you know, that comments, the videos will be really helpful as well.
Staff member (28:51):	Um, because that's what we need to have really is the young people's voice.

Interview (17 March 2023)

Findings Theme 3 conclusion

This chapter identified the challenges of exclusion and hostility faced by the young people in their communications with the 'adult world' and the ways in which they 'got round' those challenges during the CBPAR process:

1. The cyclical nature of the CBPAR approach allowed the young people to develop communications methods through mechanisms which allowed them to exercise counter-power.
2. Young people encountered hostile environments, typified by being explicitly excluded from public spaces, e.g. shops, and implicitly excluded from attendance at active travel events, e.g. events were scheduled during school hours.
3. The young people, when given control over a communication method, e.g. Instagram, embraced it.
4. Capacity-building in technical skills took place, drawing on the skills of the workers. The young people learned how to take a video and edit it, and learned to create a Map in Padlet. Additionally, they built soft skills such as working as a group, decision-making and leadership (5.2.3).
5. The young people developed an effective way of communicating cycling issues which affected them, and retained autonomy by using an interactive Padlet Map over which they had complete control.
6. The young people used the workers to network on their behalf with local community groups, thereby interacting with the 'adult world' – the transport department, a

health promotion programme, a bike charity and a third-level educator involved in a bike usage initiative.

7. The young people strove to find alternative methods through which their views could be heard. They used the workers as their proxies to give input to the planning process, they emailed their views to the planning body, and they helped in preparing and sending a press release to the local media. Finally, some attended a conference for which they assisted in creating an Infographic and gave input to and approved the presentation slides.

All the Findings chapters presented both process and results. My reflections on the CBPAR approach as facilitator were shared in the Methodology chapter (3.7). The Discussion chapter brings together three key observations from the research project.

7 Discussion

Introduction

The Discussion chapter will bring the findings into dialogue with the literature covered in Chapter 2, to shed light on the research questions that the study sets out to address. It would be helpful to reiterate the research questions:

1. Based on the young people's current experiences of active travel and their goals for developing active travel in their communities, how do they see their route to achieving those goals, given their status as a marginalised group?
2. How can young people, as a marginalised group, express their needs and wants regarding active travel to decision-makers through the structure of a youth work organisation?
3. How can social workers and youth workers aid youth development through community action activities relating to active travel?

The literature review focused on studies with young people and sustainability in an urban setting to reflect the research group's demographics. The group is identifiable as a community, or a subset thereof, defined as a collective body of people with similar interests (Sewpaul, 2008), in this case, cycling, overlapping with active travel. The regional active travel strategy was intended to promote a move from car use to more cycling, walking and public transport. The research project addressed this example of a green transition and demonstrated how its formation process, despite good intentions, can be unjust for a marginalised group such as young people, while the project also formulated and implemented effective responses grounded in forms of counter-power.

In this chapter, I will focus the discussion on three key observations from the research project:

1. **Motivation and safety perceptions**: The difference in the perceptions of adults and young people in the CBP regarding motivations for cycling and safe bike travel. The discussion demonstrates that the group felt, despite their age, they were able to cycle independently or as a group, even though their parents and other adults thought it might be unsafe. The differing perceptions led the young people to have reduced options for fun and transport.

2. **Youth voice and sustainability challenges**: The challenge of promoting youth agency and autonomy given the differences in perception and control imbalances that arise

when the powerful group (in this instance, adult decision-makers) makes decisions on behalf of the less powerful or marginalised group (young people). The additional aspects to consider are the contexts of sustainability and the roles of social workers. The discussion draws on epistemic justice literature as young people attempt to inform the development of a new active travel strategy and on the use of everyday ethics to negotiate with the young people on decision points throughout the research project. The CBP approach to resolving young people's conflicts with adults, regarding their perceptions of motivations and the inclusion of their recommendations for the new strategy, led to the formation of adaptable data collection and dissemination methods, as discussed in the final key observation on creative solutions through a technology-assisted approach to PAR.

3. **Creative approaches to communication through technology-assisted CBPAR**: The creative process evolved into the project's Map, building on the young people's familiarity with technology and social media, as well as their group discussions on communicating their needs as a marginalised group. The section concludes with a discussion of the literature on how the group's Map can enhance PGIS use in city planning, thereby creating a new pathway for youth voices in just green transitions.

7.1 Motivation and safety perceptions

The findings demonstrated that, despite being self-motivated and needing little encouragement from adults, a group of keen young cyclists who wanted to increase their bike usage nevertheless encountered multiple barriers to achieving their goal. Our findings, which resonated with the existing literature, revealed that the motivations and perceptions of young people sometimes differed markedly from those of adults. Furthermore, the avenues provided by the planning body for young people to express their perceptions were problematic, whether the young people's opinions differed from those of adults or not. For example, both groups seemed to agree that cycling instead of using a vehicle decreases carbon emissions, improves air quality and increases physical and mental well-being. There also appears to be agreement that both the young person and their bike should be safe; however, the motivations and priorities on all aspects of the topic differ.

7.1.1 Motivations and their value

The findings from our study support and build on other research, indicating that young people identify fun and visiting enjoyable places as key motivators for cycling. Additionally, our research and the literature reveal that young people's high ranking of fun, autonomy and mode of transport as motivators differs from that of adults. For example, Simon *et al.* (2014) found that promoters of active travel cite increasing one's health as one of the main

benefits; however, young people (ages 18–25) cited autonomy, travel time, financial cost and vehicle ownership as important, with ecology and health as not important at all.

In another study on youth motivation, with younger children (ages 10–12 and their parents), Ghekiere *et al.* (2014) found that the two groups had differing opinions regarding cycling. For example, children said they liked cycling with others, while their parents were concerned that this would distract their child from the road. Furthermore, children found an aesthetically appealing location more inviting, whereas their parents prioritised safety over aesthetics. Lastly, Ghekiere *et al.*'s study noted that children prefer cycling short distances that are longer than a five-minute walk. The parents often overestimated the cycling time to a destination. Our study's findings echoed these differences between children's and adults' perceptions of the same topics (4.2.5). The young people in our study were adamant that fun activities are the most important motivator (4.1.1.).

One study that was similar to ours on what is considered fun by young people listed: 'Racing bikes on the street, Cycling in parks over more extreme terrain (mountains, hills, etc.)' (TfL, 2008, p. 34). In our study, the young people listed similar activities and added rough trails, gravel paths, winding paths, stairs and BMX tracks (4.1.1). In both studies, the young people acknowledged that activities they enjoy can be considered unsafe or anti-social by some adults; however, our findings demonstrated that young people are capable of addressing safety issues (4.2.1).

The difference in adults' and young people's motivations for cycling is significant because of the power dynamics. In a democratic setting, young people's opinions would be equal to those of adults and parents. However, because of adultism, young people's views are not considered as important or seem to lack the value of safety, which is overall the most important aspect of cycling according to adults. The research project and some literature disagree with this analysis, demonstrating that young people's views are valid and should be considered by adult decision-makers. Furthermore, with proper infrastructure and resources, young people's motivations for fun activities can be safer than they are now. The interviews with experts in our study on public health, community cycling, third-level education and experiences with active travel, as well as input on road and path use from neighbourhood policing, revealed a consensus that increasing bike use among young people is beneficial. Given the agreement between both adults and young people on this point, it

would be helpful to initiate a dialogue on possible solutions, with a relational autonomy approach. Further, increased bike use can be safely done with proper infrastructure and resources (De Hartog, 2010; Woods and Hamilton, 2022; Lester, 2019; Mayers and Glover, 2021; Tupper *et al.*, 2024). Future research on youth and adult cycling perceptions may involve dialogue between the groups, rather than the separate collection of perceptions.

In addition to exploring the young people's motivation for fun and to go places, our study addressed safety issues regarding the Park and other designated areas for young people as part of a Nature-based Intervention (NBI) organisation with a goal of youth development. NBIs are an example of ecosocial work theory in social work practice (Boetto, 2019; Närhi and Matthies, 2018). Our group's activities in the Park were organised with the workers and aimed at fun, youth development and socialising, not necessarily exclusively around active travel topics. Some organised activities utilised cycling, a minivan or public transport to access appealing locations, whether farther away or within the local area, in various weather conditions. In all cases, risk assessments were completed, and due diligence was observed to address safety. Our study exemplified the importance of placing equal value on safety and youth development while respecting young people's perceptions.

As presented in this section, implementing ecosocial work theory can raise points on the tension where young people's wants differ from those of adults, leading to examples of adultism (Teixeira and Kennedy, 2022; Delgado and Staples, 2007; Bell, 1995). Our study has added to the literature because the young people, supported by adults in solidarity with them, demonstrated appropriate actions, including increasing their skills and knowledge, and incorporating learning from experts through interviews to address adult perceptions of safety. Our study reflected the literature and expert points of view on the benefits of cycling for youth health and well-being, including the development of autonomy, counteracting adultism. As noted, in some literature and in our study, adults' emphasis on safety is given greater priority than fun. The adult workers and young people in our study acknowledged the need for safety (addressed further in section 7.1.3). However, our analysis, supported by much of the available literature, concludes that safety, fun and youth development can be considered equally important in further research and practice, especially when young people are in a dialogue with adults.

The findings on motivations to cycle (both for fun and transport) and barriers varied slightly from those in the literature. Our study's findings regarding barriers to motivation contrasted with Wood and Hamilton's (2020) in that our group did not regard poor weather or dark winter evenings as deterrents to cycling, in the main. This difference might be at least partially explained by our cyclists all being highly motivated, regarding themselves as a cycling community, whereas Woods and Hamilton (2020) recruited both motivated and unmotivated participants.

7.1.2 The value young people place on cycling for transport

Our study identified barriers to longer cycling journeys, specifically the absence of appropriately sized secure cycle storage boxes connected to public transport stations and the costs when combining cycling with public transport (4.1.2; 4.2.4). Furthermore, our young people preferred cycling because it was less expensive than public transport, while allowing them to travel independently.

Traffic was a barrier to bike transport in our study and others (Ghekiere *et al.*, 2014). However, their study also captured direct parent opinion that traffic was a 'major concern' when letting their child cycle for transport. Items that can aid young people when cycling in traffic include helmets, fluorescent clothing and bike lights. Young people in our study and in Ghekiere *et al.* (2014) disliked using these items. However, young people in both studies agree that it is important to be seen in traffic. The young people in our study felt that separated cycle lanes could address the dilemma. Although based in Hong Kong, Chan (2025) argues that transport systems are complex and require consideration of both social dynamics and engineering, a perspective that can also be applied to a UK setting. Chan (2025) cautions that institutions need to have 'equitable policies that balance individual responsibility with inclusive institutional strategies p. 247' to ensure inclusion.

The literature suggests that motivating people to increase cycling is a sustainability transition issue, requiring individuals of all ages to change their behaviour to reduce car usage as their primary mode of transportation. Our study showed that creating a new behavioural pattern is not required, indeed quite the opposite. Our young people are already engaged with a goal of sustainability. What they required was the removal of

numerous epistemic, infrastructural and attitudinal barriers, which would increase the cycling level among our young people and enable others to cycle more.

7.1.3 Young people and safety

Another group of findings applicable to cyclists of all ages was young people's attempts to increase active travel while negotiating safety impediments. The young people identified issues concerning their safety and bikes as the main barriers to cycling more. Through the CBPAR process, the group learned how to mitigate some of its safety and security concerns.

As mentioned in the previous section, our study and others found that young people and parents identify traffic as a concern (Ghekiere *et al.*, 2014; Woods and Hamilton, 2022). One finding that illuminated this point in our study was the roundabout near the Park (4.2.1). There were issues with the location of the paths on the roundabout arms and with the young people having to risk crossing fast-moving traffic without clear indications from drivers exiting the roundabout. One solution for cyclists with traffic is to use a cycle lane or a footpath. The group found no designated cycle lanes, separated from traffic, such as those referenced in De Hartog *et al.* (2010).

An issue arose in our study for young people with a spatial disability (e.g., dyspraxia). Their difficulty with spatial awareness may cause them to fall into traffic when the cycle lanes are on the road (4.2.1; 5.4). After an extensive search, the issue regarding young people with disabilities navigating on-road cycle lanes as an infrastructure issue appears to be absent from the literature. By analogy, within the disability studies literature, the concept of the social model (Oliver, 2013) versus the individual model applies to our findings because it is the infrastructure that is limiting bike travel, not the young person's disability.

Other young people in our study without disabilities felt vulnerable using on-road cycle lanes because a car door could open suddenly, or a bus may be present at a bus stop, requiring the cyclist to go around the bus and into traffic (4.2.1). The safety issue is the same in both cases because the infrastructure is the cause of the vulnerability. Brown (2014) discusses the construction of childhood in terms of vulnerability, with society addressing their vulnerability through legislation and policy to protect children. Dempsey *et al.* (2011) noted that the UK government uses Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954) when making decisions. Using the approach in theory and legislation to address safety before higher

needs, like youth development, seems logical. However, our study found that infrastructure prioritising bike use over vehicle use would address some safety issues and support youth agency for independent cycling. Other studies agree with this approach. Carver *et al.* (2010) in research with young people (mean age 16) and their parents, found that improving infrastructure would ease adults' perceived risks for their children. Lorenc *et al.* (2008) conducted a systematic literature review on young people's and adults' perceptions of walking and cycling in the UK. They concluded that safety fears could be addressed by decreasing the prioritisation of car use. In a study mentioned previously, De Hartog *et al.* (2010) found that separate cycle lanes lead to good health results. The implication of our research and other studies is to prioritise infrastructure that physically separates and, importantly, prioritises bike use to increase safety, especially for vulnerable groups.

Our study found that bike use needs safe infrastructure and adequate bike parking at destinations. The young people's lived experiences noted barriers to bike security and a positive facility that they use in a nearby city. Secure bike parking is available in a multi-storey car park facility, which the young people found beneficial because it was free to use and monitored by a security guard. Bike security is also essential for adults. According to Ghekiere *et al.* (2014), parents said their child could not cycle if secure storage were not provided at the destination.

The young people in our study who specifically wished to cycle to school noted a lack of resources in their schools compared to those prioritised in a nearby large city university's sustainability goals (5.3.1). These are special storage lockers with clothes drying function, shower facilities and enhanced bike security at the university. Simons (2014) agrees with the call for more facilities to support bike use in educational settings. The different priorities for cycling resources between primary-age and university-level students were highlighted in our study, with the young people expressing frustration at carrying large bags for their cycling clothes or not having lockers in their schools (4.2.5.3).

Research conducted by Lester and Howard (2019) used focus groups of teachers, students and parents on using active travel to schools in the UK. They found similar barriers to active travel as in our study, namely distance, weather, attitudes, car speed, congestion, safety and time. The recommendations were similar to those in our study and those discussed so far,

namely, for planners and developers to consider increasing active travel infrastructure. However, as our study found, bike-friendly school infrastructure is needed too.

The issues surrounding the safety of young people and their bikes highlighted discrepancies in bike resources between older young people in privileged educational settings and the young people in our study, who attend schools in economically deprived areas. Another discrepancy is the lack of support for public transport and cycling in general, which is a low-cost form of transport for young people. Lastly, the focus in the active travel strategy on young people cycling *to school* and not for fun or socialising missed one of their primary motivations for cycling and consequently, did not support their call to prioritise different types of trails and facilities. Clearly, a dialogue is needed between adult decision-makers and young people to address some of the issues raised. The next section delves into topics in greater detail.

7.2 Youth voice and sustainability challenges

Adults who fail to accommodate youth voices in climate discussions can be regarded as contributing to unjust green transitions due to epistemic injustice (DeBrabander, 2023; Byskov, 2021; Dore, 2019; Kidd *et al.*, 2017; Fricker, 2007). In the context of research, not including meaningful contributions from young people can be described as tokenistic inclusion (McLaughlin, 2012). Some adults stereotype young people as anti-social or place a lower value on youth priorities than those of adults. When adults feel they know what is best for young people, they often disregard the young people's agency and autonomy. This is the definition of adultism (Teixeira and Kennedy, 2022; Bell, 1995). In the context of the green transition, the impact is significant for young people and the planet. For example, young people can become disempowered and not feel responsible for future environmental action. The benefits of positive youth engagement on ecological concerns in the present are also lost.

Lessons learned from this CBP with young people and workers offer pathways into co-creating spaces for collaboration and capacity-building between youth and adults in advancing the active travel strategy in an urban area for other adult youth advocates. The youth–adult relationships in the case study demonstrated that challenges to cycling can be addressed with solidarity, which is crucial for a fair and just green transition. This PhD project demonstrated that participatory practices help challenge adultism and the

misrepresentation of youths, enable co-learning, and promote the capacity to support young people's autonomy, highlighting the role of social workers in facilitating youth participation in the green transition.

7.2.1 Adult perceptions vs young people's perceptions: Challenges and opportunities

When what is fun to young people is described as anti-social by adults, adult–youth relations in the community are antagonised. As mentioned in the literature review, in a study on childhood obesity and social aspects of eating out, Burningham *et al.* (2022) found that adults judged young people for eating at 'fast food' restaurants because the high calorie food can lead to obesity, yet the young people said the restaurants were one of the few places that they felt comfortable to meet and socialise. Although not related to cycling, this example illustrates that young people can have valid reasons for their behaviour that are important to them. At the same time, adults can entirely dismiss or invalidate these reasons. Like the young people in the Burningham *et al.* research, our study's young people had their cycling motives dismissed by adults in the wider community.

By dismissing youth motivations, adults create conflicted relationships, which underpin exclusion and hostility from adults towards young people. The hostile relationships leave little to no room for mutual understanding. There were numerous examples of adult behaviour that were negative towards young people recorded in the Map, including drivers cutting them up, honking at them when they were on a zebra crossing, and having to 'play chicken' at a roundabout (4.2.1). Furthermore, the young people demonstrated a better understanding of using footpaths and pedestrian areas, as confirmed by conversations with the Neighbourhood Policing Service and the project workers, than the adults, who would yell at or push them off the path, wrongly claiming that the young person was not using it properly.

The tension of differing perceptions in the adult–young people relationships is complicated by the differing perceptions of 'what is good' for the community, even though young people are community members. An example shared of a similar dynamic is revealed through Wenham's (2020) study with young people in a UK coastal town, which showed that young people were aware of and adversely affected by economic priorities set by the adults in their

area: ‘Young people described feelings of frustration and anger with the prioritisation of tourist spots, while local (stigmatised) neighbourhoods were neglected and left to “run down”’ (p. 12). Similarly, the young people involved in our project identified that tourist activities are prioritised over their wants, as exemplified by the main road between the town and the coast. The young people identified on their Map that this road is busy with tourists during the summer months. Because the road and path infrastructure prioritises car and pedestrian traffic, the young people cannot access the coast on this route with their bikes. Similar to the young people in Wenham (2020), our young people also see priority accorded to accommodating tourists over their wants for BMX tracks and access to natural amenities like the coast.

Young people’s capacity to navigate competing demands for road use can be enhanced when adult allies who are also cyclists are supportive. As part of the group’s NBI goals, young people in this CBP increased capacity for group riding, road rules, bike maintenance and safety as they collectively sought ways to enhance safety while having fun on their bikes. The relational autonomy approach utilised by the adult allies with the young people in the project followed the social work ethic of aiding decision-making without manipulation (Juhila *et al.*, 2020). The approach is also supported by McLaughlin’s (2020) assertion that young people can use agency if the focus moves from individual vulnerability to the ‘… social relationships that inform children’s socio-cultural worlds that have the potential for being the source of their agency and a key site where they can enact rights around both their lives and their involvement in research’ (p. 210).

The tension and hostility between adults and young people could be summarised as adults perceiving young people as either vulnerable and in need of care, or irresponsible and a source of potential harm, thereby assuming the responsibility for making decisions on their behalf. Using the concept of relational autonomy in conjunction with social work skills, the young people’s vulnerability and inexperience is still acknowledged but approached ethically with dialogue between the two groups. Our study demonstrated that this approach enables young people to acquire skills and knowledge and make informed, safe decisions for themselves and others regarding cycling. Furthermore, the study demonstrated the meaningful inclusion of young people in research design and activity contributes to rich data and a sense of being heard on topics of interest to them.

7.2.2 Youth power and control challenges

Some authors in the literature called for an end to adultism, with, instead, adults sharing power with young people. Finding and creating spaces for exploring and realising relational autonomy is a core task in this CBP, and it led to many activities within the group for interpersonal, leadership, social and technical skill development. However, finding adults to listen to young people cannot be effective if the audience is created only from within the group. Of equal importance is seeking empathetic and supportive spaces created by adults outside of the group, where young people's lived experiences and opinions about active travel can be heard and considered.

Our study included an experience of supporting young people to present at a social work conference. The young people volunteered to take part. During the presentation, they were encouraged to speak directly and answer questions from attendees about their experiences without going through the project workers. These empowering relational spaces provide opportunities for challenging adultism and developing young people's agency (Billingham and Irwin-Rodgers, 2021), leading to a 'healthy sense of their significance' (ibid., p. 1244).

Our group further amplified this call for more supported autonomy outside of our group when we discussed Bike Week activities in their schools. In those discussions, the young people recounted that the school administrator's incentives to increase bike use were not appealing to them. Our group debated the advantages and disadvantages of the adults' suggestions and their own. The CBP demonstrated that educators could relinquish control of the Bike Week activities and discuss with young people in their schools what they would like to offer instead. Hall (2019) and Larson *et al.* (2005) demonstrated that decision-making can be shared in educational settings. The debates with supportive project workers throughout the Group Sessions helped build young people's confidence in having these types of discussions with other adults.

Building capacity for new skills gives young people the self-reliance to participate in matters affecting them. Bolzan and Gale (2012) proposed that young people need safe opportunities to exercise control and power. Our study amplified this stance by using a co-design approach to research. The CBP workers, being aware of adultism, practised staying in the role of co-designers. Although this goal may not have always been reached, the intention was ever

present. Frank (2011) suggests that young people can participate in decision-making in a manner that fits their needs, as well as their preferences and aptitudes. In confirmation, our study's design honoured the young people's request that they not do text-heavy tasks, but instead maintain a focus on fun, cycling and learning new things. The study was also conducted so that young people were not required to attend every week or participate in all research activities. Instead, they were free to partake to their desired level, which Frank (2011) describes as 'pockets of participation'.

The CBP provided examples of how relational autonomy can work in the real world when allies support MIG. However, as mentioned, conflict arises with unsupportive adults outside the group exercising power, which is defined by Castells (2007) as: 'the structural capacity of a social actor to impose its will over other social actors' (p. 239). One of the approaches is to generate counter-power, which, in this instance, is to increase youth capacity to resist and mitigate the effects of power dynamics outside of their control (Castells, 2007). For our group, the counter-power activities included emailing recommendations and using workers to attend adult-space meetings on behalf of the young people. Other studies have shown that when young people have the power to participate in adult spaces and decision-making, the young people, organisations and communities benefit (Blanchet-Cohen *et al.*, 2012; Zeldin, 2004).

Literature from CBPAR, which includes young people, acknowledges the power dynamics of 'children in the world' (Smith, 2008), where economic, cultural/religious, social and political influences all have a bearing on the young people's lives (Larson, 2011; Domínguez and Cammarota, 2022; Anyon *et al.*, 2018). Our study evidenced impacts of the outside forces, all in adult control outside of our group, at the community level, summarised in Table 7: Summary of outside power influences on young people in our study (based on the model in Smith, 2008). Acknowledgement of the forces and assisting youth in navigating them was an underlying and encompassing task of the project workers, discussed further in section 7.2.4.

Table 7: Summary of outside power influences on young people in our study

Force	**Evidence of adult decisions outside our group at the community level impacting young people**

Economic	- Tourist driven infrastructure for road from town to the coast - Public transport that is more expensive for young people compared to cycling for transport
Cultural/religious	- Priority of cars over bikes for transport - Not prioritising fun in green initiatives - Priority of safe travel to school but not young people's other bike wants in school or in the community
Political	- Support for BMX track in their Park withdrawn by local council - Young people Invited to the active travel strategy formation spaces yet young people unable to participate directly
Social	- Some parents and other adults not valuing young people in general (shop sign) or pushing and yelling at them when they act appropriately on paths - Adults claim to value safety; however, present cycle lane designs are problematic for young people of all abilities

The literature supports our study's findings that including young people in decision-making contributes to their agency, autonomy and development. Previous research on young people, transport and planning acknowledges social justice issues when they cannot participate (Ginwright *et al.*, 2005; Chatterjee *et al.*, 2019; Derr and Tarantini, 2016).

7.2.3 Youth voices in the new green transition strategy formation

Wägsaether *et al.* (2022) argue that climate justice concerning MIG and just green transitions must include MIG' input or risk creating inequality. We recall the characteristics of epistemic injustice: discounting, ignoring and minimising a group's knowledge from their lived experiences, due in part to their lived experiences being deemed unworthy, resulting in their exclusion (Fricker, 2008; Byskov, 2021; Johnstone, 2021). In our study, the young people attempted to exercise their autonomy and agency in decision-making by giving input on strategy formation. As a group of keen cyclists, they felt that they had substantial information to share regarding the cycling aspect of active travel, echoing Tupper *et al.*'s (2024) assertion that young people are knowledgeable experts. Furthermore, the young

people are stakeholders in the strategy as it will impact their ability to cycle as they wish for many years.

PAR ethics suggest that outcomes should benefit those who contributed to the data, including editorial control (Abma *et al.*, 2018; Stern, 2019; Pain *et al.*, 2008; Israel *et al.*, 1998; Banks *et al.*, 2013). For example, a paper written by people in a mental health setting claims that their narratives became sanitised versions when they did not have control of dissemination outputs (Costa *et al.*, 2012). Our Map is a good example of the group maintaining control throughout the map process.

Given the acknowledgement that MIG are knowledgeable contributors, that their voice needs to be included to meet the aim of epistemic justice, and that they should maintain control of their narrative, the CBP project gave real-world examples when the group aspired to contribute to the new strategy. Johnson (2017) reviewed outcomes from a PAR project in Nepal and the UK with children and young people (CYP) ten years after completion to determine if youth voices were considered in policy formation. They noted a similar dynamic that occurred in the CBP project,

> If power relationships between CYP and adult decision-makers are not taken into account in PAR, then adults are likely to ignore CYP's evidence or use it in a tokenistic way. Decisions are then made on the basis of more quantitative evidence or from processes that are more adult centric (p. 106)

The power dynamics in our study appeared inclusive, with the young people receiving invitations to the adult spaces. Each invitation is summarised below to exemplify the counter-power activities in response to the epistemic injustice embedded within the invitation. Each example also demonstrates, as McLaughlin (2012) acknowledges, that consultation does not result in guarantees of action or results. However, our findings highlight the barriers for young people to provide feedback directly in the first instance.

The first invitation to attend a forum meeting had barriers of distance and limited transport options for the group. Initially, the group discussed making the journey but opted to send me instead. This solved the problem of the whole group attending and the issue of staff coverage for young people who did not want to attend. I brought the group's suggestions to the meeting. Their recommendation that public transport be more linked up with cycling

was included in the final strategy. Therefore, the group's counter-power activity did produce results, albeit limited, because the young people could not comment directly.

The next invitation for young people to give feedback was at a face-to-face consultation. It was scheduled during school hours, so two workers attended to pass on the young people's recommendations. It is possible that the young people may not have attended even if they could, as this took place in a library and involved speaking with strangers; however, the alternative was still helpful in conveying the young people's experiences, even if not directly. The young people would have witnessed the workers' dissatisfaction with the way the young people were excluded. Although we did not gather the young people's insights, seeing others acknowledge the exclusion could have been positive, or it might have reinforced the young people's feelings of marginality.

The last opportunity to express their voices was through an online survey. After confirming with a strategy staff member that young people were not reflected in the demographics of people returning online surveys and that there was an avenue for them to send recommendations, the group chose this route. This involved the formation of their recommendations and an email on their behalf with a link to their Map. As the format that contained the young people's experiences directly, the Map was the best alternative to their reluctance to return an online form. As in the previous example, the young people did not share their reasons for not participating. It is possible that it was easier to express an opinion as a group than individually, or perhaps the online technology and presentation were a deterrent.

All three alternatives were good examples of counter-power and community action to overcome the epistemic injustice of discounting the young people's lived experiences. Neas *et al.* (2022) found that the community action approach to youth climate action supports young people's agency. The young people in the CBP also gained and amplified their voices by building confidence, skills and other capacities through supportive spaces co-created with adult allies using social work interventions. These positive experiences also contribute to their willingness to be part of the policy formation process on the green transition, despite the challenges to include their direct voices.

7.2.4 Social workers' role in just green transitions

In some health promotion literature, researchers have called for the inclusion of young people in research design to improve youth engagement in policy and youth development (Ozer *et al.*, 2024; Patton *et al.*, 2016; United Nations Children's Fund, 2018; World Health Organization, 2018). In his work on epistemic and climate justice, De Brabander (2023) argues that social workers should address just green transitions with their skills, training and expertise. Other researchers concur that social work ethics differentiate their approach to system change from community activism alone (Gutiérrez and Gant, 2018; McConnel *et al.*, 2021). Although similar, the social work approach differs from health promotion and community activism in its emphasis on social justice values and training in complex system change, spanning from the individual to the macro-levels of the continuum (Naranjo, 2024; Mary, 2016; Rinkler and Power, 2017). Hall (2020) identified that Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and Youth Organising (YO) approaches to research are the most effective in addressing system change issues affecting young people. Our study did not fully adhere to a YO model, partly because of the barriers created by the planning body. The workers, therefore, aimed to include young people as much as possible.

It would have been preferable for young people to speak directly at meetings and events. In one incident, young people were asked to participate in the online community stakeholder interviews; however, they declined. Youth agency in preferring not to participate was equally supported as choosing to participate in activities. However, in another situation, there was a time limit on the public consultation period for the strategy, resulting in the workers taking a more directive role to ensure some youth input was included instead of none. The dilemma of balancing client self-determination and client policy inclusion in the research project mirrors the dilemmas social workers face in practice. The CBP was a journey in solidarity with the young people and an example of policy intervention and group intervention, thus giving an example of how social workers can be 'policy activists' (Smith, 2019).

Kemp (2011), De Brabander (2023) and Shackleford *et al.* (2025, forthcoming) agree that social work has a role in just green transitions in practice and research. The collective argument is that social work's focus on social justice issues, skill sets and knowledge bases that support marginalised groups can assist in navigating power dynamics. Our study demonstrated that power influences exerted on a MIG can and should be countered with

solidarity, professional skills and ethics. The CBP supported the assertions in the literature that the values of social work professionals, including client self-determination, capacity-building and inclusion, would benefit not only green transitions but also individual youth development, in a mutually reinforcing manner.

Young people, with adult support as required, need to participate in strategy formation for social justice as outlined. Another motivation for their inclusion is that they can positively contribute to the just green transition discourse, with researchers finding that young people are more inclusive than adult decision-makers alone (Derr *et al.* 2013; Freeman and Tranter 2011; Malone, 2013; Vivoni, 2013; Derr and Rigolon, 2017; Derr and Tarantini, 2016; and Nissen *et al.*, 2020).

7.3 Creative approaches to communication through technology-assisted CBPAR

The last key observation builds on the assertion that young people should be involved in strategy formation activities that affect them. Their approach to this goal was based on their everyday activities and incorporated technology, some of which was familiar to them. This section begins with an overview of the technology used and how the PAR approach supports young people facing power and control barriers. Subsequently, the discussion delves deeper into the issues of power and control related to lived experiences and decision-making through the map methods. The last subsection applies these methods and converses with the literature regarding approaches to including MIG in public consultation strategies.

7.3.1 Everyday technology and capacity-building

The technology-assisted CBPAR approach yielded information on communication tools familiar to the young people and capacity-building to master unfamiliar technology. The group's use of Instagram is the best example of the former, while the video editing is the best example of the latter. With worker support, technology usage helped to build confidence, and encouraged young people to try new things outside their comfort zone and work together as a group. Equally, by using platforms and devices that the young people had already interacted with, they were more likely to engage with the research project's activities. This level of trust is significant because the distrust of the active travel strategy

process dampened young people's enthusiasm for direct participation, prompting their alternative counter-power response.

In addition to trust, another advantage of using everyday technology was the group's willingness to maintain control of the communication. For example, it was the young people's choice to have workers conduct online interviews with other adult community members. Conversely, if encouraged to engage in an Instagram chat mainly with their peers, they were more willing to respond. The participatory approach, combined with the skills of adult facilitators in incorporating technology, allowed the young people to take control, contributing to the ownership of the project after the fieldwork ended. This was evident in the January 2024 meeting on the initial findings, when the group spontaneously created a list of their next steps. Other studies with participatory research found the ownership shifted from the academic to the community group (Salsberg *et al.*, 2017; Banks *et al.*, 2019; Pain *et al.*, 2008). Youth ownership of communication can be complex because the organisation supporting youth activities usually has safeguarding policies. For example, the youth organisation supporting the CBP required that adults contacted by youth directly on social media platforms must report this immediately to the manager.

Using technology that young people are familiar with or are willing to learn aligns with social work's value of client self-determination. Building technological capacity exemplifies a pragmatic approach to utilising workers' skills and a solution-focused approach when young people are interested in developing a new skill. Lee *et al.* (2020) noted that creative approaches aid social and ecological situations and can work with young people on multiple levels in the community. The young people's requests to learn more about cameras and video editing are good examples of the CBP building capacity. If it were designed in advance by adults not using a PAR approach, the flexibility to include capacity-building that appealed to young people may not have been included in the CBP. The result would have been less democratic. Reason and Canney's (2015) research concluded that the PAR approach is suitable for supporting inclusion and democracy when addressing socioecological systems. PAR also builds the capacity of co-researchers so that they can speak directly to the issues that affect them in the ways that they want (Freire, 1970; Fricker, 2007).

7.3.2 Young people's new approach to communication

Using a PAR approach, the CBP combined Photovoice and Bike-Along Interview methods, utilising a map template to gather data, as outlined in the Methods chapter in section 4.4.4.4. The young people's Map proved effective in conveying their lived experiences, generating data points and organising community activities. The group's experiences with the barriers to the active travel strategy input have been discussed in the previous key observations, illustrating that invitations from the planning body to participate in the public consultation process lacked inclusive means for direct communication from young people.

The planning body in our project utilised online surveys for the public consultation phase, which, for MIG, have similar barriers to those associated with PGIS (Elwood, 2008; Harris and Weiner, 1998). The barriers can be technical (software or coding knowledge and connected costs of software and hardware to run programmes) and cultural, such as a lack of transparency and accountability by local leaders (Ganapati, 2011; Kyem, 2001). The research group's findings on similar barriers in their project necessitated a new creative approach to communication through their Map.

However, not all online map platforms offer the same level of functionality for unrestricted data capture. Our study utilised a Padlet Map template, on which young people placed points and associated text and videos to share their lived experiences (Padlet, n.d.). Padlet functionality provides participants with the flexibility to zoom in and out of a map representing streets and locations, similar to the way the ubiquitous Google Maps application works (Sinaga *et al.*, 2024). Contrastingly, Wood and Hamilton (2020), who also used PAR to elicit lived experiences, employed the Mural platform, which features a static map graphic upon which groups placed virtual sticky notes and photos with lines drawn to locations (Mural, 2024). Any future changes, such as expanding the Map area, would require organising additional workshops to replace it with another graphic. Conversely, the Padlet Map platform is editable by CBP members (once trained – which is relatively straightforward) at times convenient for them, without requiring them to repeat the workshop process. The Padlet platform empowers young people with independence and control over their lived experiences through text and videos, without incurring extra costs to the youth organisation (assuming the youth organisation is using their usual computers and Wi-Fi, and incorporates the tasks into their normal activities).

Our research group's map process demonstrated Vélez and Solórzano's (2019) assertion that maps are more than geographical representations when created by someone as an expression of their lived experience. Other studies have recognised that maps can be multidimensional and have called for their use to gather data on people and their activities, thereby better understanding people–place relationships in practice (Healey, 2005; Stephenson, 2010; Ozer and Piatt, 2017). Because people–place relationships are associated with other disciplines, the discussion concludes by exploring the implications of the young people's approach to mapping methods in other contexts.

7.3.3 Young people's voices in system change with social work support

The conversation on youth voices in sustainability has shown that marginalised groups, such as young people, face challenges and sometimes need support to find solutions. Our study exemplifies an application of social work and PAR approaches, resulting in a possible solution to epistemic injustice in a planning context. A question now arises as to how planners could use a map similar to the one the group created to include MIG in just green transitions.

Berglund's (2008) study aimed to include children's voices through GIS maps in city planning. The results were promising, with both children and teachers using specialist GIS software. However, the project required a high level of involvement by the researchers to train participants in the software and equipment. Other researchers suggest that social workers adapt maps to address transport issues (Queralt and Witte, 1998) and identify community assets as part of a community assessment (Lightfoot, 2014). In research that combined the use of GIS maps with MIG and a social work approach, Hiller (2007) concluded that social workers help make GIS maps more inclusive while maintaining confidentiality. Applying ideas from the literature in our study demonstrated that social work could benefit MIG in just green transitions. For example, the CBP's Map includes GPS coordinates that can be integrated with GIS planning software (Padlet, n.d.). The qualitative data from youth voices for each map point is then connected to the quantitative GIS planning software. The map process, therefore, can take the technical flexibility described and combine it with social work facilitation skills to elicit participants' lived experiences. Once part of the Map data, MIG can be included in discussions, whether in transport issues or other issues.

Our study demonstrated the vital importance of qualitative data in advancing the green transition in a socially just manner. Furthermore, the study showed that how the data is collected is equally critical. The young people's input on increasing bike usage, sharing their experiences and knowledge, which surpasses adult levels in some cases, emerged in text and visuals that might not have been captured through online surveys and PGIS approaches. For example, the video clips connected to some Map points provided detailed information regarding issues from the young people's perspective. The Map was a data collection of experiences; however, the build process allowed space for emotions, which is an equally valued exercise in PAR and social work practice and research values. Combined with the worker-facilitated sessions, both weekly in the Park and the serial Group Sessions, the young people were supported in expressing feelings ranging from joy to fear. With the skills the workers bring, a connection was made between emotions and experiences to address system-level progress on transport policy. MacDonald *et al.* (2013) support the approach used, noting that young people can and should participate in climate change discourse; however, they may need assistance to learn how to engage on macro-level issues when they encounter barriers to their communication efforts.

The CBPAR approach contributed to the ethical inclusion of MIG in system-level issues in our study. Using this approach, with social work ethics as everyday ethics, and a relational focus, can move research from being extractive to being more relational (Banks *et al.*, 2013; Salsberg *et al.*, 2017; Shadowen *et al.*, 2020). The group's acceptance of the initial findings in January 2024 and participation in dissemination events that summer are indicators that the research reflected their viewpoints and the importance of the topic to them. The implication is that future studies could utilise our approach of combined research methods to share the lived experiences of MIG in power dynamics that would otherwise discourage their participation.

Discussion conclusion

The conversation between findings and the literature covered a range of topics and theories. Despite the differing perceptions of young people and adults regarding cycling motivations, the difficulty young people experienced in sharing their viewpoints in adult spaces, and their experiences with barriers to participation, the study revealed the rich potential contribution of young people's involvement in the just green discourse.

The study demonstrated that young people's cycling knowledge and experiences challenged adult ideas of safety and motivations to cycle. This study validates that for these young people, fun, play and destinations are more valuable than health benefits. Adult perceptions that fun is risky or unnecessary restrict youth agency and autonomy, as evidenced in our study. The workers in the study group modelled a different viewpoint by supporting youth development as part of a youth organisation with NBI, implementing community action, ecosocial work and critical youth theories. By taking this course, the workers demonstrated that young people of various ages and cycling abilities can safely navigate the existing urban infrastructure, however limited the infrastructure may be. In this way, the study can be applied in future practice or in further research when adult concerns about safety are used to argue against young people cycling at all. Our research and the literature, however, still call for safe infrastructure, such as designated and separate cycle lanes that are distinct from those for vehicles and pedestrians.

Another key observation was that young people continue to be excluded from decisions that affect them. Young people's lack of power in decision-making is a significant cause of exclusion. The CBP workers supported inclusion through counter-power action. The CBP workers supported capacity-building to enable the young people to navigate the adult spaces. If young people could not or did not wish to participate directly in strategy formation that affected them, workers participated on their behalf, ensuring that young people's voices would be expressed and taken into account. The literature supported the social work ethics and social justice focus in addressing the epistemic injustice that young people experienced with the new strategy process. The qualitative data collected sheds light on the many aspects of the journey for the group.

The last key observation explored communication barriers with planning tools such as PGIS maps, which are poorly designed to include MIG. Our group encountered similar barriers to online survey participation and then circumvented them. By adopting a democratic and inclusive approach that supported the group's everyday activities, a map template was utilised with functionality that fostered youth agency and provided GPS coordinates for GIS software used by planners. The young people combined the Photovoice and Bike-Along Interview methods to generate a Map that reflected their lived experiences while maintaining control of their narrative. In this way, our study addressed the calls in the

literature for improved methods to include marginalised groups in planning, and specifically in just green transition planning.

8 Conclusion

Introduction

The thesis concludes by highlighting key messages gained from the findings and the Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) process in the study. The contributions, both conceptual and methodological, that this study offers to sustainable travel and youth services, in relation to social work practice, are also presented.

8.1 Contributions: Conceptual

The project successfully gathered data with a marginalised group on their cycling experiences; however, the study's contributions can apply to all situations where Marginalised Indigenous Groups (MIG) wish to communicate their lived experiences and may encounter barriers. The barriers to communication in our project stemmed from power imbalances, with adults in control of the new active travel strategy process, school bike initiatives and planning infrastructure, such as paths and roads. In all cases, the young people had valuable information to share that would improve conditions for people of all ages and abilities wishing to increase their cycling. Therefore, the first contribution of the study was the slight movement in the direction of increased communication of young people's biking experiences through their counter-power activities to change the systems.

Closely related to the first contribution is the engagement of the group in addressing community-level goals, which often occur slowly when measured in the context of wider active travel policy, school initiatives or urban planning. However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the young people found a meaningful voice even in the face of discouraging adult system interactions.

The next contribution was that the young people's experiences contradicted adult knowledge on cycling. The first example of a contradiction to adults' attitudes is the young people's correct use of paths and roads, which makes cycling safer for them. This correct use is also an example of capacity-building. The second was that young people are drawn to fun activities that can be safe with the right support; however, adults dismiss them completely, leaving fewer opportunities for young people to practise age-appropriate, safe boundary pushing and independent travel. The contribution highlights the difference in cycling motivation between the two groups, with young people naming fun as the most important

factor, whereas adults prioritise health benefits. Adults need to learn that some level of risk is necessary for normal youth development. The last contribution regarding adult viewpoints was that adults mainly focus on youth travelling to school, whereas young people's priorities are much broader.

We captured best practices of youth and social work in supporting a vulnerable group, which can be transferable to other social workers and disciplines in the community. The concept of relational autonomy in building capacity was a key component of the best practices, enabling a group that would not or could not otherwise engage in their community on issues affecting their lives. In this manner, the workers' approach aligned well with PAR. The combination of the PAR, social work and pragmatic approaches to the project activities led to a new communication method, one of the novelties of the research project.

8.2 Contributions: Methodological

The workers' best practices provided significant methodological contributions. The primary one was the facilitation of activities leading to the Map creation. The group's Map is a new tool for the inclusion of MIG viewpoints on issues impacting them in the Global North and English-speaking literature. The tool can be used in a variety of situations, whenever a group wants to share their experiences geographically and gather GPS data that can be integrated with GIS software used by urban planners. Some disciplines that may find it useful include social work, sports, human geography and health promotion. The area where the tool may have the most significant impact on MIG inclusion in decision-making is through PGIS or other public consultation efforts. In this manner, the quantitative data required by some disciplines is gathered through qualitative methods used by the workers. This is significant because it supports transdisciplinary efforts in sustainability research.

The tool combines established methods (Photovoice and Go-Along Interview) with adaptations for use on a digital platform. This may have been done separately in the past; however, the last aspect of the new tool is the control of the narrative by the group. The group maintains administrative control, resulting in ownership of the Map editing. The same applies to the communication through Instagram. The group did consider using bike apps and adding bike routes to their Map, which is possible, but we ran out of time to explore those options.

The research project specifically evidenced young people's contributions, demonstrating that participatory research can and should include and recognise their inputs. The examples presented throughout the thesis were:

1. Young people's genuine decision-making power on whether the project went ahead in the first instance and at action decision points throughout.
2. The Map credits the group as authors and is available with a Creative Commons Copyright.
3. The Map and the presentation at the social work conference were two vehicles for direct youth voice on issues that impact them.
4. Young people's voices were included in the press release and the infographic, which both contained their recommendations for active travel strategies and direct quotes.
5. Almost all research project participants attended an end-of-project celebratory meal to acknowledge the group's work.

At the end of this chapter is a copy of a list the young people generated with workers on future actions. One item not listed is for me to write a journal article with one of the youth workers to share the youth input during the project, thereby acknowledging the young people's contributions more widely.

8.3 Limitations: Challenges and mitigation

The challenge of addressing structural change is difficult; however, our study was a small step. It is essential for community groups to continue to pressure decision-makers so that the priorities of vulnerable community members are not overlooked. Even with our approaches, the study was not completely inclusive at all times or free from impediments to young people's input; however, it was a heuristic approach to the problems that was good enough in this context.

Another challenge is that our study, it could be argued, only speaks to a local issue due to the data being site-specific. However, although the data points generated may speak to local issues, the tool created can be applied in many directions by any discipline that aims to increase advocacy for any MIG.

Another limitation of the data was a lack of engagement with the project activities from the active travel planning body and the local council's transport department. The young people's

input to the active travel strategy could have been improved with more two-way dialogue with the two key organisations on the topic of increased cycling. Efforts were made with both organisations; however, it was more important to focus my energies on engagement activities with the young people.

Other limitations were practical and situational. The fieldwork consisted of start and stop timeframes due to the funder's requirements for me to travel for required meetings and training outside the fieldwork's region. The result was an added level of administration and logistics to manage. I tried to schedule fieldwork activities around those commitments. One example was conducting online interviews when I was on secondment in another country.

An added limitation of the study was that the filming of issues took place in the evenings during the winter when it was dark, and sometimes the weather was poor. My preference for better video quality would have been to film during the summertime; however, the footage did show the dark and wet evenings and demonstrated how young people still wanted to cycle in poor weather.

The last two limitations were minor. The first was navigating the end of the COVID-19 social distancing requirements. Many charities that were initially approached cited the situation as a reason they could not engage in a long-term research project. The second limitation was the move from two fieldwork sites to one. Efforts had started with a community service in Belgium, a bike-friendly city, which was abandoned due to travel logistics. The comparison of differing bike cultures in England and Belgium would have added another dimension to the study.

8.4 Implications for future research

To present the implications generated by the Community-Based Project (CBP), I have separated them into research, practice and policy. This project demonstrates that traditional approaches to consulting on active travel/green agenda initiatives can, due to their structural and epistemological barriers, exclude MIG, such as young people. Therefore, all three levels are impacted by social injustice. Additionally, all three levels utilised everyday ethics by the adults in the project to guard against the project itself becoming another source of social injustice.

The assessment for the next research study with young people on active travel should include a dialogue with adults and young people about safety. It must be a dialogue on what we will do about it in terms of structural changes, e.g., building safer cycle lanes. A dialogue would address the social injustice of adultism when the adults assume they know what is best for young people.

Future research also requires planning for efforts that include public consultation, in addition to online surveys, which may take more time and resources. The implication is that future studies could utilise our approach and new combined methods for sharing the lived experiences of MIG in power dynamics that would typically discourage their participation in public consultation, thereby addressing epistemic injustice.

The group's findings on cycling motivation and research in the literature suggest that further studies on changing adults' attitudes toward young people's need for transport options, such as bikes combined with public transport, are warranted. For example, the dialogue methods used by workers during the Group Sessions were key to drawing out young people's responses. The underlying care and support required by relational autonomy was demonstrated and should be included in future research with vulnerable groups.

Future research on barriers to increased bike use among all ages could include how to change attitudes toward safety equipment. An additional option is to develop a cycle-friendly approach to road infrastructure. De Hartog *et al.*'s (2010) literature review on health benefits outweighing increased risks for people switching from car to bike transport drew on their calculations on infrastructure in the Netherlands, where cycle lanes are separated from other road users. This fact has multiple benefits: reduced collisions between cyclists, vehicles and pedestrians, reduced need for cyclists to wear protective equipment, and increased cycling.

As an early-stage researcher, I would like to build on the project's findings by conducting research in the Irish context, where a focus on active travel and sustainability in general is less developed than in the UK. I am also curious about how to increase social work practice research in Ireland on sustainability issues.

8.5 Implications for social work practice

The implications for social work practice could be to increase the focus on practice research. For practitioners and researchers, the social work and youth work best practices demonstrated during the project can be implemented when supporting a vulnerable group with community goals. Other implications for social work practice are:

- Incorporating a starting point in solidarity with service users
- Using principles of relational autonomy in practice activities
- Addressing the needs and wants of young people by prioritising times and locations of meetings so as to be accessible to them

8.6 Implications for public policy

The last category of the implications of the study is public policy or system-level changes. The main activity of the project was that the active travel public consultation received input from young people, in part because I initiated activities that allowed them to do so. But I did it in a way that did not take power from them. In this manner, we shared a life lesson journey, which was that if you want something to change, you will have to participate. Furthermore, if there are barriers to your participation, you will need to find alternative avenues to have your viewpoint heard.

Public consultations are only one aspect of policy development. Some other implications from our study were:

1. The new active travel strategy calls for people to make a small change to walking or cycling instead of driving for journeys that are less than five miles. This approach is similar to other sustainability actions in the Global North, where the focus is on individual-level changes. Although changes like this are helpful, they fall well short of any significant climate change improvements, as structural changes are needed for significant carbon emission reduction.
2. The young people are individuals who are already engaged with a goal of sustainability. What they required to increase cycling was the removal of numerous epistemic, infrastructural and attitudinal barriers.
3. Policy efforts to address road infrastructure are needed if cities (where decisions on road infrastructure are often made) have declared climate emergencies. Separated bike paths have been proven to be effective in increasing bike use

while decreasing safety concerns. Policies that support walking and cycling need preference over vehicle traffic to reduce carbon emissions.

4. Social workers are familar with complex systems and addressing social justice issues with marginalised groups. Therefore, social workers, along with other practitioners such as youth workers using similar interventions, could play a role in combining practice with policy to become policy activists (Smith, 2008).

The last point for policy-level implications is that youth voices, which have usually been marginalised, are often overlooked in policy formation. Our study and others have noted that young people's input on sustainability issues is valuable. Policy makers might need to do what I did and take time to develop relationships with young people and other MIG. The investment should not be deemed wasteful if it does not yield a return in the short term. Again, the involvement of MIG could prove to be cost-effective over a longer time frame.

Final words

The thesis on the CBP now comes to a close. The aims set out were ambitious. The funder's commission was met, and the research process was a fulfilling one for me as a researcher and on a personal level:

- The CBP workers used best practices for capacity-building so that young people could participate in system-level activities, which they might not have done otherwise.
- Young people generated data to increase cycling in their area that can be incorporated into GIS software with GPS coordinates.
- Fun as a motivator to cycling more was identified.
- Safety concerns were identified, and some solutions were proposed.
- Young people addressed epistemic injustice through relational autonomy support with workers who worked with them instead of extracting information from young people for the active travel public consultation.
- Cycle lanes need to be separate from vehicle traffic. This is especially important for people with spatial disabilities like dyspraxia.
- A new communication tool for MIG was developed that is suitable for other groups, topics and contexts when a group wishes to advocate on issues with a geographical component.

- A focused approach to using counter-power activities resulted in the overall project becoming an example of counter-power in action.

Efforts to implement structural changes in any social system can be challenging due to their complexity and scope, yet the research project demonstrated that the effort continues to be worthwhile. When undertaken with democratic and inclusive values, the journey itself yields results for those who participate in it.

It is fitting that the thesis ends with young people's voices. These are the notes on their next steps after we discussed the initial findings (edited for clarity):

1. W3 will post the initial findings on the Instagram chat for those who could not make the meeting tonight. Feedback is welcome.
2. The group may secure funding to share the Map more.
3. The group can add points to the Map and more videos and photos.
4. The group might try to record more activities in general and share them on TikTok, Discord and Twitter/X. The young people need to post more because W2 is already looking after social media.
5. Other young people's groups can be brought into activities.
6. W3 will approach Durham University Graphics Services about creating a Findings Infographic.
7. W3 will write papers and apply to attend conferences in addition to her thesis. Young people will be invited to present at conferences. W3 will post on Instagram about that too.
8. The group may target people to share the Findings. Three were mentioned – a local politician who is interested in the group's work, a person connected to Active Travel England, and an active travel writer.
9. The group may want to connect with other community groups.

(Initial Findings Meeting 12 January 2024)

The young people took ownership during the project, and these comments demonstrate clearly their desire to maintain ownership and continue the community action effort by exercising their newly built capacities.

Appendix A: Glossary

Abbreviation	Term	Meaning
	Active travel	Active travel is one approach to urban planning addressing climate change issues by prioritising walking, cycling and public transport over vehicular use for transportation (DfT, 2020)
ASTRA Project	*Applying Sustainability Transition Research in Social Work Tackling Major Societal Challenge of Social Inclusion*	The funding and training consortium of 15 early-stage research projects, of which one was the topic of the thesis (Matthies *et al.*, 2022).
	Bikeability programme	Bikeability is the UK government's flagship national cycle training programme for children in England. The programme provides practical cycling skills training at various levels, helping participants feel confident when using a cycle on England's roads (Active Travel England, 2025).
	Capacity-building	In the context of the research project, 'Central to meaningful participation for lived experience co-researchers is building co-researchers skills and confidence to express their views and influence decision making at all stages of the research process (Dembele *et al*., 2024, p. 7).
CBPAR	Community-Based Participatory Action Research	A variation of the PAR approach with a focus on community interests and actions for system changes (Israel *et al*., 2012).
CBP	Community-Based Project	The research group that is the subject of the thesis.
	Counter-power	The term 'counter-power' describes when one challenges

		institutionalised power relations, which may include building networks of people to enact the intentions (Castells, 2007).
	Epistemic justice	Epistemic justice refers to the fair treatment of individuals in their capacity as knowers, further defined by testimonial and hermeneutical justice (Fricker, 2007). Testimonial and hermeneutical injustice are related because, in the case of the former, a person or group is discriminated against due to the credibility of the knowledge shared being questioned, and in the latter, because the information used to determine credibility is not collectively valued (ibid.).
GIS	Geographical Information Systems	'GIS is typically defined as a computer data system capable of capturing, storing, analysing and displaying geographically referenced information. This information is attached to a location and can be identified by latitude and longitude, or by more common names such as a street address' (Sianko and Small, 2017, p. 169).
With a capital G and S	Group Session	Refers to one or more of the six gatherings of CBP members during the fieldwork.
JGT	Just Green Transitions	The transition from fossil fuels to green energy and approaches that ensure the social justice needs of marginalised and non-marginalised community members are met during the transition (Wang and Lo, 2021).
Map with capital M	Map	The group's online map created in the Padlet platform.

MIG	Marginalised and Indigenous Groups (plural)	Marginalised groups, including indigenous people as defined in this thesis, refers to people who are perceived as different from mainstream society (Pettican *et al.*, 2023).
Park with a capitol P	Park	The public park the group met in weekly as part of their activities. Most young people lived near to the Park.
PPGIS (PGIS)	Public Participatory Geographical Information Systems	In the thesis the term PGIS (with one P) will include members of the public or citizens.
RA	Relational Autonomy	A theory created to address people of all ages who wish to be independent and connected to others; the theory '… defines autonomy as the ability of individuals to make decisions and act independently, but within the framework of social relationships that influence and are influenced by others' (Rachmad, 2017, p. 1).
	Social justice	Social justice refers to the fair and equitable treatment of all individuals and social groups within a society. It encompasses social, political and economic institutions that promote fairness, equity, inclusion, and self-determination, especially for marginalized populations. (Duignan, 2025, para. 1)
W1, W2	Youth workers	Staff of youth organisation that supported the research project and young people attending their services.
W3	This author researcher	PhD student and qualified social worker

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Research: *Social Justice and Transport within Green City Initiatives*

Researchers Names:

Principal Investigators: Dr Roger Smith, Professor and Dr. Sui Ting Kong, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology at Durham University.

Researcher: Ms Eileen Lauster, PhD Student, Department of Sociology at Durham University.

Contact Information: Phone +[redacted] or email at eileen.t.lauster@durham.ac.uk

You are being invited to take part in a research project on *Social Justice and Transport within Green City Initiatives*.

It is very important that you know what the study is about before you decide whether or not you want to take part. If you have questions about any part of the research please contact the researchers and we will be happy to discuss it with you. You should only consent to participate once you are happy that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. The Consent Form should not be signed if you do not wish to take part.

What is this research about?

The overall goal of the research project is to bring to light the social injustices people experience regarding transport as it is now and might be in the future, as more and more cities try to reduce their carbon emissions. The goal for now and then should be equal access to all life necessities like food, recreation, home, work and education in addition to the wants of communities such as cultural connections and freedom of choice. In

other words, people should not feel burdened or restricted by green initiatives and have equal access to modes of transport that best meet their mobility needs.

Why this research topic has been chosen?

The first reason is that there is a lack of research on this topic. Some related research suggests that transport issues can have a large effect on people's ability to access services. Another reason is that the researcher hopes to gather the voices of those experiencing social injustices in a systematic way. Then the data generated can be used to influence policy changes or to consider people's opinions when setting up new modes of transport in a city.

Why you have been invited to take part?

You are being invited to take part in this research due to your connection to a community group and are able to give your consent to participate. We are looking for the insights of people travelling within and outside their city whether with a car, public transport, cycling or walking. We also what to hear from people with mobility issues who may find that public transport does not meet their needs.

The specifics of the research process will be decided by those wishing to join in. We will agree together the goals and activities for the project. We will also agree on protocols for communication, safety and handling conflict. We will discuss ethical issues and practical ones too like any training that is needed and how the project will be funded. Your participation in this research is voluntarily, and you can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

What will happen if you decide to take part in this research?

If you agree to take part, your name will be added to a list of people from whom we will form a Research Group. This group will then decide democratically the goals of the research and how it will be conducted.

Do I have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part. It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep. You will also be

asked to sign a consent form. If you choose to take part you have the option to opt out of the research project at any time.

How shall the information be collected and stored?

Any information collected whether by using audio or video recording equipment with your consent will be transcribed. The Research Group may also decide to produce art such as photos or drawings. All information collected during the course of the project will be anonymous and confidential as far as possible in a small group. Any names that are mentioned will be changed so that everyone's identity is kept anonymous. All information collected will be stored securely and kept confidential. Findings from the research will be utilised in my doctoral thesis and made available at conferences, workshops and/or publications stemming from the thesis, but your anonymity will be protected and you will not be identified in any findings or publications from the research if you wish.

Disclosure Issues

Please be aware that if you disclose information which indicates the potential for serious and immediate harm to yourself or others, the research team may be obliged to breach confidentiality and report this to relevant authorities. This includes disclosure of child protection offences such as the physical or sexual abuse of minors, the physical abuse of vulnerable adults, money laundering or other crimes covered by prevention of terrorism legislation. Where you disclose behaviour (by yourself or others) that is potentially illegal but does not present a serious and immediate danger to others, the researcher will, where appropriate, signpost you to relevant services, but the information you provide will be kept confidential (unless you explicitly request otherwise).

What are the benefits of taking part in this research study?

The study aims to give people that are usually not consulted on transport planning to give a say on what modes of transport are needed for them. This project also aims to influence decision-makers to address the needs identified.

What are the risks of taking part in this research study?

The study is interested in the perceptions and experiences of people who have used private or public transport and found it not meeting their needs. This process may raise people's anxiety or upset. Where this occurs, the researcher will pause the interview/discussion/recording/art making and explore with the participant what support may be appropriate or necessary. Also please note that if the interviewer feels that you or somebody else is at risk of serious harm, they may need to disclose this to relevant agencies.

Can you change your mind and withdraw from the study?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time, without explanation. Once the goals are agreed by the group and before commencing the research, the researcher will outline the project and insure consent is given to participate. The Research Group will form from those that are clear that she/he understands what they are being asked to do and have signed the consent form.

Contact details for further information: Eileen Lauster can be contacted at +[redacted] or by email at eileen.t.lauster@durham.ac.uk

Appendix C: Consent Form

Title of Research: *Social Justice and Transport within Green City Initiatives*

Principal Investigators: Dr Roger Smith, Professor and Dr Sui Ting Kong, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology at Durham University.

Researcher: Ms Eileen Lauster, PhD Student, Department of Sociology at Durham University.

Contact Information: Phone +[redacted] or email at eileen.t.lauster@durham.ac.uk

Consent Form

Please tick the boxes below to indicate your consent to participate in this research.

☐ I agree to take part in this study which aims to gather the perspectives of people using private and public transport in cities with green initiatives to reduce carbon emissions.

☐ I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time and do not need to give a reason to do so.

☐ I understand that my information will be anonymised and I will not be identified through my participation in the research.

☐ I understand that some data may be obtained through photography, audio and/or video recording and that this may be shared by the group through social media platforms like InstaGram and

YouTube.

☐ I have read the information sheet and understand the nature of the project.

☐ I understand the main researcher Eileen Lauster will be producing a dissertation and may include research papers stemming from the dissertation as per ASTRA Project and Durham University.

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Researcher's Name (Print)_____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix D: Ethics Approval Summary

Ethics Application and Decision Summary

Application Date	Description	Ethics Committee Decision	Decision Date
14/04/2022	Initial Ethics Application with groups in Leuven, Belgium and Northeast England with over 18s only.	Approval is conditional on a revised form being submitted when specifics are decided by those wishing to join in.	24/05/2022
03/08/2022	Revised design including under 18s and location changed to only England. Updated forms and detailed Data Management Plan included.	Approval, subject to the specified condition of the consent form including research papers stemming from the dissertation.	27/09/2022
17/01/2023	Research project dates expanded from the 4th of July 2022 to the 30th of April 2023. Correct revised consent forms uploaded.	Approved	14/02/2023

Appendix E: Field Notes Summary

Field Note Summary

Date	Location	Key Activity Observed	Young People	Adults (including author)
2022				
4 Jul	The Park	Met young people for the first time. Started the conversation by asking about environmental issues. Talked about using GoPro cameras.	8	3
11 Jul	The Park	Asked about their cycling experiences. Talked about ethics and working indoors some of the time.	5	3
13 Jul	Local Council City Hall	W2 (youth worker), W3 (this researcher) and one young person met other young people and adults at the local council Youth Parliament Mental Health Day.	1 from Research group, approx. 50 others	2 plus others
18 Jul	The Park	Group agreed to create an Instagram group chat for the research project.	7	3
10 Sep	Edinburgh, Scotland	Study Visit of city bike infrastructure and community resources and activities.		1
12 Sep	The Park	CBP identified goals and video-recorded some possibilities for a funding application.	3	3
22 Sep	Community Association Centre near the Park	**Group Session 1** – Young people's feedback for funding applications and research project since overlap of topics. Not recorded for transcription.	4	3
26 Sep	The Park	Bike repairs and games in the park. Plans for long cycles.	4	3
3 Oct	Community Association Centre in town	Discussion with adult providing the bike repair session paid for by the local council.		2
3 Oct	The Park	Bike repairs and long cycle outside the park. Discussions on the group attending the planning body forum next week. Barriers to travel for the YP in general. Agreed W3 would attend on the group's behalf and share feedback.	7	3
10 Oct	Planning body offices	Planning body Active Travel Forum – First of three special groups' feedback on the new active travel strategy for the region.		Approx. 20
12 Oct	Common Room in Department of Geography, Durham University	Met with PhD Geography student regarding the possible use of map software in fieldwork.		2

Date	Location	Key Activity Observed	Young People	Adults (including author)
19 Oct	Community Centre in a nearby town	Health and Well-being Event organised by local council's Youth Council. CBP stand with school-age children and adults to learn about community organisations.	1	2
24 Oct	Community Association Centre, near the Park	**Group Session 2** – Group expectations for the research project. Start map generation and discussion on travel wants in 2035. Recorded for transcription.	4	3
29 Oct	Bike repair and resale shop, in nearby large city	Summary of author bike-purchase journey and discussions with young people and youth workers about same.	2	4
7 Nov	The Park	**First video filming session**. Started in the Park, went to the local shops area and returned.	7	3
9 Nov	Via Microsoft Teams	Introduction meeting with Health Promotion Officer in local council.		2
14 Nov	The Park	Bike repairs and games in the park. New young person joined research group.	7	3
21 Nov	Community Association Centre near the Park	**Group Session 3** – De-brief of videos from 7 November. Planned next cycle to record journey to local town centre and other issues in the area. Recorded for transcription.	6	3
28 Nov	The Park to local town centre and return	**Second video filming session**. Filmed points raised in Group Session 3.	3	3
5 Dec	The Park	No bike repairs but a parent did ask W2 for input on a new bike purchase for one of the CBP that needs a bigger one. W2 told group about plans for new shop and asked for input on a funding application followed by games in the park.	4	3
2023				
9 Jan	The Park	Updates from holiday break. Bike repairs and games in the park.	6	3
12 Jan	Planning body offices	Planning body Active Travel Forum – Second of three special groups' feedback on the new active travel strategy for the region. W3 again brought CBP feedback to the meeting on the recently launched strategy, which is open for public consultation.		Approx. 15
13 Jan	Via Microsoft Teams	Follow-up meeting with local council Health Promotion Officer on Planning Forum meeting and update on CBP activities.		2
16 Jan	Community Association Centre near the Park	**Group Session 4** – De-brief of videos from November. Had discussion on next steps. Group decided to record repairing a tyre	5	3

Date	Location	Key Activity Observed	Young People	Adults (including author)
		puncture video as the fear of getting one stops other YP from going on long cycles.		
21 Jan	Local library near the Park	Youth organisation's AGM and reveal of new minivan.	3	10
23 Jan	The Park	Bike repairs including filming of a puncture repair. Afterwards played games in the park.	6	3
30 Jan	The Park	Video-editing using the minivan. Group discussed ways to use the videos. Afterwards played games in the park.	6	3
6 Feb	The Park	More filming of puncture repair. Bike repairs and games in the park. Discussions on how to use the video. Draft of Padlet Map created.	9	3
13 Feb	The Park	Group approved script for tyre repair video. Played games in the park.	4	3
20 Feb	Community Association Centre near the Park	**Group Session 5** – De-brief of Padlet Map with pins with some connected to video. Discussion on confidentiality with media. Had discussion on next steps for interviews in March and wrapping up the research project in April.	3	3
13 Mar	Via Zoom	Interview with Cycling charity staff.		2
17 Mar	Via Zoom	Interview with Health Promotion Unit staff in local council.		2
29 Mar	Via Zoom	Interview with University staff regarding increasing cycle travel for third-level students, their challenges and action.		2
3 Apr	The Park in the morning and later in the youth organisation's new bike repair shop near the Park	Met CBP briefly in the morning before they travelled for a long cycle with others outside the research group. **Group Session 6** – Met the CBP after they returned from their long cycle. We updated each other on March interviews and planned the rest of April activities.	4	3
17 Apr	Youth organisation's bike shop and later in the Park	**Group Session 7** – Workshop where young people learned how to make points on their Map in youth organisation's bike shop followed by camera recording skills in the Park while playing games and cycling.	2	3
24 Apr	Youth organisation's bike shop to restaurant on the coast and return	Group cycle from the bike shop to a restaurant on the coast for celebrations as research project ended.	10	3

Appendix F: Group Session Summary

Group Session Summary

Date	Location	Session Number and Key Activity	Young People	Adults (including author)
2022				
22 Sep	Community Centre	1- Discussion on Climate Change and what activities we can do for the research project.	4	3
24 Oct	Community Centre	2- Continued research design discussion with 2035 exercise and Google Maps pin generation.	4	3
21 Nov	Community Centre	3- De-brief on videos recorded 7 Nov.	6	3
2023				
16 Jan	Community Centre	4- De-brief on videos recorded 28 Nov and discussed challenges and possible solutions to lack of fun places, lack of good bike lanes, bike safety and repair. Group decides to make a video on how to fix a tyre puncture and discussed a possible survey of young people outside the group on their experiences [the video progressed but not the survey].	5	3
20 Feb	Community Centre	5- De-brief on more videos, Padlet Map, shared sample of transcriptions and made plans for March.	3	3
3 Apr	Youth organisation's bike shop	6- De-brief on March Activities and made plans for April.	4	3
17 Apr	Youth organisation's bike shop and the Park	7- Workshop to learn Padlet Map and GoPro Camera operation.	2	3

Appendix G: Youth Worker Questionnaire

(Sent via email to two youth workers)

1. Before our project, what experience did you have as a youth worker in doing research with young people?

2. Before our project, what social action/community development/political action had [the youth organisation] done with young people? A few lines of who, what, when, and the result would be great.

3. How well did our research activities fit alongside your usual youth work activities and goals?

4. Did our research project reach the ideas and goals you had for it at the beginning?

5. With hindsight, is there anything you think we could have done differently?

6. My thesis will look at themes in literature and theories of youth work, social work, climate change implementation, and social justice, including young people's voices, economics and freedom of travel. Do you have any thoughts on these topics?

Appendix H: Stakeholder Interview Goals

People to Interview for the Social Scientist Research Project (redacted)

Person and job title	What Hope to Learn	Interviewers
[redacted], Project Leader on Safe Schools for [redacted] Council.	How can Active Travel help young people, how can the data the research project generated help her work, how can her work support the CBP's efforts to improve bike use.	
Adult not connected to CBP trying to create a BMX track in another public area*	Struggles to get a BMX track in [redacted] going	
Neighbourhood Policing	How to keep bikes safe, the rules of the road for cyclist.	The whole group as part of the meeting on the 27th. How can we document this?
Road Engineer near large city [redacted] that is overseeing a 2 million overhaul to cycle lanes there. OR a Local Council Engineer.^	What are some of the constraints engineers have to follow? What kind of information is helpful for engineers from groups like ours?	
Someone at a College or University	Transport to Higher Education- buddy idea to cycle to school, loan bikes?	

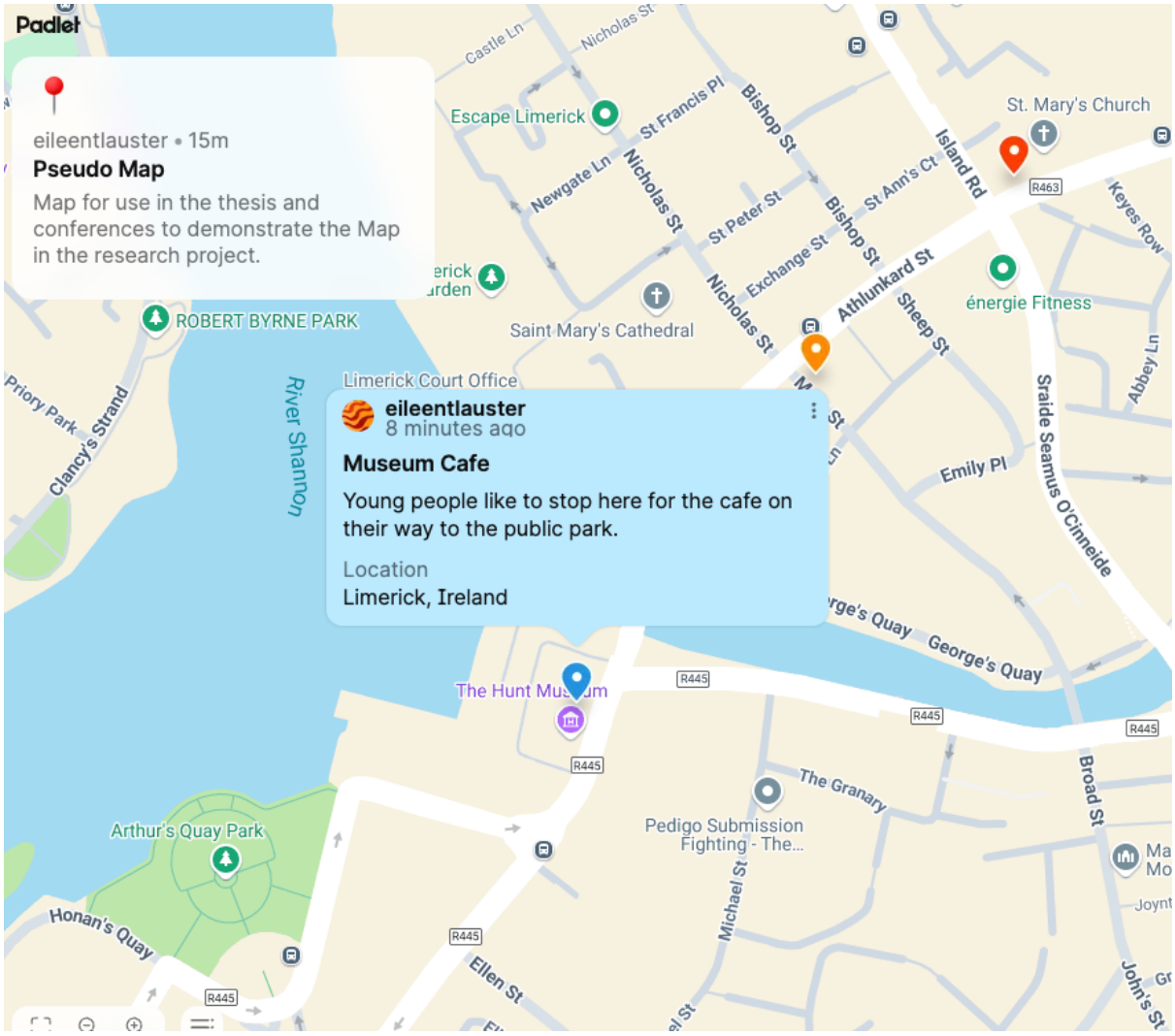
*When this person was not available, an interview with a staff person from a community bike charity went ahead instead.

^Neither interview was held.

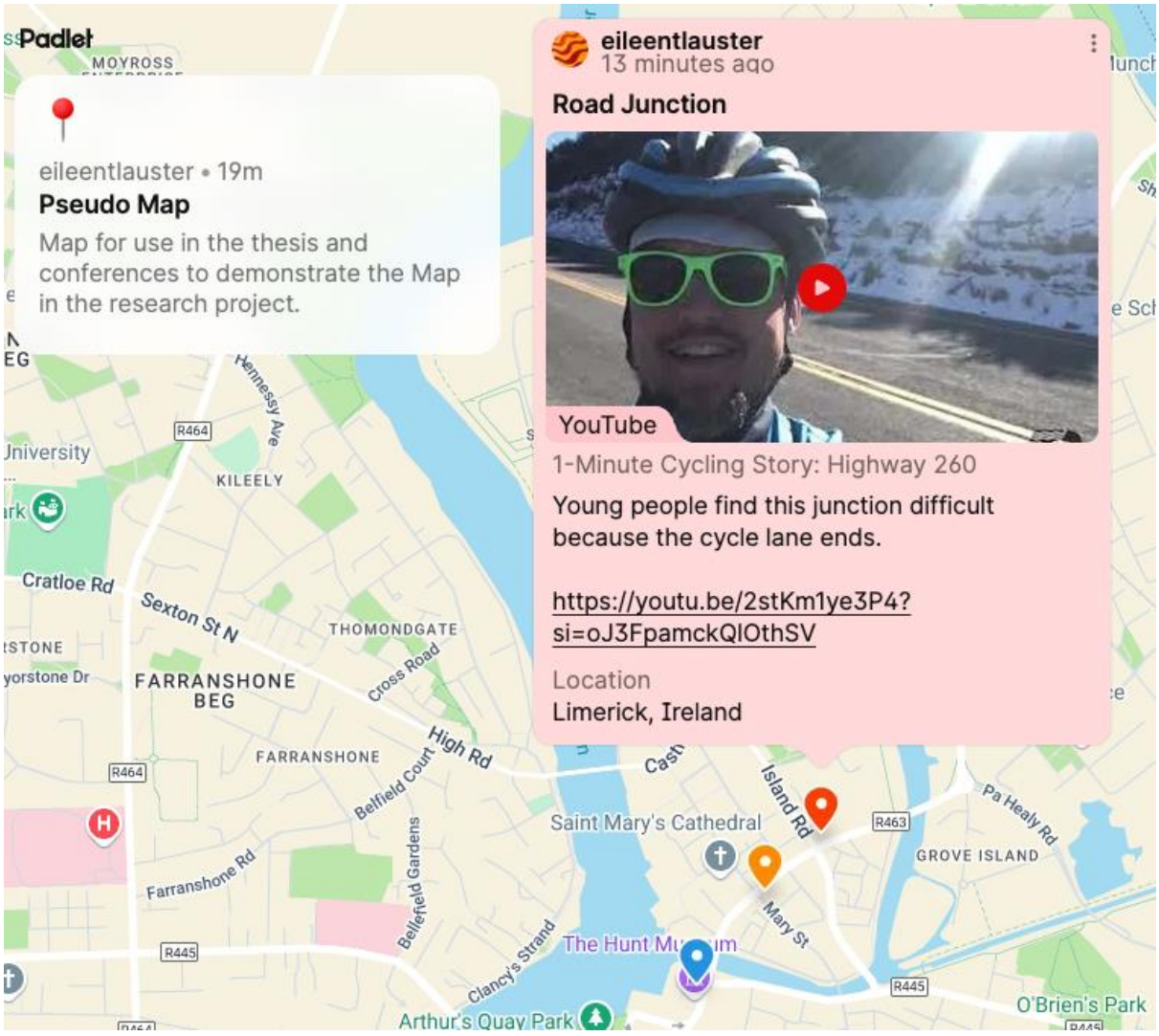
Appendix I: Pseudonym map with pin examples

The photos represent similar pin colours and location names to those used in the research group's map. The Red pin also demonstrates the use of a video link with a pin.

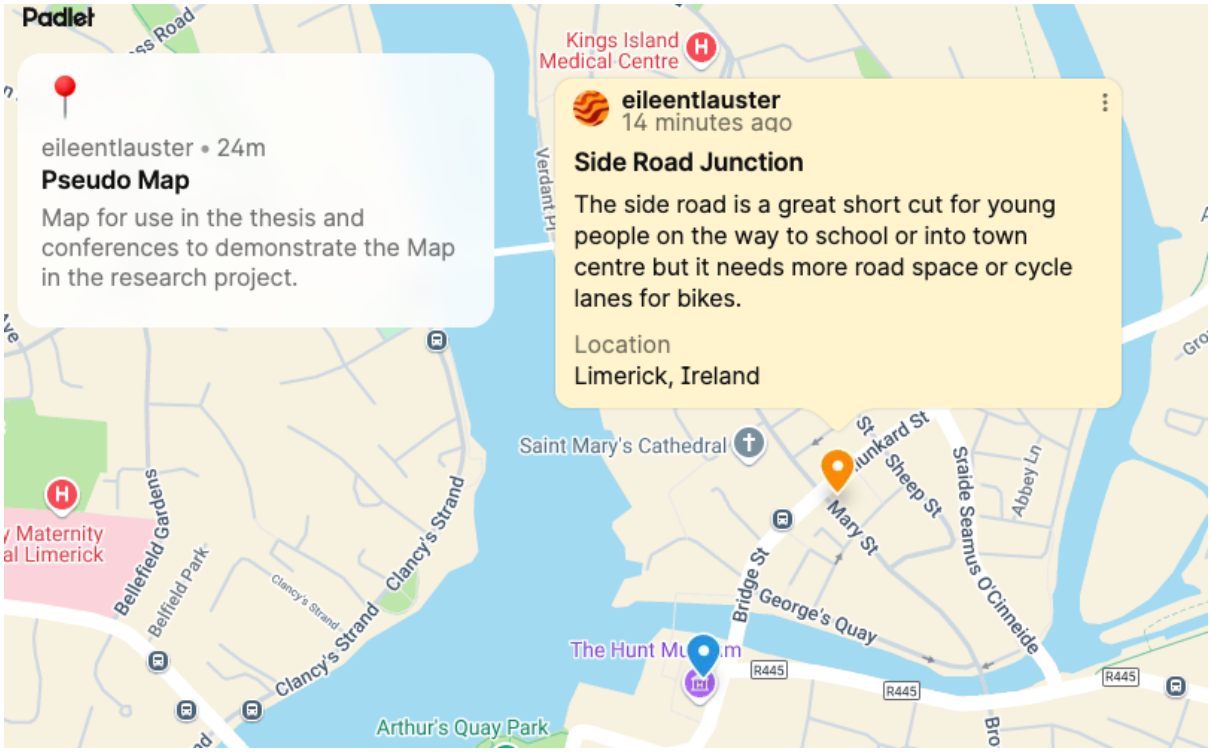
Blue Pin Example



Red Pin Example



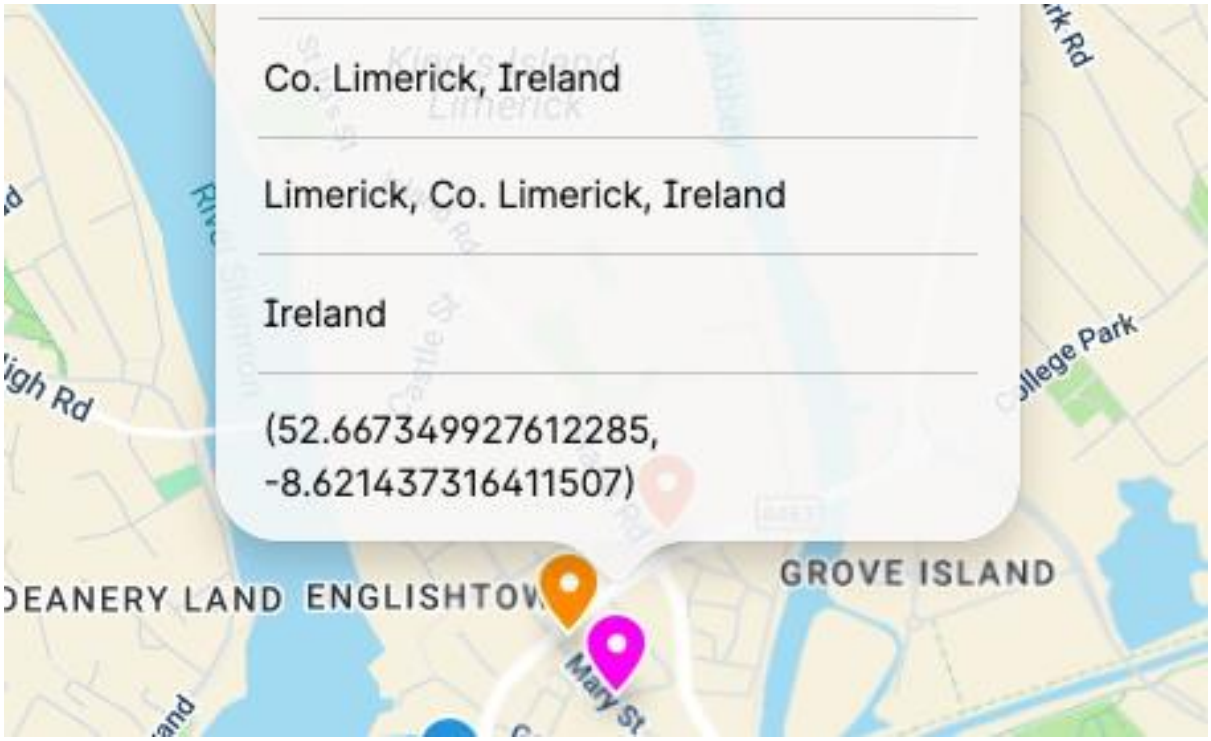
Orange Pin Example



Appendix J: Pseudonym map with pin coordinates

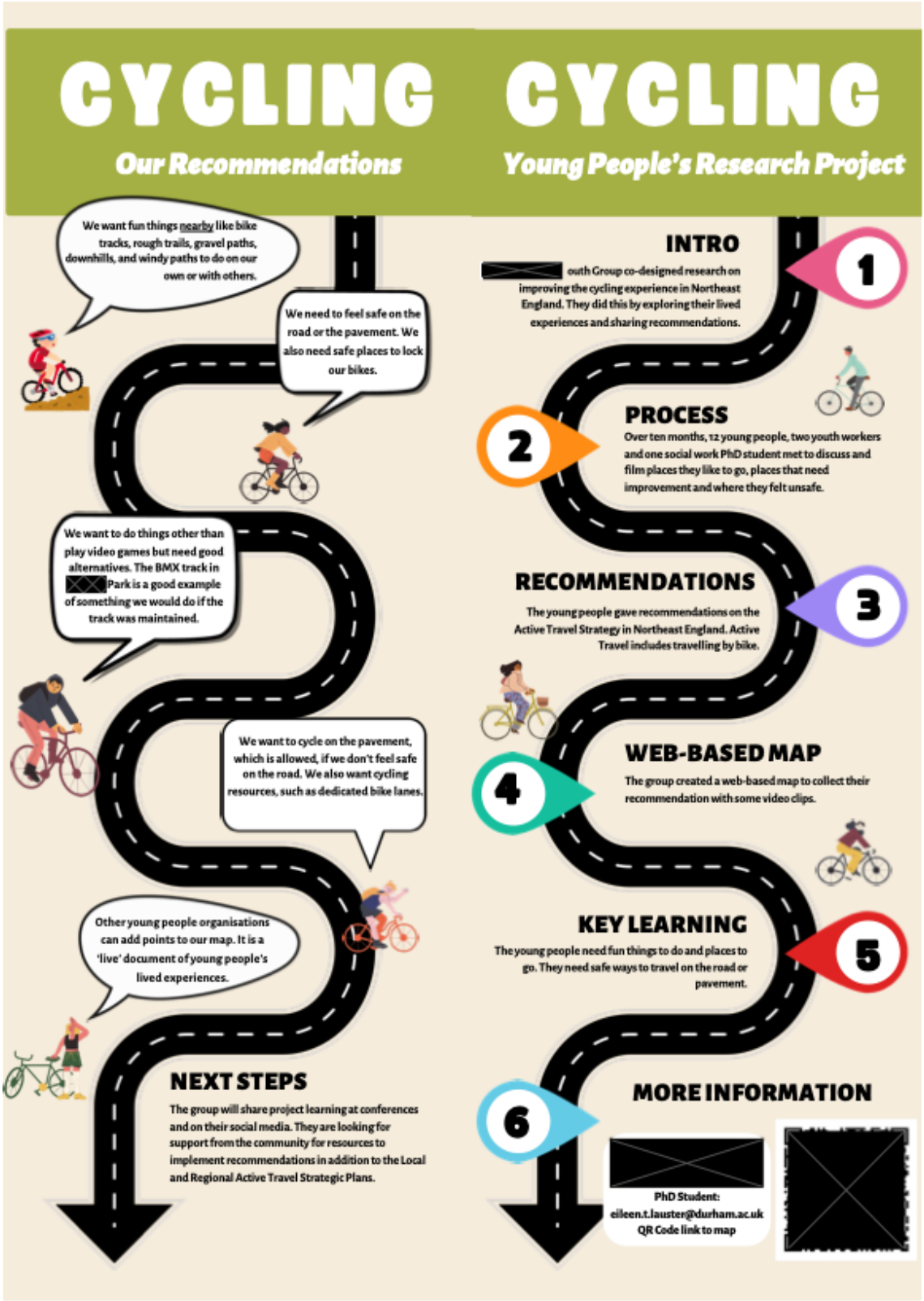
The Pink pin is different from the group's Map. The Pink pin is demonstrating using the latitude and longitude coordinates from Global Positioning System instead of a street address. Each pin's location information can be copied and transferred to another Padlet, or sent to a map app such as Google Maps or a document (Padlet, n.d.).

Pin showing position naming options when creating a pin



Appendix K: Infographic

Once printed, the sheet is folded to A5 size and glued or shared as a PDF.



Appendix L: Social Media Platforms

Although not methods in themselves for the research project, two social media platforms were used to aid communication. The YouTube Channel created specifically for the research project used a designated Gmail account. This video platform was used to upload videos, with all videos set to Private for publishing, meaning they could not be found through search engines. The Comment section for each video was disabled. The YouTube Channel for the research project served as a holding place for the group's Photovoice and Go-Along Interview videos, allowing them to be easily screened and reviewed during the Group Sessions. They could also be edited within the platform to accommodate the group members' requests for anonymity protection. The edited versions were linked to the corresponding pin on the group's Map.

The Instagram social media platform was utilised throughout the project to share photos and information about upcoming activities, as well as to solicit feedback from the young people via the group chat function. Designated for the research project, this group chat was created and maintained by a staff member of the youth organisation.

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