

**PLANNING REGIMES ON AND OFF THE GRID:  
LOW-IMPACT DWELLING, ACTIVISM AND THE  
STATE IN WEST WALES.**

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## ***Declaration***

The following thesis has been composed by the undersigned, it has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree, all quotations have been distinguished and all sources of information have been specifically acknowledged. Finally, the undersigned certifies that this thesis, and the research that it records, is all the original work of the author.

E. Forde

Date

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents ethnographic research into the practice of off-grid, low-impact dwelling in West Wales. It asks how participants imagine, construct and live lives that are low impact, and explores how this brings them into conflict with local authority planners about the proper use of land. The thesis extends anthropological theories of dwelling to critique the domestic development agenda. It demonstrates ways that low-impact *dwelling* is qualitatively different to low-impact *development*. This important distinction provides an original contribution to the existing body of literature about UK low-impact development, by revealing how inequalities implicit in the notion of development shape the possibilities for alternative models of rural land use.

Research was conducted within an ecovillage in West Wales for a period of 15 months between 2010 and 2011. Supplementary visits and short stays were arranged with participants in other sites, both ecovillages and independent autonomous dwellings. This immersive approach built a sound network of low-impact practitioners, who provided semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and opportunities for participant observation.

A new planning rationality has consolidated around the idea of sustainable development; policies in favour of low-impact development, but which remain subject to regulation, standards and models to ensure compliance with a matrix of requirements, are one of the results. Research participants and the Welsh Assembly Government hold divergent notions of low-impact dwelling in spite of models and mechanisms which would contain them both. Low-impact dwellers reject this system, or “grid”, and in doing so construct a hoped-for future in the present, a form of everyday activism.

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## **GLOSSARY**

EFA	Environmental Footprinting Analysis.
<i>hut</i>	the name given to a roundhouse, a typical low-impact dwelling.
LID	Low-impact Development.
One Wales: One Planet	Wales' strategy for sustainable development.
OPD	One Planet Development.
PCC	Pembrokeshire County Council.
Policy 52	A Pembrokeshire County Council planning policy for LIDs.
<i>scene</i>	the name given to a low-impact dwelling (generally, indoor and outdoor space).
<i>space</i>	the name used to refer to any low-impact dwelling (generally, the indoor space).
<i>trip</i>	a general term used to describe people's projects (explained more fully in Footnote 39).
TAN 6	Technical Advice Note 6, WAG policy for OPD.
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government.

## **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

In 2009 the devolved government of Wales (Welsh Assembly Government, or WAG hereafter), published a document entitled *One Wales: One Planet*, a new sustainable development strategy for Wales (WAG, 2009). This document sets out the WAG's aim to lower Wales' impact on the global environment. Following on from the prediction that Westerners' lifestyles, left uncontrolled, would consume almost five planets worth of resources, Wales aims for its people to take only 1.88 global hectares<sup>1</sup> (gha hereafter) within the lifetime of one generation (ibid: 17). In 2010, the WAG published *Technical Advice Note 6*, known as TAN 6 (WAG, 2010), which complements *One Wales: One Planet* with a provision for what is called One Planet Development (OPD hereafter).

WAG (2010) defines an OPD as a “development that through its low impact either enhances or does not significantly diminish environmental quality (ibid: 24). With OPD, the stage is set for “sustainable development” in the open countryside, something that had hitherto not been permitted in planning policy. OPDs which are located in the open countryside, typically smallholdings, are subject to the extra requirement that within five years the site must meet the “minimum needs of the inhabitants in terms of income, food, energy and waste assimilation” (ibid).

OPD represents a culmination of a long process for many of my research participants; for them it was an ending of sorts, but also a starting point. Decades of land activism in rural Wales has seen, typically, urban, English and middle-class people

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<sup>1</sup> Global hectares is a way to express resource consumption vis-à-vis the productivity of the earth. As such, only productive areas of the earth's land mass are taken into account. This way, there were 1.88 gha available per capita in 2003.

going ‘back-to-the-land’ to live an illicit existence—due to planning restrictions on living in the countryside. This practice has defined what I refer to in this thesis as a low-impact dwelling movement in the region. OPD has emerged as a result of a dialogue between this movement and the WAG, an end-point, as it were, in the story of autonomous dwelling. OPD seems to be a starting point for something else, a new plan whereby those interested in low-impact dwelling in a rural setting won't be required to obscure their existence. OPD is, in theory, the start of visibility for the low-impact dwelling movement. This thesis picks up this tale in 2010, just as OPD becomes an option for low-impact dwellers.

## **About Wales**

The “size of Wales”—roughly 8,000 square miles—is often used as a large measurement and has become synonymous with the annual destruction of the Amazonian rainforest (which is said to be “an area about the size of Wales”), among other things. Wales is, of course, much more than a large measurement, it has become absolutely critical in the low-impact dwelling movement in the UK and beyond, and as such it is the location of my research field. This is no happy accident; I aim to show in this introduction that a combination of terrain, economy and culture as well as social non-conformism and a certain separatism have facilitated the development of a context where ideas about person, nature and environment are tested against the backdrop of a post-industrial, post-devolution nation-state.

Wales/ *Cymru* is a region of the west of the UK characterised by its landscape of mountain ranges rolling into deep valleys, its language and its industrial heritage. Wales has a population of around 3 million people, mostly living in the south of Wales and in a region called “The Valleys”, with the opposing north-eastern area of Wales also being populous. The rest of Wales is relatively sparsely populated (Figure 1.).

Wales population density: by unitary authority, 2009

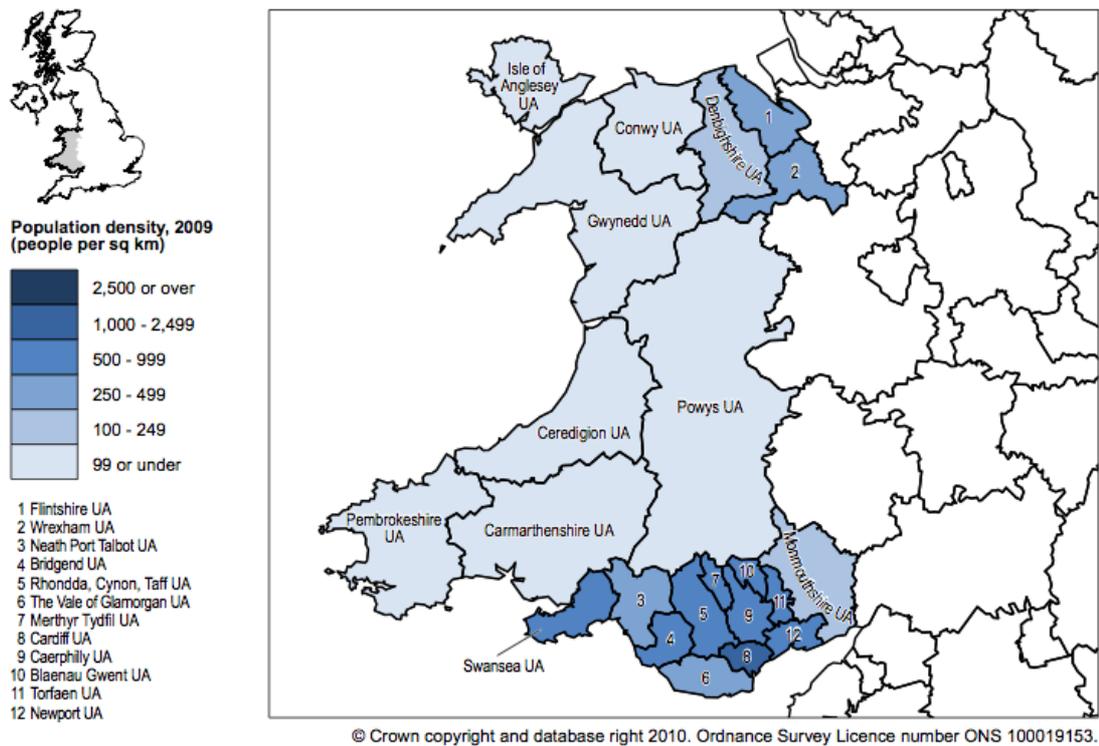


Figure 1: Wales population density map, 2009 © Crown copyright

South Wales was formerly an industrial centre for, especially, coal mining, arranged around the productive Valleys. However, citing continued industrial action, Thatcher's conservative government during the 1980s closed most of the pits, leading to a bitter 12-month stand-off during 1984–1985 dubbed “the miners' strike” which was to have a great impact upon Welsh society. As such, Wales' Valleys are still emerging from economic depression. From 2000–2006 the Valleys, along with West Wales, were classified as a European Structural Fund Objective 1 region, one of the most disadvantaged in Europe. Rural Wales, including West Wales, is characterised by pastoral farming, in which landscape is a decisive factor. Rich undulating valley bottoms are more readily productive of dairy and perhaps even agricultural crops than

rough, barren hilltops more suited to sheep raising (Caplan, 2010: 14; 2012: 17), or, more recently, carbon sequestering.

Civically, modern Wales is defined by its National Assembly which has sat in Cardiff, the capital, since 1997. Politically, the Welsh Assembly Government is dominated by the Labour party, which given the country's industrial heritage has been powerful in Wales. The Welsh Assembly consists of political parties similar to the UK parliament, plus Plaid Cymru, the Welsh National Party, currently occupying 11 seats which equates to 18% of the seats, behind Labour (30 seats, 50%) and Conservatives (14 seats, 23%) and ahead of the Liberals (5 seats 8%). Often referred to as “the Principality”, Wales' status as an autonomous nation is dubious given its place in the structure of the British Monarchy<sup>2</sup>. The idea of Wales as part of Britain is expressed by this closeness to the established order, but Osmond (2002) notes the ease with which Welsh people have a sense of their Britishness as something distinct from their Welshness. Neither concept compromises the other (ibid: 85).

### **Research “bro”<sup>3</sup>**

The specific research field is located in West Wales, which spans the northern/ eastern regions of Pembrokeshire, north Carmarthenshire and south Ceredigion<sup>4</sup>. “West” Wales is an informally recognised area of Wales which is based around the ancient kingdom of Deheubarth, and more recently the former county of Dyfed. Dyfed is no longer an administrative region of Wales in a formal sense, but remains a useful reference point

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<sup>2</sup> In Britain, the main title of the sovereign's male heir is “Prince of Wales”.

<sup>3</sup> *Bro*—(Welsh) region or locality. A *bro* roughly equates to a 15 mile radius.

<sup>4</sup> West Wales is closer spatially and linguistically to South Wales, but is conceptually distinct. “South West Wales” would also be inaccurate as this includes areas such as south Pembrokeshire, which is culturally and linguistically an Anglicised enclave, separated by the “Landsker line”, from north Pembrokeshire (Welsh -speaking).

(as in Heddlu Dyfed-Powys Police) and continues in a somewhat hidden form in institutions such as Hywel Dda health board, which is responsible for the delivery of healthcare in the region<sup>5</sup>. Given the physical character of the area, and Wales in general, a more useful set of reference points to demarcate the research field might be features such as river valleys. As such, the rivers Teifi, Tywi and Cothi are important here (Figure 2).

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<sup>5</sup> Hywel Dda health board is named after Hywel Dda (Hywel the Good) a medieval king of Deheubarth.

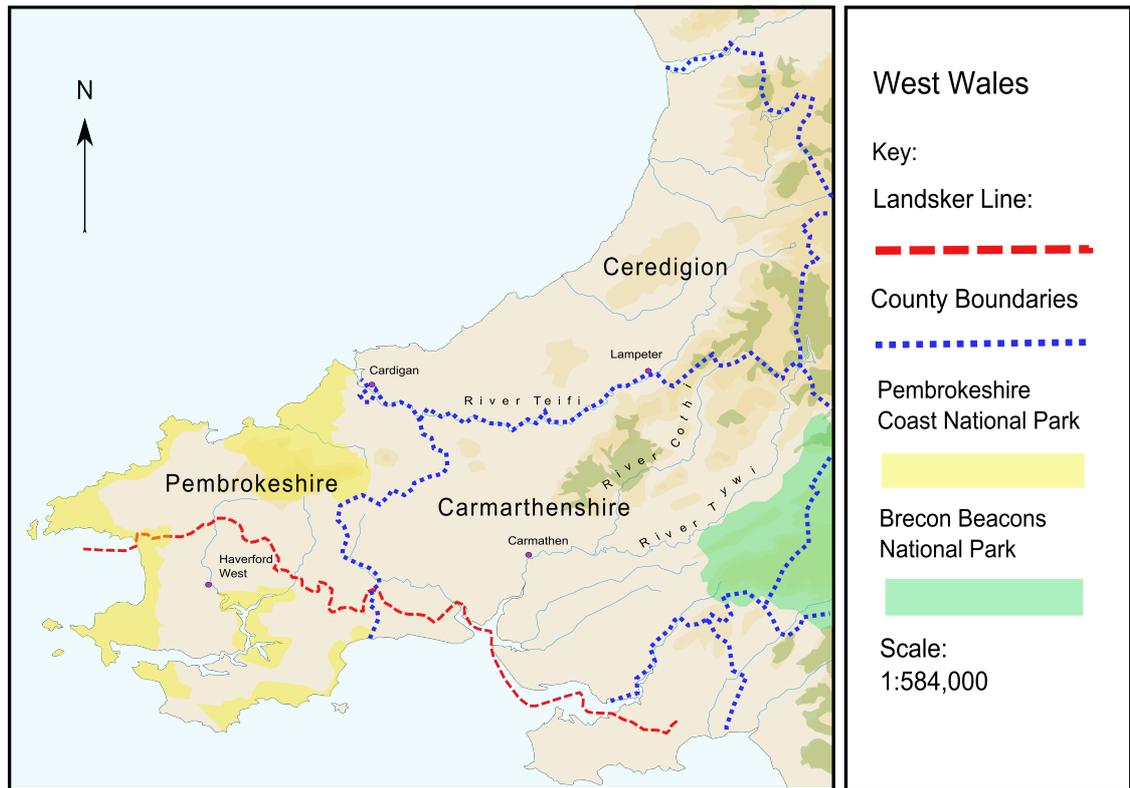


Figure 2: West Wales map (c) Forde

West Wales is a rural region, with a local economy based largely on farming (Hutson, 2003), and tourism. This part of Wales is considered to be culturally and linguistically distinct (James, 2003, J. Williams, 2003) with a high proportion of first-language Welsh speakers compared to other regions of Wales<sup>6</sup>. *Y Fro Gymraeg*, the Welsh heartland (Balsom, 1985: 6), has seen a steady rise in inward migration by, largely, English people (James, 2003: 151). In relation to rural Brittany, Maynard (1997) has demonstrated that ethnic and rural identities are mutually reinforcing, and that these categories are imagined as rustic and folkloric, thus appealing to the urban middle classes, whereas Williams (2003) has noted that there is a link between inward migration to rural Pembrokeshire and people that she refers to as “alternatives” (ibid: 153). My research also indicates that the combined factors of the availability of

<sup>6</sup> Welsh language use surveys 2004–2006, (Welsh language Board, 2008)

farmland, and an interest in Wales' "Celtic" heritage have contributed to the significant amount of in-migration to the region. Accordingly, there are many types of ecovillage in the area, and certainly no shortage of examples of people living in small scale, self-built homes, off-grid and often invisibly.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THESIS**

### **1.1 THESIS AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This thesis examines two low impact models of land use practiced in off-grid dwellings and ecovillages in rural Wales. One model that has emerged from settlement practice I refer to as low-impact *dwelling*; the other, which is policy led, is called low-impact *development*. The two approaches are very different, and the primary task of the thesis is to explore these models, comparing and contrasting the two approaches. When I refer to low-impact dwelling, and when I use the term low-impact *development* I do not use these terms interchangeably; low-impact *development* is a part of Welsh planning policy, low-impact *dwelling* is my term for what was encountered during fieldwork. Whilst remaining different, these models do influence each other. Policies are after all culturally produced, and are anthropological phenomena (Shore and Wright, 1997: 6); part of this study is therefore an analysis of the mutual interaction and influence, between planning policy and the wider context of a local low-impact dwelling network in rural West Wales. Scott's notion that in some cases informal practice is essential for the proper functioning of the formal order (Scott, 1998: 310) is considered here in the context of a new planning rationality (Murdoch and Abram, 2002) in favour of sustainable development. The thesis therefore asks, how does the practice of low-impact dwelling interact with and inform planning and development policy in West Wales? In order to answer this question it is important to set out what is meant by low-impact dwelling and why highlighting its distinction from development should be so important.

I borrow the term dwelling from Tim Ingold who explored the concept in a collection of essays in *Perception of the Environment* (2000). Ingold has latterly rejected his specific usage of the term; in the preface to the 2011 edition of *Perception*

*of the Environment* Ingold explains that his usage of dwelling has been almost apolitical, and that this is somewhat dangerous given that a specifically phenomenological usage of the term was originally coined by Heidegger (2011: xviii). I shall suggest that these difficulties can be overcome, and that it is worthwhile to retain the idea that “dwelling” breaks down a conceptual separation between human and non-human worlds. I would like to propose to read Ingold's version of dwelling in conjunction with Susana Narotzky's essay on “provisioning” (2005) from which should emerge a political economy of dwelling.

Ingold's usage of dwelling primarily contrasts the mode of habitation of hunter-gatherers with villagers to explore dwelling vs. building perspectives, but the analogy might be extended. Unplanned and planned dwellings differ, the former are expressions of “being-in-the-world” or dwelling as part of an environment, the latter are merely containers for dwelling that occurs separately from the environment. As will be seen, autonomous low-impact dwelling is distinct from developments which are mediated by planning policy, even when those are also intended to be low impact. Physical appearance and location aside, I will show that the mode of dwelling practiced by low-impact dwellers differentiates this from other ways of dwelling in ways that are important practically, discursively and ideologically. This is where theoretically “provisioning” can enhance “dwelling”; Narotzky presents provisioning as a useful way to link the production and consumption ends of economic life to address key issues such as housing and food security (2005: 78). Whereas a dwelling approach understands that people are situated entirely within their environment, a provisioning approach acknowledges the points along provisioning pathways which shape, constrict or make possible differing forms of production and consumption. The distinction between

dwelling and development in this thesis implicitly contains these notions. As such, I present ethnographic accounts which illustrate a common *techne*<sup>7</sup> amongst low-impact dwellers and I contrast this with the sort of *techne* required for compliance with OPD. As such, the policy restrictions on rural land use are examined both in terms of a philosophical separation between person and environment which low-impact dwellers do not accept, and the institutionalisation of restrictions to certain paths of provisioning which manifest different conceptions of personhood.

Since the 1970s, rural Wales has become a centre for counter-cultural back-to-the-land projects (Halfacree, 2006), currently represented as a low-impact movement (Pickerill, 2013). The ethnography of two key research sites in West Wales, similar but contrasting ecovillages, as well as several independent low-impact dwellings in the research area, informed the research questions. As well as being a model of development planning, low-impact dwelling is also an emergent process affected by specific, and not necessarily stable, socio-cultural and economic conditions typical of West Wales. The thesis asks, what are the conditions that see low-impact dwellers either engaging with or disengaging from formal planning requirements? My contrasting field sites and participants illustrate some of the different approaches that low-impact dwellers may take when situating themselves vis-à-vis planning, and other state agencies. The thesis explores what is at stake when people go “off-grid”, and new off-grid networks are created and exploited.

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<sup>7</sup> I use this term to refer to the specific tools, techniques and technologies that all low-impact dwellers were familiar with. My usage is in line with the original Greek notion of the application of skill and cunning, though I acknowledge that the term has a philosophical afterlife and that many different usages abound.

The thesis critiques existing literature on “intentional communities”—which presumes that “community” is a fact in alternative co-residential spaces—and suggests other interpretations which might be more appropriate. In particular, volunteers and volunteer labour provide a key example of an extensive network, or community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), which low-impact dwellers may access or contribute to as part of their low-impact dwelling strategies. The thesis aims to show how new formal planning regimes have been shaped by informal low-impact dwelling practice, demonstrating in turn that low-impact dwelling is shaped by informal encounters in the context of the wider community of practice in which low-impact dwelling is situated.

## **1.2 THEORETICAL CONTEXT.**

In general terms, this ethnography explores the interaction of two development models which are concerned with the environmental impact of dwelling in West Wales. This thesis is about low-impact *dwelling*, an idea which encompasses Ingold's (2011) notion of a dwelling perspective (ibid: 185-187). According to a dwelling perspective, building emerges from and is shaped by human activity within an environment. Ingold's work is an interpretation of Heidegger's (2001) 1951 essay, *Building Dwelling Thinking*. Here, Heidegger outlines the relation of building to dwelling. Because dwelling is habitual, it can seem like a mere consequence of building (ibid: 146), however, Heidegger argues that dwelling is the very relationship between man (sic) and space (ibid: 155), whereas “building, by virtue of constructing locations, is a founding and joining of spaces” (ibid: 156), building, then is preceded by dwelling, thus dwelling shapes and projects itself onto building.

Dwelling is thus different to building, an idea which I extend to this material by contrasting dwelling with development (which could stand for building). I refer to participants' activities as low-impact dwelling. Planning policy, however, is concerned with low-impact *development*. I suggest that much of the tension in the field between low-impact *techne*, and planning and buildings regulations derive from this disparity. Ingold (2011) has acknowledged that some of the strongest critique on his “dwelling perspective” highlights the absence of the political (ibid: xvii–xviii). I agree that this is problematic and it is my concern to show how inequalities are bound up with development and shape research participants encounters with the state. To this end, it is useful to adopt a provisioning approach to compensate for any perceivable lack of politics in Ingold's theory. In fact, provisioning, as Narotzky (2005) presents it is perfectly compatible with dwelling as Ingold (2011[2000]) presents it. For Narotzky, a provisioning approach follows the material paths of the production of meaning to uncover issues of power and meaning in making and consuming (ibid: 91). Translated to the context of low-impact dwelling, a combined dwelling-provisioning approach shows how the rejection of separation between person and environment that low-impact dwelling represents is shaped by extant institutional power structures, like planning, and equally forges new approaches to provisioning based on rejection of or adaptation to/ of these institutions. Several clear themes have emerged from the ethnography; broad concepts such as nature and the environment, the state and community are contained within the different formulations of low-impact dwelling that are explored. The tensions that emerge from the interplay of different low-impact models illustrate what can happen when different conceptions of these key issues share the same analytical space.

### **1.2.1 Complicating states**

I employ a Foucauldian notion of state-ness, presenting state-effects (Trouillot, 2001), and in particular the concept of governance, as a useful way to conceptualise the interplay of the many different facets which participate in formulating and enacting plans—from the locally organised co-operative groups to global political organisations—and the way that that authority is brought to bear on low-impact dwellers. While planning is performed as a local issue, by local councils, it is equally a global issue. For example, Agenda 21, an international agreement on the environment and sustainability, has had a clear influence on Wales' strategy for sustainable development, and in turn, low-impact dwellers; in fact, by describing their projects as “low-impact development” people are reproducing some of the key discourses of neo-liberalism and global environmental politics. Though criticised as a product of European nation-states of the twentieth century, Foucault's studies in governance do resonate well with this research context.

The relationship between agencies of the state and low-impact dwellers is not straightforward, and illustrates some of the tensions in governmentality. In this case, whilst planning will in theory allow for low-impact dwellings, in practice many LIDs have challenged the rules of other regulatory bodies, in particular buildings regulations. Sharma and Gupta (2006) characterise this as *subversion*, a common scenario between different aspects of governmentality, which sees “officials at lower levels of state bureaucracy [who] may not support programs initiated by others higher up in the hierarchy, and might even actively try to sabotage the execution and goals of initiatives planned from above” (ibid: 15). It is clear that the wide-ranging sustainable development strategy for Wales which incorporates One Planet Developments is not

fully integrated into the everyday practices of planners and buildings' inspectors at the local authority level.

Anthropologists have argued for some time that in a post-colonial and increasingly globalised world, the role of nation-states has been reconfigured. While debate ranges between the argument that nation-states are increasingly irrelevant, to arguments that suggest they are more relevant than ever, two things are clear. Firstly, state effects are increasingly uncoupled from what are traditionally regarded as state institutions; and secondly, state is no longer approximate to nation. Though not exactly new observations, it is crucial to reiterate these points in order to theoretically locate West Wales as a research in the broader context of a fairly newly devolved Welsh Assembly Government. It is my contention that the One Planet Development Strategy illustrates some of these tensions quite intuitively. OPD is Wales' defining (vis-à-vis England at least) spatial planning strategy, and it fully embraces the discourses of global-environmental politics. More specifically Agenda 21's Chapter 28 concerns the idea of disseminating Rio's message at the level of local government effectively by-passing the sovereignty of the territorial state. Seen in this light, planning becomes, then, a germane subject with which to explore the re/configuration of the state in Wales.

### ***1.2.2 Critical approaches to planning studies***

If policy has not enjoyed a coherent treatment by anthropologists (Shore and Wright, 1997), certainly domestic planning has not traditionally been a central anthropological concern either. Abram (1998) suggests that much of the critique levelled at the way Western development rationales are foisted onto recipient countries omits a rigorous examination of the rationalities which underpin domestic planning regimes. In this

research context, planning is regarded by research participants as a repressive, modernist regime which is firmly on the side of development, and developers. Participants go so far as to state that it represents a “different world”. This point-of-view must be seen as a product of what Ward (1976) has called the professionalisation of planning. A process which Yiftachel (2001: 5) notes has evolved in close association with the developers' trades, such as building and civil engineering. That planning is therefore allied with development cannot be a surprise. Whereas research participants routinely practice technologies of space and self which act in a similar way as planning regimes, these technologies are interpreted differently because they are not coded in the same way as top-down, state planning regimes. Scott (1998) explores this point of divergence, concluding that informal practice by necessity comes to underpin the formal order (ibid: 310).

In this thesis I explore the interplay of formal and informal spatial planning, finding indeed that Scott's notion rings true: the example of illicit low-impact dwelling is projected into Wales' new strategy for sustainable development. By contrast to many other studies of planning disputes, in this case the “environmentalist” rationality is pro-development, albeit within certain consensual boundaries. What is at stake is the notion that owners or occupiers have a right to live and dwell on land in small-scale, self-built homes, a right which planning effectively reserves only for those who demonstrate a shared rationality. As such, it has been important to explore research participants views on nature and dwelling. What low-impact dwellers makes apparent is that human dwelling practices are not somehow considered “unnatural”, and furthermore the state, such that it is, is an inadequate “container” (Trouillot 2001) to hold social desires about the correct moral treatment of the environment. Low-impact

dwellers often prefer to take action in spite of planning controls. While they do not all occupy the same position vis-à-vis many of the institutions which shape their world, on planning low-impact dwellers share a consensus which is significant enough to be expounded in this thesis. As such, competing visions of West Wales, as countryside, livelihood, heritage and playground, play out and are shaped by what Yiftachel (1998) has termed the “dark side” of planning, the structural violence of the state (Graeber, 2012) which flexes its power by the threat of demolition, eviction, court summons and fines for transgressors.

### **1.2.3 “Community” in the Welsh context**

Investigating the political economy of the state and state processes in this manner is intended to be a welcome development to the growing body of Welsh ethnography. Early ethnographies of Wales were part of an emerging “community studies” tradition, which stressed equilibrium as a quality of community life, framing the outside world as the source of change and challenge (G. Day, 1998: 234; Aull-Davies, 2003: 8). This model gradually gave way to a more problematised notion of ‘community’. For instance, Trosset’s 1993 ethnography consciously attempted to transcend the notion of community in her account of Welsh-speaking Wales. From an initial deconstruction of the notion of community (e.g. MacFarlane, 1977), to its reconstruction—indeed, one that acknowledges that community *is* a construction (e.g. Cohen, 1985)—as an analytical term, community has retained its position as Amit notes, as a “vehicle for interrogating the dialectic between historical social transformations and social cohesions” (Amit, 2002: 2). This dialectic is seen to operate in this research context, between broad changes in the way land is used, and how that use is regarded as proper or (im)moral, and how different groups, such as low-impact dwellers, or indeed

planners, mobilise around such notions. In particular, proper development is integral to notions of community. It is to these broader questions that I orient the exploration of community in this thesis. As well as providing an account of low-impact dwellers in rural West Wales, the thesis seeks to confront the salience of the notion of community in the ecovillage context, a context in which community gains a particular if contested usage.

The ideas of locality, network and identity are three ways to understand communities, as suggested by Aull-Davies (2003, 2-5), who also notes that these strands are not equally significant in every community. UK back-to-the-land projects involving multiple persons or families tend to be regarded as “communal” or “communities” almost by default (Halfacree, 2006), which tends to gloss over any deeper questions about community. In my research field at least, this is a mistake, and material will be presented which questions this presumption of community. Returning to Aull-Davies' ideas about how different aspects of community compete and converge differently in each example, in this thesis, the notion of network has clearly emerged as the most useful way to account for community life. As such, and as Aull-Davies notes (2003: 4), “locality and the relationship of community to place re-enters the area of community studies as one of the questions to be answered rather than defining the object of study”. This resonates with research participants' views about nature, land and landscape, and the relationship to place is a theme which recurs as a pivotal part of why research participants come into conflict, or indeed dialogue, with planners over the occupation of particular parcels of land and not others.

I have presented the research field and participants as part of a low-impact dwelling movement, and off-grid network in a move which mirrors my participants' general ambivalence to ideas about community and whose commonality was to be found in shared practice rather than location or indeed ideological consensus. My research participants<sup>8</sup> were actively constructing worlds outside of the grid, whereas community must be seen as part of the logic of the grid (MacFarlane, 1977). As such, I follow Day (2005), who notes that to accept the notion of community unquestioningly is to risk misunderstanding much of the politics and ideology behind alternative social movements. As well as using the idea of networks as a way to approach community, I examine the concepts of networks and grids as a significant way for participants to share knowledge and acquire skills pertaining to low-impact dwelling. This theoretical strand ties this ethnography with the notion of the newest social movements (Day, 2005), a plural collective of countercultural movements, which low-impact dwelling is a part of. In this way, low-impact dwelling is a new strand of counter-cultural back-to-the-land projects (Halfacree, 2006) in West Wales. This particular movement emerges from a social context which combines alternative lifestyles, the New Age, the romanticisation of the Celtic identity, the hippy legacy, punk and DIY<sup>9</sup> (McKay, 1998), and the commune movement, but it is focused on enacting social and technological changes which its practitioners feel can meet forthcoming social and environmental challenges.

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<sup>8</sup> My use of the term “research participants” rather than “informants” is deliberate. While it may seem awkward, it has been important in this field not to use the term “informant”. Although widely accepted by anthropologists, some participants said it invoked the idea of police informants, something which many people, especially those living without planning permission, were sensitive about. I chose “participants” because the rejection of “informant”—standard anthropological language—reminded me of how delicate my position was. Although this thesis cannot be thought of as a collaboration between myself and the research participants, it is true that it was only made possible by active participation.

<sup>9</sup> A quick word is necessary to qualify that punk DIY must not be confused with home improvement DIY! Punk DIY rejects consumerism and professionalisation, its adherents learn and freely share the skills they need through infoshops, co-operative projects and other networks (see McKay, 1998 or Graeber 2009 for more).

#### **1.2.4 Ecovillages, nature and environmental anthropology**

There is a growing anthropological interest in ecovillages, indicated by such recent volumes such as the edited collection *Environmental Anthropology Engaging Ecotopia* (Lockyer and Veteto, 2013), to which both anthropologists and human geographers have contributed, and provided chapters on topics such as permaculture and bioregionalism. Over the last decade, however, the majority of ethnographic research of the low-impact dwelling movement in the UK have emerged from the discipline of human geography, which in particular explores the transition movement, sustainability and the notion of everyday activism (Juckes Maxey, 2002; Pickerill and Maxey, 2009; Halfacree, 2006; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Lee, 2013). This literature has not tended to confront the question of development and the implicit notion of progress which it contains. My particular contribution to this growing body of work is to examine discrepancies between how low impact is imagined and suggest that the general approach to low-impact dwelling found in the field differs qualitatively from the low-impact *development* model in planning. I show how the notion of dwelling interacts with and informs the development agenda for Wales. My research has shown that as the low-impact movement becomes steadily incorporated into the development agenda, many of the key aspects of low-impact dwelling are lost or compromised. Thus, the distinction between *dwelling* and *development* which I propose in this thesis may be a pivotal part of understanding how two models compete to shape the low-impact movement in Wales.

### **1.3 THEMES IN WELSH ETHNOGRAPHY: NATIONALISM, CELTICISM AND ETHNICITY.**

### **1.3.1 Nationalism**

The emergence of a body of ethnography of Wales is a part of the development of European ethnography more generally. It was largely the Aberystwyth school of the 1950s and 1960s which pioneered ethnographies of rural Wales (Rees, 1950; Jenkins, 1971; Frankenburg, 1957; Rosser and Harris, 1965; Emmett, 1964, 1982a, 1982b), cementing the “stasis and change” model into the ethnographic canon. (but see Aull-Davies, 2003: 10-11) As such, Wales, along with Ireland, Scotland and Brittany were subjects of an early ethnographic interest in the “Celtic Fringe” (D.C. Harvey et al. 2002) which mainly saw the emergence of ethnographies of rural regions acting as the exotic aspect of a centre/ periphery dyad prevalent in the social science at the time, and much later on. The notion of Wales as a peripheral region of the UK has been roundly challenged by political and civic devolution. Prior to devolution, and the preceding consolidation of nationalist politics in Wales, Morgan (1971) argues that Wales’ nationalism had had no particular institutional focal point since the twelfth century (ibid: 154). Welsh nationalism, therefore, took other forms of expression. Jones (2008) for instance, notes how Welsh nationalism coalesced around the issue of language. Rejecting modernist theories of nationalism which portray nationalism as a hegemonic, elite practice, Jones illustrates how a geography of nationalism can inform a rather more social constructivist view of actors at all positions in formal hierarchies influencing and shaping social affects, in this case, nationalism. In particular, Jones (himself part of the latter day Aberystwyth School of human geographers) illustrates how Alwyn D. Rees (as mentioned above, author of one of the pioneering Welsh ethnographies) was a prominent figure in the particular form of Welsh nationalism emerging from Abersytwyth University in the 1970s. Focussing on the creation of a Welsh medium hall of residence at the university, the example illustrates how academics, students, Aberystwyth residents and activists from all over Wales performed several acts of civil

disobedience in the town which came to define a wider campaign for bilingualism in Wales. In this example language and nation are entwined and nationalist politics are performed in a public sphere, in the absence of the formal institutions that have emerged since devolution.

Welsh devolution, best viewed as a *process* beginning in 1997, has seen the incremental devolution of policy and decision-making powers to the National Assembly. Planning, whether strategic or spatial, is one of the key areas in which the Welsh assembly has greater, and growing, autonomy from the UK parliament. Although I acknowledge that OPD is a product of the process of devolution, as it differs incredibly from England's recent National Planning Policy Framework (2012), the politics or practicalities of devolution are not a main focus of this thesis. Other scholars have suggested that devolution marks a cultural reconfiguration, for instance Harvey et. al. associate the pace of devolution in "Celtic" nations as an indicator of a resurgence in "Pan-Celticism" (2002: 1). Cohen (2000) however shows how the question of Scottish independence was not regarded as being as significant on Whalsay as the prospect of the devolution of government powers to Shetland (ibid: 155). It might be useful to consider the primacy of the regional or local in the context of planning in Wales; as I will discuss in Chapter Eight, the relationship between global environmental politics and locally enacted planning regimes are mediated rather awkwardly by national-scale governance.

### **1.3.2 Celticism**

The idea of Wales' Celticism is something that has been seized upon by ethnographers of Wales from all disciplinary backgrounds. In answer to Nigel Rapport's contention that those with an anthropological interest in Britain "had to blood themselves on exotica" before being permitted to work on the seemingly rather more mundane home

turf (2002: 5) it seems that an alternative approach has been to seek out the unusual or exotic at home, (e.g. Okely, 1983) or to mobilise constructs such as the “Celtic Fringe” (McKechnie, 1993), or indeed *Y Fro Cymraeg* (Balsom, 1985: 6), both of which I shall discuss below.

The meaning of “Celtic” is ambiguous and the mythic is inseparable from the historic (McDonald, 1986: 335). Perhaps as Harvey et. al. (2002) suggest, “the category is purely a social construction, stitched together from written sources, literary endeavours and archaeological remains” (ibid: 2). Fernandez (2000) suggests that the notion of the Celtic Fringe is a “popular geography” which contains common and widespread ideas about centre/periphery relations and, certainly in Fernandez’s example (the English/ Scottish border), contains moral notions about the barbarian north vis-à-vis the civilised South (ibid: 123-124). This notion is applicable to the Welsh case, too and is a recurrent theme in portrayals of Wales, at least since Borrow’s (1862) *Wild Wales*. According to Fernandez, this dynamic concerns containment on the one hand, and what is regarded as normative on the other; secondly, the relationship is based on the “creative reconceptualisation of that or those contained by a process of displacement”(ibid: 132). With regard to Celticism (Fernandez’s focus) regional or ethnic identities are reimagined as the corresponding “centre” is disaggregated, by either appropriating its power(s) or denying its existence (ibid). As will be seen in this ethnography, both these processes operate in the context of low-impact dwelling in West Wales; those who have committed to informal low-impact dwelling in general reject the power of planners of whatever origin, whereas planning under the Welsh Assembly Government is seen to be increasingly differentiated from, at least, the English planning regimes.

### **1.3.3 Language: Wyt ti'n Gymro/ Gymraes<sup>10</sup>**

“Celticism” must be a tempting idea for scholars of Wales to explore due to the Welsh language, a Brythonic Gaelic language close to Breton or *Breizh* that links Wales to other “Celtic” nations. A focus on Welsh-speaking has been the usual way to account for Wales’ ethnic diversity. Balsom’s (1985) influential “Three-Wales-Model”, in which the interplay of language and chosen nationality define the analysis, became a popular way to account for the co-existence of an English-speaking Welsh Wales, a Welsh-speaking Welsh Wales, and a “British Wales” (ibid: 5) and a persistent theme in ethnographies and geographies of Wales (e.g. Bowie, 1993; Mars, 1999; Osmond, 2002). *Yr iaith Gymraeg*—the Welsh language—therefore, is a key marker of ethnicity, and is often a point of pride and inclusivity. Even within the three-Wales-model, what is constituted by the Welsh language is rather fragmentary. Language has at times been a divisive thing, with strongly localised dialects demarcating “other” very plainly. Even amongst *Cymru Cymraeg* (Welsh-speaking Welsh people), South Walians call North Walians “Gogs”, from *gogledd*, meaning north. North Walians call South Walians “*Hwntws*”, which literally means “beyond”. This comes from the expression “*tu hwnt i'r mynydd*”, which means “the other side of the mountain” (Cadair Idris, near Dolgellau). Osmond (2002) notes that the rise of Welsh-speaking institutions and media signal a new era of Welsh language as a tool for inclusiveness among Welsh speakers from all regions (ibid: 75). Of course, the Welsh Assembly is one of the institutions which is based on the idea of a single Wales, something which is also projected by the name of the *One Wales: One Planet* strategy.

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<sup>10</sup> Are you a Welsh-speaking man/ woman?

Bowie (1993) notes that in Gwynedd, being Welsh-speaking is equated with being Welsh, the two are indivisible; to be non-Welsh-speaking was to be not-Welsh (ibid: 177). The ability to speak Welsh as a second language, or the willingness to learn Welsh, were approved of by Gwynedd people but didn't bring learners any closer to being seen as Welsh in the locality, regardless of their fluency (ibid). During my time in West Wales, another region of Welsh-speaking Wales, it quickly became apparent that a well-placed *p'nhawn-dda*<sup>11</sup>, or *diolch*<sup>12</sup> engendered a warm response or even led to a friendly chat—often in English—which may not otherwise have taken place. The Welsh I did learn was more through immersion in the country before and after the field research for this thesis which, as will become clear, was based primarily in English-speaking communities of not-Welsh people. My use of Welsh was limited to opportunities outside of research-proper.

Even though there are others markers, for *Cymru Cymraeg*, therefore, speaking the Welsh language is a key marker of identity. Colin Rosser and Christopher Harris construct a picture of 1950–1960s Swansea in which kinship is the primary social bond, although we do hear from Griffith Hughes, Rosser and Harris' informant that Welsh, as the language of Chapel, had until recently defined the social proximity of consanguinal and affinal kin:

“we were all in the Chapel, you see—not necessarily the same one, but we all went somewhere—and Welsh was the language for everybody...

Take ours now. Only Dai and Lilian and their children belong to the

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<sup>11</sup> More correctly, prynhawn-da (good afternoon).

<sup>12</sup> Thanks.

Chapel and still keep up the Welsh. It's a treat to hear the children talking”

(1965: 11)

By contrast, Mr Hughes explains that his grandchildren who have an English mother who is not Welsh-speaking nor part of the Chapel do not speak Welsh and says, “It really hurts the Mam (Mr Hughes' wife) to have to talk to them in English when they come over here on a Saturday” (ibid, my parentheses).

Clearly then, speaking the Welsh language is intertwined with other aspects of Welsh cultural life and cannot be analysed in isolation. Rather than focussing on language alone, Trosset (1993) suggests that Welshness is performative, and her ethnography of Gwynedd examines the affective roles and ways of being that comprise being Welsh—egalitarianism, martyrdom, emotionalism, performance and *hiraeth* as she sees it. Bowie, also discussing Gwynedd, makes a similar observation, and notes that as well as commanding Welsh as a first language, being born in Wales and having reputable Welsh relatives are essential criteria for being regarded as Welsh: one or other of these categories is not enough (Bowie, 1993: 177). For example, Bowie notes that the South Walians she encountered in Gwynedd had internalised an English identity despite having previously identified as Welsh (ibid: 176). Remarkably the status of Welsh-learner in Gwynedd, even for very accomplished speakers, seemed to heighten perceived ethnic differences rather than diminish them as hoped. One informant—working as a professional Welsh translator—had felt accepted as a Welshman in Dyfed, but he was not accepted as truly Welsh in Gwynedd. Bowie suggests that the difference between Welsh/English is symbolic and could be equally substituted for

insider/outsider (ibid), but reconciling this with Trosset's ideas—in particular egalitarianism—we can see that the status of Welsh speaker, though apparently important, is perhaps less “Welsh” than the connection to reputable Welsh people.

Bowie's 1993 portrayal of Gwynedd was pre-devolution, but discussing a post-devolution Wales Osmond (2002) suggests that—given its new privilege in the Welsh education system—language has ceased to be the “hot potato” issue that it once was, as more young Welsh people from all regions and ethnic backgrounds learn an everyday use of their language (ibid: 75). The misconception that Welsh people “only start speaking Welsh when a non-Welsh speaker enters their presence” can be exposed: in my wider field region Welsh was ubiquitous, it was most Welsh people's first language, and first choice of language. The number of English words adapted for Welsh<sup>13</sup> and the ease by which bilingual Welsh speakers flit into English whilst speaking<sup>14</sup> may give this impression, but it certainly was not my experience.

#### **1.3.4 Models of Wales**

In rural West Wales there are clearly defined social worlds. On one hand are *Y Cymro*, *Cymru Cymraeg* (literally, “Wales Welsh”, J. Williams, 1996: 8), or *Cymro/ Cymraes glân* (literally, pure Welshman or woman, Trosset, 1993: 22). Members of this group lived their lives in Welsh. In my research field this group were often members of the local farming community<sup>15</sup>, whose institutions are characterised by permanence and

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<sup>13</sup> e.g. *tacsi*/taxi or *garej*/ garage.

<sup>14</sup> For instance numbers are far easier in English, e.g. twenty-two would be expressed in the format, two-tens-and-two, and “os gwellwch yn dda” (please) sometimes becomes “plis”.

<sup>15</sup> Although many people were not presently engaged in farming they were not far removed from this heritage, something which space does not allow me to explore fully.

continuity, and a sense of people and place inalienable from “the land”<sup>16</sup> (cf. Hurn, 2008 and Trosset, 1993). Trosset notes how the distinctiveness of the *bro* (a small region, 10-20 square miles) is a significant part of a Welsh person's sense of identity (1993: 9) Institutions such as the family farm<sup>17</sup> and Chapel are examples of one social world in rural Wales which is inaccessible to “outsiders”<sup>18</sup>. One resident of Y Mynydd used to be a farmer in West Wales, and told me, “They used to call me 'Weaver Waun Llwyd’”. By working a farm Mr Weaver became part of this social world, he became synonymous with his farm.

After at least a generation of in-migration by the “English retirees” (Robinson, 2007:113) and “alternatives” (J. Williams, 2003) or “hippies” (Emmett, 1982b: 214; Bowie, 1993: 172), I will suggest that there exists another category, what I have provocatively termed “welsh”, (small w), to refer to people who may be born and bred, even in Balsom's *Y Fro Cymraeg* (1985: 6), but who are not ethnically Welsh, or do not have what Robinson (2007) calls *eneidfaeth*—the spirit of the people (ibid: 103). Some of my research participants were third-generation “incomers” so it soon became clear to me that the term “incomer” was inadequate to describe people who had only ever known West Wales as their home and had taken a welsh identity<sup>19</sup>. Here I appropriate the word welsh in deference to the origin of the names “Wales” and “Welsh”, which are not Welsh words to describe Wales, they derive from the Saxon word for “foreigner”. I argue that this category is distinct from Balsom's “British Wales” in two important ways. Firstly, it is spatially located within *y Fro Cymraeg*, and secondly members (by

<sup>16</sup> I think it is fascinating that farmers are known by name or surname then farm name, such as Anne Pant, Jenkins Gelli-Aur, Davies Blaen Waun etc.

<sup>17</sup> Dyfed farms have traditionally kept labourers' families as “heirlooms or appendages”, such as retainers in a feudal system (Owen, 1993: 90).

<sup>18</sup> By which I mean those with no intersection with these institutions.

<sup>19</sup> It must be noted that it is likely to be common for Welsh people to think of such people as incomers (e.g. Bowie, 1993; James, 2003)

my reckoning) of this category may in fact be Welsh-speakers (of varying ability, but often, and especially in school-going children, fluent). This element of Welsh culture is not fully explained with recourse to any of the categories of Balsom's Three-Wales Model, and challenges his view that language is the critical variable defining the intensity of ethnic identity (1985: 9). I am not arguing for a simple binary to explain this, since many other identities operate in the wider region. Even amongst what are typically English “outsiders” there is socio-economic stratification, but language and ethnicity remain prominent markers of identity and difference.

Rather than suggesting a four-Wales model, and while I do recognise the fragmented nature of what it means to be Welsh, I am not sure that a model of division can encapsulate the situation. Perhaps as Mars (1999) suggests, a return to an anthropological grandfather, of Welsh descent, may be useful here. In *The Nuer*, Evans-Pritchard's (1940) offers a segmentary lineage theory to describe a situation where group A and B consider themselves as different, but will come together to form group C in the presence of a threat from group Z (itself comprising groups x and y who ordinarily may feud). Contrasting Welsh identity with “valley identity”, Mars observes that “identity became salient, and contested, at boundaries and borders both geographic and cultural” (ibid: 251; 256). The comparison is apt. Ordinarily Welsh people belong to their location, their *bro*, even expressing rivalry on a town-by-town (and certainly county by county) basis as these two examples illustrate:

EF — I'm looking for ... (*something in Tregaron*)

University Porter (*Lampeter*) — Tregaron!?! (*conspiratorially*) Where men are men and sheep are sheep!

Llanybydder mechanic — where are you from then?

EF — I live near Lampeter

LLM — for your sins!

EF — Oh! Well, I do live *this* side of Lampeter... (*hinting that it may be over the County line*)

LLM — ho ho, there we are.

Lampeter is but 5 miles from Llanybydder, but it is in Ceredigion as opposed to Carmarthenshire, it would be safe to assume that the Lampeter man and a Tregaron person would both be *Cardi*<sup>20</sup> in relation to the mechanic in Llanybydder, all rivalry forgotten. At this point, the mechanic declined to charge me VAT and rounded the price down to the—actually furthest—increment, something that according to Hurn (2008), a typical *Cardi* (a Ceredigion person) would likely never do (ibid: 340-342). This overt display of generosity, especially in the context of our conversation, served to reinforce this man's local identity.

Such issues have been taken into account during the research process, I acknowledge that a research field is primarily the ethnographer's own construction (cf. Amit, 2000), and my decision to locate the research as I have is partly a response to the existing social worlds in rural Wales which became evident during research, and partly a result of the fact that not a single research participant identified as culturally Welsh in any of the senses that I have outlined, hence I call this a Welsh ethnography. This thesis discusses research participants who are part of a wider and non-place-specific

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<sup>20</sup> See Hurn (2008: 340–342) for a fuller explanation of the “Cardi” identity.

alternative network, such a fluidness and non-specificity of place sits at odds with rural Welsh conceptions of personhood rooted in the landscape.

#### **1.4 LOW-IMPACT DWELLING IN WEST WALES: HISTORIES AND FUTURES.**

In addition to the sorts of low-impact dwelling found in West Wales nowadays, Wales has an historical provenance as a potential destination for alternative living. In the late eighteenth-century the Romantic poets Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge planned a utopian commune, Pantisocracy, which although originally destined for America, was later planned for Wales before being abandoned altogether. Undoubtedly the focus on Wales in this case was strongly linked to the emerging travel guides to Wales, such as William Gilpin's (1782) *Observations on the River Wye*. Wales' industrial history plays a part here too. As the first industrialised nation, large swathes of rural Wales were rapidly abandoned as people settled in the industrialising south and north-east. Indeed, in the coal-mining valleys because pastoral farming carried on alongside the collieries, such “industrialised” areas remained largely “rural” in appearance (Brennan et. al. 1954: 16-17). It therefore makes sense that Wales should be a destination for successive waves of counter-urbanisation. Halfacree (2006) picks up this trend from the 1970s, and characterises West Wales in particular as a destination for “radical refugees” to escape the confines of urban life (ibid: 320), by embarking on “back-to-the-land” projects.

Back-to-the-land counter-urbanisation was exemplified in West Wales by John Seymour. Seymour had a farm in pembrokeshire and his guides to self sufficiency

written during the 1950s to 1970s helped to foster an association between West Wales and self-sufficiency. In the final chapter of the 1974 edition of *Fat of the Land*, after a move from Suffolk to Pembrokeshire, Seymour (1974) notes:

“In Wales life changed for us completely. For one thing we found ourselves in the midst of a still-peasant society. Our neighbours had not yet all given up brewing their own beer, killing their own pigs, and living largely from their own holdings ... They still have the time to help each other, to farm for the good of their land as well as their pocket”.

(ibid: 165-166)

Seymour has had considerable influence, being at the forefront of the 1960s–1970s back-to-the-land movement. His social commentary, bemoaning agri-business and planning in favour of the preservation of an unspoilt-looking countryside as well as predicting the need to pool resources to collectively buy land in the face of prices rising out of sync with general prosperity, suggest a conceptual lineage between his ideas and low-impact dwelling. Even so, during research I could only establish peripheral links to Seymour, and to another influential institution, the Machynlleth-based Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT). CAT began as an ecovillage of sorts in 1972, but is now an exemplary, degree-awarding centre for education and a hub for the sharing of skills, knowledge and information. Perhaps due to the topography of West Wales, and certainly this research field which is centred around the Teifi, Towy and Cothi valleys, CAT was not a particularly influential centre in terms of participants' everyday lives. Situated some 60-70 miles from my research sites and participants, though CAT certainly

contributes to an outside perception of (North) West Wales as a centre for information about green technologies, it was a peripheral part of this research context. My participants seemed to rely on a much less tangible word-of-mouth network based on personal affinity, through which socialisation and the sharing of skills and techne took place in and around sites in a much tighter geographical location, rather like a *bro*.

My research shows that a significant element of the sort of counter-urbanisation that Halfacree describes takes place in West Wales in the form of low-impact dwelling. Approaches vary, however, and the field is by no means homogeneous. Some demonstrate a certain set of ecological ethics, others rather more pragmatically adopt LID as a way to remain undetected on marginal farmland, thereby sidestepping the need to rent or purchase costly houses. Different approaches to ownership or occupation of land were evident, such as trusts, and co-operative organisations, but during research I did not become aware of anybody squatting either land or a house. That is not to say it did not take place, but it was not typical of low-impact dwelling in the research field. It will be seen then that low-impact dwelling is a strategy with which to facilitate the sort of alternative lifestyle which rejects formal institutions, as well as a form of activism which challenges those very institutions which in participants' views are pitted against small-scale and environmentally sound developments in rural areas. Whatever the motivation, unpermitted dwelling has brought low-impact dwellers into conflict with neighbours and planners.

Typically, planning disputes over low-impact dwellings in West Wales have been lengthy, indicating a certain marginality as well as ambiguity concerning the practice of autonomous dwelling: very often low-impact dwelling-places are not considered

dwellings by the usual standards. Useful examples in West Wales include a 13-year dispute over a pair of tipis in a Carmarthenshire ecovillage. The process in obtaining permission included several public enquiries which decided in favour of the tipis, only to be appealed against by the local authority; the case was referred to the Welsh Office, then subsequently the Welsh Assembly. Under the Welsh Assembly's First Minister, the tipis were finally permitted in 2004. In another example, a low impact turf-roofed roundhouse was discovered within the bounds of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. A planning dispute arose and the home was condemned. The occupier challenged the process in court, and eventually won a reprieve but the case took over ten years to resolve. The cost of the home, which was modest, “carbon neutral” and off-grid in every respect: £5,000. The legal fees to keep it: £7,000. That the home fitted exactly with the local authority's own policy on low-impact development seemed not to figure in the case. My research participants report on a typical cycle of conflicts with planners which tend to be decided in the dwellers' favour, only for planners to resume enforcement action after a hiatus. Furthermore, protracted planning disputes muddle perceptions about entitlement to dwell somewhere; participants have quoted four, seven, ten and twelve years as increments for automatic retrospective planning permission, or “right of use”.

It seems that generally low-impact dwellers have found it more favourable to appeal their cases to the Welsh Assembly, rather than see their planning battles flounder at the local government level. This is also true of the major case study explored in this thesis, Tir y Gafel. Tir y Gafel's case is exemplary in that it must be seen in dialogue with the Welsh Assembly's sustainability strategy, *One Wales: One Planet* and OPD. Research participants imagine that OPD is a revised version of Policy 52, and see the

Welsh Assembly's intervention in the Tir y Gafel case as the link between the two policies. In turn Policy 52, can be seen as a way to formalise unpermitted low-impact dwelling already happening in Pembrokeshire, this flow exemplifies the way that experience gained in the context of informal low-impact dwelling underpins formal low-impact development. One job of this thesis is to explore the reconfiguration of the informal into formal practice in the context of spatial planning. This informs the key argument that low-impact dwelling is affected by and a response to issues of the larger politics from which low-impact dwellers distinguish themselves; dwelling underpins development in this context, it is both a catalyst for identity, community and network formation, and a strategy of resistance.

## **1.5 DEFINING A MULTI-SITED RESEARCH FIELD.**

### ***1.5.1 Introductory***

There are no shortage of back-to-the-land projects in West Wales that may have become part of this research. Such projects vary from the formally organised to the very informally organised, and indicate some of the different ways that households may be formed. Some groups comprise multiple, separate households, whereas others are based around one household to which new members are recruited, and of course there are other approaches which are more fluid, in which perhaps some facilities are shared and some resources are pooled and others aren't. Access to land is a crucial factor linking all such projects. Whether simply an issue of having the space to accommodate others, or being directly concerned with low-impact living in all cases these people have a commitment to dwelling and provisioning which is mediated by the land.

This raises some interesting methodological questions about bounding as an anthropological practice (Candea, 2007: 172). I clearly did not include every “alternative” in West Wales in this ethnography, I didn't even include every “alternative community” in West Wales. Nor did I consider the definition “alternative” to be fully definitive (cf. J. Williams, 2003). Throughout the course of fieldwork it became clear that my focus was consolidating around the issue of planning; the participants I followed most closely tended to be those who had had direct experience with the planning process, or those that had deliberately avoided it. Following every worthwhile connection may have illustrated much about shared practices, or revealed ideological consensus but, as per Candea (2007: 174) leaving certain things out—or rather, leaving most things out to refine a specific focus—has been a methodological decision. Unlike Candea, though, I have drawn methodological boundaries based not on a village location, but on the shared experience of planning, thus my research field is less an arbitrary location than an arbitrary *situation*.

### **1.5.2 Village-based field site A**

Fieldwork centred on fifteen months' intensive participation at one field site, which I call Y Mynydd, and which served as my base while I made regular trips and visits to other sites in the area. Y Mynydd could best be described as a low impact village, situated about one mile outside of an existing small rural Welsh village. Established in the mid-1970s, this site is perhaps the first and is certainly the largest example of this sort in the area. The group, consisting of about 100 resident-members, now has around 200 acres of land occupying a steep-sided river valley, which is held in trust. Most of the residents occupy temporary dwellings such as tents, buses or trailers which they can, and do, move regularly. Because of planning restrictions which forbid people from

dwelling on what is officially considered to be farmland, the residents have faced several eviction battles. In line with the village's ecological ethos, most dwellings are moved seasonally to *allow the land to recover* (from the effects of human occupation there). While much of the land is communal, the majority of residents keep separate households, based around heteronormative family groupings, though some subsistence ventures do overlap. This group represents a particular form of environmental activism which sees people directly committed to the space surrounding them. Their use of their land is, however, at odds with local spatial planning policy, therefore the settlement remains illicit.

### **1.5.3 Village-based field site B**

At the time of research another group of research participants began to emerge who exemplified a very different approach to their land activism, by engaging openly and directly with a restrictive planning regime. At the start of fieldwork in 2010, a group based in Pembrokeshire, called Lammas, had just successfully applied for planning permission for a low-impact development of nine “ecosmallholdings” on around 76 acres of land. Lammas was the name of an over-arching co-operative structure which effectively owned the site—which is called Tir y Gafel—and residents (who may or may not have also been involved with Lammas) leased their plots on 999-year leases. Many low-impact dwellings apply for planning permission retrospectively, but this group applied in advance, under Policy 52 of Pembrokeshire County Council’s (PCC) and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's Joint Unitary Development Plan

2000-2016 (PCC, 2006)<sup>21</sup>. Policy 52 permits low-impact development where (among other things):

v) the proposal requires a countryside location and is tied directly to the land on which it is located, and involves agriculture, forestry or horticulture; and

vi) the proposal will provide sufficient livelihood for and substantially meet the needs of residents on the site;

(ibid: 66)

According to Lammas' application for an ecohamlet, each dwelling would be built using “green” materials such as straw bales, local timber, usually roundwood (not milled), earth plasters etc. and have a small parcel of land attached for the use of each household. Again, households were arranged in nuclear-family groupings, except as time went on, household formations on each plot swelled with live-in volunteers. Additionally the Lammas ecohamlet would benefit from common areas—a “community hub”, mill-pond and woodland. The site would generate electricity using an extant 28kWh water turbine to power a 3-phase electrical system—a very powerful off-grid system for that level of domestic use.

While the technological approach at Tir y Gafel was of the same ilk as the buildings found at Y Mynydd, and the low impact ethos, shared communal space and

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<sup>21</sup> A significant area of Pembrokeshire is part of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (see Figure 2), as such the Park Authority and Pembrokeshire County Council have collaborated on planning strategies, but sometimes produce independent strategies. For purposes of style and convenience, I will refer to PCC or Pembrokeshire but in general mean this to include the area which is National Park. Tir y Gafel is located in Pembrokeshire, but is not in the National Park.

anti-ownership sentiments were also carried through, Lammas represents an example of a direct confrontation between environmental activism and instrumental rural planning/development on the other. Where groups such as Y Mynydd have effectively created and held an activist space with which to experiment with low impact living, this has been characterised by values such as obscurity, impermanence and invisibility. Lammas, by contrast, has engaged in a process of dialogue, negotiation and compromise, but this has affected change. The manner and extent of such changes remain to be realised fully. Chapter three introduces these villages more thoroughly, as I compare and contrast practices to form a detailed description of low-impact dwelling in village-based groupings.

#### ***1.5.4 Wider research network***

The publication of the WAG's new policy on One Planet Development swung my focus from a village-based study, with occasional, ambivalent attempts to access the network which I knew did exist and would probably have been worth investigating, to one firmly focussed on the interplay between the practice exemplified by a disengaged, anarcho-primitivist "counter site", and planning mediated through the process of specialism encapsulated by the Lammas project. In the spirit of a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995), which "investigates and ethnographically constructs the lifeworlds of variously situated subjects, it also ethnographically constructs aspects of the system itself through the associations and connections it suggests among sites" (ibid: 96), this research includes other participants in autonomous low-impact dwellings who were linked to those in the village field sites to reveal how broader concerns about dwelling and provisioning are met through the adoption of similar practice.

The research field was not shaped primarily by the boundaries between field sites, but by the discovery and exploration of shared practice and interest. As such, research participants and field sites included family homes, conferences, workshops, festivals and events both private and public. For example, one group of participants was a family that I got to know initially because they lived off-grid and used a home-made water turbine for power, another example was a conference I attended which intended to showcase off-grid living. From initial encounters on that basis, I was able to develop more in-depth methods where appropriate. To say that research participants were involved in a network is true only to the extent that it was the network that I created for this research which linked all of them. Of course many people had existing links to others in my network (which was often how I was able to include these persons in my research network). While there were clear boundaries between people and places, certain practices were characterised by fluidity and portability, in that different *techne*<sup>22</sup> were adopted, adapted and shared physically and conceptually. Finding the same practice at two or more sites didn't necessarily mean the practitioners were linked in any other way, however occasionally I had the opportunity to facilitate links between participants who may not have otherwise met, and invariably discussions about *techne* and practice resulted. Chapter Three introduces these autonomous low-impact dwellers, whereas Chapter Four develops the idea of networks more fully.

## **1.6 Methodology, reflexive ethnography and ethics.**

Charlotte Aull-Davies' search for a reflexive stance in ethnographic research that can overcome the compromise between positivism (knowable facts) and the ethnographic tradition of interpretivism (the subjectivity of knowing) leads her to critical realism.

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<sup>22</sup> *Techne* is an idea I will come back to throughout the thesis, I use it as a shorthand way to say tools, techniques and technologies, and offer a fuller explanation in Chapter Five.

Critical realism, she argues, can provide “a fully reflexive yet realist basis for research practice that can be expected to yield explanations which are open to informed debate and criticism and which provide qualitatively better understandings of human societies and cultures” (2008: 19). Realism critiques both positivist and interpretative approaches in order to avoid the partiality in either approach. In critical realism, the “reality” that social science research purports to represent is a compromise between the act of writing and the social reality encountered by the researcher: it is not a pure product of either the discipline of writing or of lived experience. From this point of view, the question of ethics arises in two different ways. There is the ethical conduct of the researcher in the field to consider, as well as the ethics of writing and perhaps publishing research findings. The ASA ethical guidelines (ASA, 2011) provide a comprehensive framework for reflection on such issues. Additionally, however, there is a third issue which is harder to navigate, and that is the very act of conducting anthropological, or other academic research at all.

This latter issue is heightened by the contexts in which anthropologists tend to find themselves, where the sort of knowledge-base we might use to analyse others is either alien, or rejected by them. Typically in my case, I found the latter to be true. On the subject of ethics Bhaskar (1998) states that “I have also argued that any theory of knowledge presupposes an ontology in the sense of an account of what the world must be like, for knowledge, under the descriptions given it by the theory, to be possible ... Failure to be explicit in one's ontology merely results in the passive secretion of an implicit one” (ibid: 642). In terms of this latter issue, my study which is largely a comparison between differing forms of knowledge is mediated by a third form of knowledge which cannot be written out of a reflexive account of fieldwork.

I understood a general rejection of mainstream values to be a significant aspect of the way I was perceived as a researcher by research participants. I had reassured research participants and described the many steps I would take to keep details about them safe so it was not the implications of research that were an issue, the question rather became—what is the point? In real terms this granted me access to some groups within the research field which then precluded me from others. It was a revelation to me upon reflection that some of the clearest insights on the research process occurred as a result of me being questioned by research participants. In particular, Mervyn and I kept returning to a debate about the product of research, academic forms and conventions. Mervyn told me that he had become frustrated during his fine art degree that a proportion of his mark rested on the contents of his sketch book; Mervyn sculpted in wood from designs in his mind, to use a sketch book disrupted that process and was pointless to him as an artist. I remarked that it was part of the requirements for the degree, whether or not it was part of the requirements for being an artist. The ontological primacy given to the academic process over the artistic process pre-occupied Mervyn more than any other issue. That we could not agree on this highlighted the fact that as a researcher with a thesis in mind I was bound to reproduce the conventions that Mervyn, as an independent thinker, had little patience for. Had my purpose been different I may have simply agreed with him.

### **1.6.1 Ethics**

To answer the question of ethical conduct whilst in the field, in line with the ASA guidelines (2011) I drew several strict boundaries which I feel will protect my participants, something which was important to every participant to varying degrees. For instance, while I write here at length about participants' interactions with the

planning system, I did not personally engage the local planning department. The ASA guidelines (2011: 2) acknowledge that research participants may be distrustful of bureaucratic practices and suggest modifications to the way consent is secured, accordingly I relied on verbal consent because such a distrust was certainly evident in the field. As such, a research project which brought together low-impact dwellers and planners, via mutual involvement in one project seemed out of the question. Everyone who has been quoted here has given their approval, likewise nobody who has refused to be involved has been mentioned. In many cases I have been able to tell or show people what I have written about them and I have responded to errors or omissions, to the delight of one young participant who asked, “so we could just keep saying we don't like it and make you change it forever and you won't get your PhD!?”

I have made passing reference to people (anonymised) who haven't given express permission. Because all personal names have been changed I feel that passing references to people who were indifferent about me or my work remains compliant with the ASA ethical guidelines (2011). To further safeguard identities I have obscured many details, in particular removing personal pronouns when anonymising so as not to indicate what gender or how many people I might be referring to. I didn't keep information about myself or my research out of reach, and was always happy to discuss what I was doing, but it must be noted that many people that I encountered were not particularly interested in me or my project. The imperative of negotiating informed consent must equally allow people the freedom to choose whether or not to be informed. ASA guidelines (2011: 3b) note that “undue intrusion” might occur to informants: “by having been caused to acquire self-knowledge which they did not seek or want”. As such, an anthropologist cannot insist that every person encountered in the field must be

fully informed of their research when it is clear that they do not choose to be either informed or involved. I interpreted such responses as the absence of consent, and the research output reflects this.

### **1.6.2 Access**

My research was helped and shaped in no small way by aspects of my own history and personal trajectory. During several years of undergraduate study in Wales I had begun to consider West Wales as a particularly suitable location for research into low-impact dwelling. During this period I had already met some of the research participants discussed in this thesis, and had a general feel for some of the major issues that ought to be explored. I was able to negotiate research access with all research participants in a very straightforward way, which initially consisted of an exchange of details and an explanation of what I would like to find out, of course regularly updated as fieldwork carried on. It did seem however that given the fact of there being ecovillages in the research that I would need some greater consensual approval beyond each individual research participants' agreement.

The problem with Y Mynydd is that there is literally no universally accepted spokesperson, leader, representative, council or other such party to approach—I will note below that there are gatekeepers but their approval would have positioned me as even more of an outsider. I resolved instead to just make visits as early as possible—and long before “fieldwork” started—and I informed as many people as possible about my plans. Because I had visited and had contacts at Y Mynydd prior to even contemplating research, I was not a totally unfamiliar presence there. Because I was a student when I had first made contact with people there, my new status as a “research student” didn't

seem to make an impact. Whether my formal status had changed much was at times unclear, admittedly from my perspective taking a critical distance has changed some of the ways I interacted with prior acquaintances—I sought a level of explanation and understanding which was more demanding than an ordinary relationship (e.g. not research-driven) would have been. This prior engagement with the village meant that my new research status was a step in snowballing, not just a quantitative, but also a qualitative shift.

Though I must acknowledge the role of several gatekeepers, I consciously avoided Y Mynydd's usual gatekeeper. Y Mynydd has a certain discursive presence online and by contacting the named contact one is invariably received by a village elder in an ageing tipi and may ask a series of questions about village life and receive composite answers constructed from around 30 years' experience in the village. It was not my aim to avail of this experience and I yearned for a modicum of “insider” knowledge more commensurate with my intention to stay for a prolonged period of fieldwork, rather than a Reading Week. I therefore did not approach research via this person like other students did, though it would have been possible. During fieldwork a steady stream of students arrived and left the *big lodge*<sup>23</sup> at Y Mynydd with interviews or films in their bags. Over time it became clear that I was not thought of as *just* a student, I was other things, too. Participant observation meant that sometimes my researcher identity seemed prominent, and sometimes absent. On more than one occasion a visiting student looked crestfallen when I informed them that the willing authentic participant they had recruited was in fact just another student. Certainly, had I been continually scribbling notes or wielding cameras or tape recorders I may have

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<sup>23</sup> A big tipi, shared as a communal space. At Y Mynydd people often referred to their tipi as a lodge.

seemed more akin to the visiting students, but recording media were not as important to my approach as the ability to be immersed in everyday life as it unfolded.

Tir y Gafel was a different case, because by connection to Lammas it did appear to have a formal body through which to direct prospective enquiries. I had been in contact with one of the Lammas organisers since the earliest stages of research, and I knew that the organisation had already received academic attention. From the outset I felt as though my interest in Lammas represented, to them, yet another student who wanted to come and “have a look”. The correspondence (see Appendix II) was initially very encouraging, although the prospect of a “research department” at my field site did cause some alarm which led me quickly to read up on Maxey's work. Further communication was not forthcoming and I did not want to hassle because I had several other access routes in mind. I thought it best to simply book a place on a pre-organised “open day” which I attended whilst already in the field, along with some interested parties from Y Mynydd. With hindsight this was an ideal solution for me. I very quickly gained an affiliation and a context. It turned out that some members of Lammas had even lived at Y Mynydd some time ago, and already knew one of the people I travelled there with. This connection meant that I was in a privileged position, my presence was quickly accepted, I saw behind the scenes and I was considered someone who already knew some of what Lammas residents would have to show and teach other visitors. It was important to emphasise research at Tir y Gafel, because I tended to be introduced as being “from Yr Mynydd” and “doing research” rather than simply “a researcher”. This difference, I observed, meant that I was quickly able to assume a closer degree of intimacy and access than if I didn't have recognisable credentials as something of an “insider”, but equally it raises ethical considerations.

While it may appear that I enjoyed a shortcut to an enviable level of rapport with participants, significant elements of the research were influenced by my personal positioning. In both Tir y Gafel and Y Mynydd I was more closely allied to certain factions than others. Being known as an anthropologist shaped my research experience; those that disapproved of my project avoided me, especially at Y Mynydd. I took care not to approach people whom I learned would not be receptive to my work. For example a participant at Tir y Gafel explained that his partner would certainly be more interested than he was in helping me out since she had “done university and all that”, he therefore indicated that he had little interest in academia, or the process or product of research. What was interesting in that case was that on a previous visit the same person had taken a great interest in my studies! This illustrates just how temporal and partial ethnographic engagements are; in the time it takes anthropologists to capture what we regard as a representative picture, our participants lives and views may have changed considerably.

In the context of low-impact dwelling, and this is something I have tried to illustrate with a focus on *techne*, research is not a wholly alien concept. Certainly there are issues around representation in academic research, but research in general terms—the task of finding out about the world—was not my exclusive domain. In the kitchen whilst at Lammas as part of a volunteer week, some other women and I were discussing different technologies we had heard about to improve gardening practice as well as useful documentary films, websites and these sorts of media, at one point we all whipped out notebooks to help us remember what we had found out. I realised then that we were all in a position where we learning experientially and from each other. The key

difference, I felt was in what we would do with our research, in my case it has been the critical distance that I required which set my research apart from others'.

### **1.6.3 Methods**

The primary ethnographic data gathered included field diaries and notes taken in the field, or shortly after. For example, I took notes after unstructured interviews and ethnographically rich encounters, but at the time of gathering narrative accounts and oral histories. In the case of formalised groups and networks I also used discursive materials published on line or in print, as well as planning policy documents and guidance notes, reports and decisions. From an initial focus on dwelling and provisioning strategies, four key themes emerged from the data. These are community, nature, environment and the state. I discuss these more fully in terms of the relevant literatures in Chapter Two.

The vast majority of fieldwork was conducted using participant observation supported by open-ended, largely unstructured interviews. In practice this was the only approach which was worth pursuing. I found that my ethnographic methodology—and the methods employed—were refreshing to many participants who had a sense that research was a somehow painful, interview-based experience. When I tried to formalise interviews I found otherwise well-informed, interested and willing research participants uncharacteristically slippery. It seemed that research participants were reluctant to claim any recollections as absolute. Equally I felt that formality might be a detriment to the rapport that we already had. I didn't sacrifice this rapport for the sake of pursuing a research technique that was overall of little use in the field.

Roseneil (1993) portrays the difficulties inherent in researching out of doors in a public place as part of her decision to conduct retrospective research about the women's peace camp at Greenham Common (ibid: 191). While certainly participants had their own *spaces*, a lot of everyday life in and around a low-impact dwelling is carried out outside, from home maintenance to gardening to gathering, sawing, chopping and stacking wood, to food preparation, eating and socialising. Certainly at Y Mynydd there was always the likelihood that someone would wander past, and the conversation be expanded or lose significance for my research agenda entirely. In line with my decision to stay informal, I relied on making field notes less and less, preferring instead to update a field diary and thematic notes once or twice a day or when appropriate. I knew intuitively that taking notes at events or in front of people would be disconcerting, in fact as part of negotiating access one of my gatekeepers advised me to play down the idea of “doing a study on...” and to instead emphasise that I was “keeping a diary”. When attending special events or conferences, however, I employed note taking as standard—besides, I wasn't the only one to do so. The most important aspect of employing methodology for this particular field has been to ensure that it did not create a distance that was otherwise not there. This also meant changing the ethnographer's usual language—in particular, rather than recruiting “informants” I gathered participants.

#### ***1.6.4 Navigating politics***

Aside from broader questions about the politics of conducting research at all, another set of everyday interpersonal politics governed my route around research, in a manner which must be navigated by any researcher in close-knit groups—being allied to certain people and not to others was just a fact of village life in both Y Mynydd and Tir y Gafel

and was not peculiar to me as a researcher. As an ethnographic researcher, however, such issues might be anticipated in a context where one's social self is the primary research tool (Hume and Mulcock, 2004: xvii). An example illustrates this point. One of my initial gatekeepers, a resident of Y Mynydd whom I had befriended through her extended family some years prior to any suggestion of research there, began to question my continued presence at Tir y Gafel, and once asked me outright:

MB—"Why do you keep hanging out down there (Tir y Gafel)?"

EF—"Well, it's hard to get in there without working there full time, they can be quite formal really. So whenever they're having an event or an open day or whatnot I try to get down there.... It's good, you get to meet all the volunteers in one go, too, it's like 'networking'."

MB—"Why don't you 'network' with us?" (my parentheses)

At the time I felt that I needed to make the most of opportunities to visit Tir y Gafel, although it did seem to compromise my reputation at Y Mynydd somewhat. The conversation recorded here perhaps doesn't convey the sense of expectation some parties felt towards me and my project, which is something that I had encountered before and is perhaps not unusual for ethnographers relying on interpretive or qualitative methods. Participants, especially gatekeepers, perhaps saw an opportunity to tell their story, or to be written about. For every reluctant participant there seemed to be an equally keen participant, when events unfolded which drew my focus, questions of access and allegiance lapsed, sometimes completely.

Equally, at Tir y Gafel, access had to be mediated through one of the residents, it was very difficult to simply be there with no overt purpose in terms of the group's own

aims. I understood that not everybody in the group got along, and it was my concern to approach the group independently wherever possible. For example, having obtained an invitation to stay at Tir y Gafel to conduct research through one of the plot-holders, I decided to set up camp in a communal area by the community hub building. Not only did I chance upon more people passing through, but I managed to seem less partisan. Although I shared an affinity, and developed what I consider to be a meaningful friendship, with many of my research participants, as a researcher I projected the fact that I was interested in all aspects of village life. Likewise, I made some ecovillage friends who have not participated in this research although they have been personally supportive.

By including low-impact dwellers which were not physically part of either Tir y Gafel or Y Mynydd I have been able to provide a more rounded account of the issues to do with low-impact dwelling and planning in West Wales. I had to know people personally to find out that they a) lived in a low-impact dwelling out-of-sight, and b) where they lived in order to visit them. These participants are much more an extended part of my own pre-existing personal network, or at least befriended during the course of research and now friends as well as willing research participants. It is more complex to reflect upon ways in which my research has effected or may effect such people. As Pink (2000) notes, in such cases “the field” was simultaneously everywhere and nowhere, and research is defined in terms of the researcher engaging in the act of producing anthropological knowledge (ibid: 99) I gained insights during the course of discussions, and later (or at the time if I was certain) I asked to reproduce this information, a process which often initiated further discussion and refined my understanding accordingly.



## **CHAPTER TWO: THEMES AND THEORIES**

### **Introduction**

This literature review needs little by way of introduction. From the initial premise that a focus on dwelling can enhance a critique on development planning, several key theoretical themes emerge from this thesis. While the act of separating and examining anthropological literatures to then apply to contexts where it is acknowledged that ideas are not distinguished and separated in such a way does seem to reinforce artificial boundaries, it has nevertheless been useful to identify and examine literatures on the state, community, nature and the environment. There is an element of parallelism here, as broad questions about how anthropologists theorise states filter down into the way that communities are conceived. Similarly, nature has been a prominent theme in anthropological theory, and theories about what nature is and how it relates to other categories are at the core of theories about environment.

### **2.1 ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STATE**

Leaving the problematic aspects of the term aside for one moment, I have chosen to use the term “state” to describe the matrix of rules, requirements, bureaucracy, inspection, legal notices, challenges, court cases and fines which have comprised my participants' relation to planning. I use this term knowingly, because in spite of a powerful critique of the “governmentalisation” of the state (Foucault, 1991: 103) and the prominent idea that the state exerts pressure through constituent actors, (Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 46) what is discernible is a remarkable coalescence at all levels of formal government around the idea of sustainable development. In this thesis, therefore, I argue that the salience of the

term “state” is located in the inter-relationship between planning, global environmental politics and Welsh devolution.

### **2.1.1 State effects**

Early Anthropological interest in the idea of the state was not exactly coherent. On the one hand, Meyer-Fortes and Evans Pritchard agreed that states were indeed tangible in society and approached societies in terms of how like Western liberal democracy they were. On the other hand, as early as 1940, and in an often cited preface to *African Political Systems* (e.g Abrams, 1988; Trouillot, 2001), Radcliffe-Brown (1940) notes that the state, such that it exists, only does so as an object of study—yet political anthropologists have not made a sustained critique of the idea of the state on that basis. This hints at a problem for anthropologists about how to conceptualise the state: it might not exist as such but certainly its effects can be seen in many research contexts.

Abrams (1988) explores this issue in great depth. For him, the state as an object of study is out of reach. Firstly, the state is not a reality, it is a mask which prevents us seeing the reality of political practice, and furthermore, political power is not open to study since its integral aspect is the control of knowledge production, not least about itself (ibid: 60; 62). Indeed, for Abrams, this process of power legitimisation that reifies the state *is* the state, insofar as it can be objectified and studied<sup>24</sup>. Responding to the greasiness of the state as an analytical object, Trouillot instead focuses on a matrix of “state effects”, such as isolation, identification, legibility and spatialisation. The state is not a thing as such, rather it is a combination of factors, such as government, policy,

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<sup>24</sup> It must be noted that this is not necessarily a fair representation of all states. In contrast, Abram discusses the relative openness of Norwegian local government (2011: 60).

law, taxation and institutions which taken together deliver, or demand, certain “state effects”. Similarly, Hansen and Stepputat's (2001) discussion of the state coalesces around three categories of state action: the assertion of territorial sovereignty; the gathering and control of knowledge; and the generation and management of resources (ibid: 7). Similar themes are explored by Scott's (1998) work on the relationship between planning and governance, which focuses primarily on the notions of spatialisation and legibility. For Scott, planning is primarily about making populations visible and legible; once citizens/ subjects become visible they become citizens/ subjects. Planning may then be seen as exemplifying the transformatory power of state effects, thus planning appears to be a state-effect *par excellence*, it is a practice which cuts across each of these categories.

### **2.1.2 Sovereignty**

State effects are an interesting notion for ethnographers, since, according to Trouillot, they can be captured partly through the subjects they help to produce. Trouillot's notion of state-effects is useful therefore to describe everyday encounters with authority—or perhaps the loss of sovereignty—that people experience when dealing with authoritative institutions. Certainly, such terminology is more acceptable than the problematic “state”. Foucault's notion of governmentality can clearly be seen as a basis for these approaches to the question of the state (Foucault, 1980; 1991; 2009). Foucault suggested that sovereignty had been replaced by a range of practices and discourses which aim to order and control bodies, and taken to its theoretical conclusion, populations. As such, populations and bodies are rendered legible, disciplined, and controlled. The resultant “synoptic data” (Scott, 1998) become the categories that bureaucrats and other sorts of state officials understand, expect to find, and ultimately

reproduce. Aretxaga (2003) calls for the question of the state to be repositioned in relation to the developing meaning of sovereignty. Such an approach would also highlight the potential for difficulties when states face non-conforming persons (Ward, 1976; Porter, 2014)

It must be noted, however that Foucault's work on governmentality has emerged from and for the context of urban, European nation-states; it is thus both ethnocentric and historically bound to the Europe of the mid-late twentieth century (Gupta and Sharma, 2006). Foucauldian analyses of states are therefore implicated in these politics. "Governmentality" is not used here uncritically and without some qualification, but even a Euro-centric theory is not entirely out of place in this ethnography of West Wales. That aside, Foucault's key concern, with how human practices have become (in the contexts discussed) regulated objects of knowledge and discipline, is appropriate in the context of planning, which appears to impose order and legibility on the more fundamental practice of dwelling, as well as the more tangible objects of dwellings. It might be more pertinent to ask not why certain people reject planning's authority, but to ask why so many others appear to accept it?

### ***2.1.3 Transnational states***

Recent anthropological scholarship of the state recognises at least two issues which are useful to consider here. Firstly, "state" can no longer be said to correspond to nation, and secondly post-colonialism and now globalisation have altered the way states operate and therefore affected the practice of governance (e.g. Gupta and Sharma, 2006). Aretxaga (2003) notes that the notion common during the 1980s–1990s, that neoliberal capitalist globalization and all its effects would erode the relevance, if not herald the

actual disappearance of, the state had, by the early 2000s given way to a renewed form of what we may now call the transnational state. Not necessarily any more tangible, nor commanding more inherent power, the transnational state is a container for “meta-capital” (Bourdieu, 1998) as well as real capital and social capital coalescing around media outlets and national sports (see also, Hann, 2001). As Aretxaga notes, “Globalization is not only compatible with statehood; it has actually fueled the desire for it, whether to have access to resources and powers experienced, imagined, or glimpsed or to defend an ethnic group against the violence of another state” (Aretxaga, 2003: 395).

Even so, Hansen and Stepputat (2001) have argued that rather than viewing the formation of states in the postcolonial world in terms of mimicry of a more developed, Western liberal democracy: “we need to disaggregate and historicize [sic] how the idea of the modern state became universalized [sic] and how modern forms of governance have proliferated throughout the world” (ibid, 6). I believe it is analytically useful to associate globalisation with post-colonialism, because some aspects of globalisation—at least those that are held to be the most total (the globalisation of desire in, particularly, youth consumer culture) conceal the same inequalities that were laid bare by the end of the era of European colonialism. In terms of the ethnography of the state, governance of any person or people almost anywhere in the world now occurs (or at least, attempts to) in a trans-national arena. The global environmental politics which I will discuss later in this thesis are certainly an example of this new form of governance in a global context. As for the first issue I raised, that state no longer corresponds to nation, this idea will be seen to be somewhat problematic in this ethnographic context, and my investigation of the devolved Welsh Assembly Government's new domestic planning strategy.

If critics of the state-nation homology argue that states are increasingly irrelevant in the age of transnational, global governance, then what must one make of devolution on a nationalist or ethnic basis? An effective way to conceptualise the results of the shoring up of a global-nationalist-devolved politics in Wales, and I use Trouillot here again, is to focus on state-effects and minimise discussion about the state as either object or symbol. Planning is a good platform from which to examine this issue, given that domestic planning is one of the major areas which WAG has jurisdiction.

In spite of a historical association with direct action, left-libertarian politics and anarcho-syndicalism (Ward, 1976), Yiftachel (2001) notes that planning knowledge has progressively developed along with other professions of the built environment, and as such is part of the consolidation of the state via policy that reflects not only the spatial and temporal contexts that produce planning knowledge, but represents the interests of the powerful in society (ibid: 5; 11). Such connections—between categories like knowledge and professionalism to power and rule—has been a theme of the anthropology of the state (Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 47). Scott (1998) characterises professional knowledge as “imperial”, and is dismissive of the sort of practical knowledge which he calls *metis* (but here I have called *techne*). This relationship, according to Scott, is “part of a political struggle for institutional hegemony by experts and their institutions” (ibid: 311). Corbridge et al. (2005) suggest that “states are best thought of as “bundles of everyday institutions and forms of rule” (ibid: 5) not least because the cultural differences at the various levels that states are articulated—from international or transnational organisations, national, regional and local government departments differ widely. Corbridge et al. refer to the Indian context, arguing that it is a

mistake to consider that the lifeworlds of elite politicians coincide with their counterparts in local government departments, hence, policy and procedure are reinterpreted and sometimes significantly changed. (ibid) Although the scale of the issue is more compact, it is important to consider that planning strategies articulated by the Welsh Assembly Government are enacted by representatives of local planning departments in conjunction with town and parish planning committees. In no sense, then can this process be devoid of cultural interpretation or complexity. Although Sharma and Gupta (2006) note there is a neoliberal focus on lean government, governance actually proliferates, through “stakeholder” participation, and autonomous entities such as NGOs and, incredibly, GONGOs (non-governmental organisations, and government organised non-governmental organisations respectively) (ibid: 21). In the case of planning for sustainable development the proliferation of governance takes place through local, regional, devolved Welsh, UK, European, international *and* global institutions. In a globalising world, the state may appear diminished but the idea of the state, or what a state does, is reproduced through disparate institutions and practices. The sections which follow pay particular attention to the inevitable practice of bureaucracy and how the encounter with bureaucracy mediates how the state appears and operates.

#### **2.1.4 Bureaucracy**

Bureaucracy is one state effect which is of primary relevance to this thesis—according to Shore and Wright (1997), policy (which includes planning) is a “major accessory” of bureaucracy (ibid: 9), one which vitalises it and gives it purpose (ibid: 4). I discuss policy along with planning more fully in Chapter Seven since, discursively, planning takes the form of policy, and in practical terms planning knowledge is represented by/ as

policy. Here, I examine bureaucracy which has been equally embraced (Hegel, 2001[1822]), idealised (Weber, 1978) empowered (Foucault, 1977) made unconscious (Bourdieu, 1998), embedded (Herzfeld, 1992) and uncovered (Appadurai, 1993), it is considered one of the most pervasive of all state-effects (Hegel, 2001[1822]) and has been extensively studied (e.g. Hoag, 2011). While on the macro-scale planning is of course concerned with spatialisation and legibility as we have seen, and represents itself as such via policy, to a significant number of research participants it was experienced primarily as a bureaucratic exercise; many evocative images of piles—or wheelbarrows full—of paperwork have circulated between low-impact dwellers. The meaning of paperwork is interpreted variously as a replacement for extant social rituals (Graeber, 2012) or as constitutive of bureaucratic organisations themselves (Hull, 2012). Paperwork therefore is symbolic of the power relations which demand that certain people become more legible, and resistance to this sort of procedure highlights this unequal power relationship: more than one participant in this research was living their everyday life without permission—or worse—with clear un-permission, simply because they could not engage with the planning bureaucracy, or could not perform a planning way of being. Actually, the bureaucracies of planning can only be regarded as an outer layer. Planning, as a state-effect, is comprehensive; as this thesis will show, planning should not be regarded as “mere” bureaucracy which reduces the complex to the simple (e.g. Graeber, 2012: 19). Acknowledging that planning emerges as a different practice in different contexts and points in time (e.g. Abram, 2011), the particular planning regimes that this thesis will follow show how the models that planning uses in fact *complicate* a reflection/ distortion of everyday life.

By focussing on low-impact dwelling which transgresses the planning system, this thesis shows how disjuncture between planning policy and practice shape possibilities for ad hoc dwelling. This messiness (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2013: 3) exemplifies an important issue that breaks from Foucauldian-inspired analyses of governmentality; that is the theoretical tendency to assume that bureaucracy and other state effects function as intended. While they may be idealised, more often than not such effects are not experienced smoothly (Graeber, 2012; Abram and Weszkalnys, 2013). Planning is a particular form of state utopianism, it is the collective vision of a locality, region, nation or of groupings at an even wider scale, but like Utopia, the assurances created by planning regimes remain elusive; planning, perhaps more than any other aspect of bureaucracy represents the co-ordination of potential failure (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2013: 9). Because this thesis is aimed at uncovering ways that informal low-impact dwelling has influenced formal low-impact development, in Chapter Seven I focus on a particularly “messy” aspect of planning, and that is the contemporaneous practice of planning enforcement. Caught in the disjuncture between the utopian future of planning strategy—that is, the articulation of utopia in policy—and the complicated notion of the preservation of landscape, planning enforcement is a prime example of how messy, arbitrary and elusive planning is, and how it resists classification as a bureaucratic exercise.

## **2.2 COMMUNITY**

The notion of community is at once romantic, elusive and vague. In the research field “community” existed either as an external category, applied by others/ outsiders, or as a cause under which to mobilise, and thus one which emerged politically, at times of

controversy or celebration. In this way community was extraordinary—not exactly a part of participants' everyday experiences. While the *idea* of community is strong it is my contention that the *experience* of community is more nuanced. Given my choice of research field, and the frequency by which problematised notions of community were encountered it is important to explore what community might mean and what theories about communities do. In the wider literature on intentional communities, use of the term “community” must not be read as acceptance of the term's salience. In this section I explore anthropological approaches to the study of community/ communities as well as literature on intentional communities from other disciplinary traditions.

### **2.2.1 Themes in the ethnography of community**

According to Vered Amit, “community” is a slippery category (2002: 13), as Hillery's (1955) “ninety-two varieties” should suggest. Despite its relative ambiguity, however, there are some key aspects of community that ethnographic accounts have focussed on. Belonging, for instance, is regarded as a key aspect of how people experience community (Cohen, 1982); Aull-Davies (2003) has suggested that belonging to a community is intimately linked to identity (ibid: 15). Cohen (1985) considers community to be a *relational* category; in particular he views the commonality of belonging to a community as a way to differentiate one group from the next. Community therefore contains broader notions about similarity and difference, which are reinforced by the practice of boundary-making, both tangible and symbolic. Joseph (2002) takes up this argument as she explores what we might think of as the “dark side” of community; whilst elusive, inclusive and romantic, community effectively excludes non-conforming others.

We can begin to see then, that community is not necessarily a Good Thing. In spite of Hillery's epic work Macfarlane (1977) goes as far as to doubt that communities exist at all, outside of the rhetorics of government and social research (ibid: 632), arguing that community is a myth typical of industrial societies. The idea of a stable and tight-knit community existing in the past has been a model to shape structural changes to societies, in the form of local governance and community-based initiatives. Where communities cannot actually be discerned in practice, Macfarlane states they would have to be invented (ibid). This claim suggests that community is not a given, there are reasons why it is mobilised as a concept: it's use tells us much about what broader issues are at stake.

One early and well-known study is Young and Willmott's 1957 account of changing kin and, by extension—for the two are closely linked in their Bethnal Green study—community relationships, as housing policy relocated families from what were contentiously regarded as “slum” housing to new housing estates. Young and Willmott (1986) present Bethnal Green as a cohesive working-class area (ibid: xxix)—the external factor driving change is presented quite clearly as housing policy. Though not explicitly using the term “gentrification” it becomes clear that, postwar, inner-city regeneration plans favoured open space and public gardens rather than the difficult and costly task of reinstating of working-class housing (ibid: 165); instead, vast housing estates could be built on open spaces acquired by the London County Council (ibid: 99). Young and Willmott note that providing enough new working class housing in Bethnal Green would mean relocating some industry and investing in improvements to existing housing stock: “The problems are formidable, but if the purpose of rehousing is to meet

human needs, not as they are judged by others but as people themselves assess their own, it is doubtful whether anything short of such a programme will suffice”. A tension between what is imagined adequate in housing policy, and how people imagine their own needs is a theme I will return to throughout the thesis.

It becomes clear that for Young and Willmott (1986), Bethnal Greeners belong to the same community while growing up *and* after marriage, and express this belonging in an enduring attachment to their kin networks—something which a relocation to a new estate puts strain on (ibid: 111). The importance of kin for orienting the way people related to others in their locality is a theme in Rosser and Harris' (1965) study of 1950s Swansea, which was intended to replicate Young and Willmott's work in another area (ibid: v). In both cases, *external* influences are presented as straining, and irrevocably changing the relationship between person, kin and community. Unlike in Bethnal Green, Rosser and Harris note that a range of social and cultural changes in Swansea have brought a new heterogeneity to the family (ibid: 17). Swansea is of course much greater in area and population to Bethnal Green, and Rosser and Harris' informants can recount their parents' migration to Swansea (e.g. ibid: 9). In Bethnal Green, however, there is the sense of staticness, as time plays an important role in the sense of belonging which is central to Young and Willmott's notion of what community is (1986: 81-82).

This notion of externalised events threatening the cohesive internal communal structure, or the “stasis and change” model, was the hallmark of early ethnographies of Britain in the community studies tradition, many of which focussed on rural Wales (Rees, 1950; Jenkins, 1971; Frankenburg, 1957; Rosser and Harris, 1965; Emmett, 1964, 1982a, 1982b), and is a remarkably enduring theme. Cohen (1985) pays particular

attention to this classical interpretation of community, later taken up by the Chicago school. The Chicago school seized upon Durkheim's contrast between mechanical and organic solidarity, attributing the mechanical to urban configurations and the organic to rural configurations in rather a simplistic fashion (Cohen, 1985: 25). Young and Willmott's Bethnal Green study in particular shows that this is not always, if ever, the case. Cohen argues that while social evolution had held a progression from simple rural communities to complex urban assemblages to be self-evident, such differing modes of community may be complimentary. Cohen also suggests that community shows no sign of a demise in the face of rapid urbanisation, rather people use symbols to reassert the boundaries of community when they feel it might be somehow under threat (1985: 28). Although Cohen appears to move away from earlier models, the notion that community emerges more strongly under threat remains part of his approach. This was also observable in the research context that I outline, and I explore this further in chapter four. Returning to Macfarlane, however, we might regard the specific emergence of a strong vision of community suspiciously, and be aware of the wider political context in which strong articulations of community emerge. Though Cohen and Macfarlane appear to disagree about how real community is, in both accounts the notion of community is strengthened by the pressures of modernity. In contrast, Amit and Rapport (2002) take up the argument that modernity *has* in fact heralded the demise of community, and, after Olwig and Hastrup (1996) assert that the dis-location of many social forms brings the category of place as a factor in community into some question.

The need to understand the longevity of the stasis and change model and its relevance to Welsh ethnography is particularly acute in the context of the ecovillages that I present. In collective ventures such as these, the link to an idealised notion of

historic communities seems clear and irrefutable and permeates the literature with a presumption of community. Vered Amit (2002), who views community as an over-used, over-analysed, in fact, “hackneyed” term, argues that it still warrants attention at this point. In Amit's view—which resonates with the early community studies tradition—community is a conceptual medium which presents the interplay between modernity and social solidarity and is a useful rubric for anthropologists who are consciously bounding their fields. Amit suggests that rather than being analysed as actual entities, community-as-category is viewed as “an idea or quality of sociality” (ibid: 3). In this way, community becomes seen in terms of identity rather than interaction. In other words, community is now regarded as a conceptual category which is dis-embedded from place or space and can transcend ideas about locality. Community, therefore, is an important idea to examine in contexts where its adoption, or indeed, rejection is evident.

### ***2.2.2 The presumption of community***

According to Lovell (1998) locality is often subsumed within a notion of belonging that acts in a way similar to how many anthropologists imagine that community acts: it “serves to provide collective identity and a sense of cohesion and cultural commensality (although conflict and differentiation can also emerge out of these processes)” (ibid: 4). Like Amit (2002), Parkin (1998: x) claims that anthropologists cannot assume that the people they study also have a territorial reference point. I would add the caveat that we must also be careful of portraying “the people” we study as “a people” in a collective sense if they resist that label, and certainly should not assume collectivity by virtue of a shared spatial locality. While the trend is to see community as transcending place, it is less often posited that place transcends community. Ingold borrows a diagram from Turnbull (1963) that shows the arrangement of dwellings in a pygmy camp as highly

fluid, particularly subject to change as group relations also reconfigure. Ingold's purpose is to contrast with the pygmy camp the spatial configuration of a village that is predicated on building. In a context where moving between houses is not typical, Ingold states that the built environment of a village is immovable and social relationships must navigate through spatial configurations. Young and Willmott made a similar observation: Bethnal Greeners were usually reluctant to move, only a breakdown in kin relationships prompted active migration from the area, migrants with strong kin ties only moved reluctantly. An exploration of dwelling outside of a “built environment” therefore draws attention to how community and place operate independently, and how shared occupation of space does not correspond to social cohesion. Granted, what I have termed dwelling for the purpose of this thesis is not always so fluid and potentially mobile as the pygmy camp that Ingold presents (after Turnbull 1963), but such examples indicate very clearly that accounts of community and place are complicated by political and social factors.

In my examination of ecovillages I found that other idioms for relationships were more prominent than community. In the world of alternative co-residence “community” has a specific connotation and means a communal group sharing dwelling-space and economy. In such cases, community appears to stand in for the perhaps problematic, though historically accurate notion of a household which extends far beyond consanguinal kin of two or three generations. Research data revealed a certain presumption of community when outsiders or members of a wider low-impact dwelling network referred to ecovillages as communities. In the wider literature, “intentional communities” is a generally accepted descriptor to refer to a wide range of alternative forms of co-residence (Sargisson, 2007a: 418). In this literature, the term

community tends not to be explored as critically as other key concepts, such as utopianism, for example (Sargisson, 2000, 2007a, 2007b, 2009 Sargisson and Tower-Sargent, 2004). Cohen (1982) suggests that academic usage of the term community ought to reflect the contexts in which community is portrayed by insiders. Accordingly, Cohen's ethnographic work on Whalsay (1985b, 1987, 1996) focuses on the subjective aspects of the construction of community. Bearing these issues in mind, I noticed that in contrast to outsiders, research participants that were located within ecovillages used the term “community” only very selectively; instead they preferred “village” as a general descriptor—and sometimes in the Mynydd case, “family”.

Sargisson's (2000) work on transgressive utopianism in the context of intentional communities aims to critically explore the problematic term “utopia” but “community” does not receive the same treatment. For example, The Findhorn Foundation is one of Sargisson's key examples of intentional community. It could equally be argued, though, that Findhorn takes the form of a network. Self-described as a Foundation *and* a community, the main Findhorn site counts some 300 residents, while its Findhorn community association comprises 320 members and 30 organisations over a 50-mile radius<sup>25</sup>. Accordingly we should call Findhorn a community, as they do, but we might describe it as a network, or “network of networks, infinitely interconnected” (Day, 2005: 182) to explain the proliferation of consensus and belonging beyond place. This description would not risk leaving the central question unanswered—why is it important that this network describe itself as a community?

I would argue that presuming a sense of community in the intentional community context risks missing some of the specific politics behind alternative

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.findhorn.org/aboutus/community>

ideologies. For instance, Day (2005) doesn't reject the term community, outright, but he does critically examine the idea that community is synonymous with the Hegelian notion *Sittlichkeit*, or community based on universal communion. Rather, in his discussion of the newest social movements—and his proposal (after Agamben, 1993) about what the “coming community” (or communities in Day's view) may look like—Day makes a convincing argument for the plurality of community, arguing against the hegemony of community based on communion:

“Rather than longing for total communion, we must understand communities as multiplicities that cannot be totalised, as *n*-dimensional networks of networks that spread out infinitely and are infinitely interconnected”

(2005: 182).

Day's interpretation of community belongs to radical spaces, and to gloss over what exactly community *is* means that “alternative” community becomes a hegemonic construct just the same as the idea of a “mainstream” community, therefore it doesn't really represent an alternative. Without seeking an alternative to the hegemony of community, accounts of radical spaces are forced into a dialectic relationship with the not-so radical or mainstream, the relationship with the other mistakenly becomes the point of definition.

Joseph (2002) notes that community is used *inclusively* to draw sometimes disparate individuals together under a shared identity, such as nation, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or belief. By the same token, “community” simultaneously *excludes* non-conforming persons and elements of personal and shared identities which do not fit the particular rendering of community which is being used. Throughout this critique runs the idea that community is not a fixed category, it is a shifting concept and context

dependant, in other words community is therefore symbolic and thus adaptable. Of course, Cohen (1985) argues for the symbolic construction of community, but he does not mean that community is somehow intangible. For Cohen, community orients members in terms of other scales of belonging such as kinship or society: “Community... is where one learns and continues to practice how to ‘be social’” (ibid: 15). This notion of community as the starting point for social conditioning is refracted by Anderson (1983; 1991) who focuses instead on how technologies socialise people into communities which might otherwise not be there, such as nations. Porter (2014) exemplifies how the political deployment of community to broader-scale groupings happens at the expense of the smaller units which, in the community studies tradition, were taken to be the most salient forms of community. In Porter's account of dispossession under planning regimes, family homes are demolished in order to build a sports stadium to serve for Glasgow's hosting of the 2014 Commonwealth Games. In this case, the perceived public benefit of a new sports facility, and the added statement about social cohesion in a large imagined community such as the Commonwealth is shown in sharp relief next to the loss of community solidarity in East Glasgow exemplified by the story of one family's displacement.

The reduction of community to a meaning in which insiders share total communion must be seen as a tool, the usage of which mobilises different interests and expresses different politics. This sort of rendering is largely symbolic; it can no longer be thought of as structural (Appadurai, 1996)—although arguably community never has been structural: even the branch of ethnography termed “community studies” focussed by and large on kin networks. More recently the idea of broader and abstract affiliations, such as nation or commonwealth mobilise interests which undermine the family. It is for

these reasons that I treat the presumption of community—in the literature and in the field— with caution. In Chapter four I exemplify how and when this very loaded term emerged and was put to political use.

### ***2.2.3 Communities of practice and other forms.***

Community, then, was a complicated notion in the field. Here I shall suggest that perhaps what would be more useful is to consider the field as a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). ‘Community of practice’ is an idea used in education, but has been used by anthropologists to explore contexts as diverse as cord-making (Minar, 2001), Italian freemasonry (Mahmud, 2012), historic pottery production (Sassaman and Rudolphi, 2001), tree identification (Shipman and Boster, 2008) and seafaring (Pálsson and Helgason, 1998). Community of practice has a clear advantage over the term community as it is quite clearly demarcated from the problematic Hegelian *sittlichkeit*. Whereas Lave and Wenger (1991) mainly explore how craftspeople or professionals acquire skills as part of a practice community, low-impact dwelling is not strictly either a craft or a profession, but as Chapter Five will show, my research makes an apt contribution to this literature. In this case, a community of technological tradition which is greater in scope than any bounded field site has emerged and is consolidating in West Wales. This community of practice is shaped by the sort of social, physical and economic factors discussed during the introduction, as well as recent policy changes to promote low-impact developments.

A community of practice, then, is premised on some shared technological or practical interest, but it does more than that; in terms of a theory of practice, it must account for the collaboration between novices and teachers, apprenticeship and situated learning (Pálsson and Helgason, 1998: 910). The clear advantage to using the term is

that it makes it possible to unite research participants as a group of sorts, by virtue of a common techne, in spite of resistance to groupings based on other notions. In fact this resonates more accurately with the way that research participants would express commonality with others who lived ‘like this’, an idea I return to in Chapters Three and Four.

A community of practice might also be usefully described as network. Aull-Davies (2003) suggests that network, along with locality and identity, is an aspect of community: “which may be localised but not necessarily so” (ibid: 3). Amit (2002) suggests that networks are both extensive and ephemeral, largely the product of individual effort and therefore contingent (ibid: 22-23). Reproduction is the key difference between community as an institutionalised group and network as an individualistic group: a community can be reproduced by the retention of a core of key roles, whereas a network is almost constantly reconfigured (Amit, 2002: 23). Importantly, community and network are not mutually exclusive. The question of whether ecovillages are networks, communities or both is nuanced and there can be no single answer for all examples. The frequent rejection and political deployment of the term “community” must be taken into account, so too must the mobility that characterises the choice to live in an ecovillage. Long-standing examples such as Y Mynydd are reproduced inter-generationally, but as we shall see in the following chapter, though village membership is reproduced certain values and ways of living are reconfigured by each person. It is with this in mind that I explore the idea of networks.

In actor-network theory (ANT), persons do not form networks external to themselves, they *are* networks. As such, ANT explores the heterogenous materiality of

any given actor(-network). Latour (2005) argues that ANT should primarily be regarded as a methodology, as opposed to a paradigm, whereas Law (1992) suggests that ANT is a form of relational materialism in which relation and material are not opposed: taken together they are “interactional effects” (Law, 1992: 7) which can explain social reproduction.

There is much in Latour’s work that is pertinent here, in particular his examination of the nature-culture binary (Latour, 1993). Latour (2005) cautions against the casual use of ANT to describe networks, however: “being interconnected... is not enough... it’s the work, and the movement, and the flow, and the changes that should be stressed (ibid: 143)”. In the case of the low-impact dwelling network that I shall discuss, people are connected through a social and practical network, but also their ideas are connected; low-impact dwellers develop their own knowledge and skill, it emerges from their practice and interactions with other networks, such as planning, or volunteers. This thesis does not, however, make a sustained material-semiotic exploration of the material; certain aspects of how low-impact techne are developed are treated in this way but actor-network theory has not been a major methodological influence.

Though I have not adopted an ANT methodology, it is true that in the context of low-impact dwelling material considerations enable and limit social reproduction in a particularly tangible way. ANT scholars argue that properly functioning networks appear “punctualised”, that is, as coherent agents whose material heterogeneity is concealed. In the DIY culture of low-impact dwelling, material heterogeneity is emphasised. For example, the rejection of planning exposes weakness in what might otherwise appear to be a functioning—and hegemonic—actor. Likewise, other

particularly durable punctualisations are challenged by low-impact dwelling, categories such as “nature” and “the built environment” are picked at and reconfigured, adopted partially, if at all. It is the partial usage of such networks that has relevance to the argument I wish to set out. Low-impact dwelling's ability to influence planning relies on both orders being at least in some respects partial. This partiality allows the flow of ideas from different networks to converge, or assemble around certain issues.

According to Anderson et. al. (2012) ANT and assemblage theory share a starting point, an “ambivalence towards the a priori reduction of social-spatial relations to any fixed form or set of fixed forms” (ibid: 178). My exploration and critique of “community” must be seen in such terms. Although the term assemblage has been around in archaeology and art for some time, assemblage theory can still be considered an emerging alternative social theory, mainly articulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who, when they do offer to pin down what is meant by ‘assemblage’, describe it thus:

‘On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both territorial sides, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization, which carry it

away. No one is better than Kafka at differentiating the two axes of the assemblage and making them function together’.

(1987: 88)

“Assemblage” addresses Durkheimian notions of mechanic and organic solidarity, yet accounts for the symbolic and discursive, as well as spatially dis-located aspects of how groups emerge. As such, assemblage fits entirely with Day's (2005) account of the newest social movements. As a theory of how things, or—crucially—*elements* of things, relate, assemblage can be qualified with reference to Strathern's assertion that Melanesians are ‘partible persons’ (1988). Melanesian identity is formed out of relations which are made visible by various combinations—or assemblages—of context and actors. Similarly, assemblage's contribution to relationality is therefore to start from a point before the individual subject arises as a container for social life and an element of that social life. The constituent parts of an assemblage have agency that extends beyond any one particular assemblage, neither are assemblages whole systems. More so than the points of a network, the constituent parts of an assemblage are in flux, they represent different things at different points. As a methodological tool, assemblage is a worthwhile way to understand how research participants approached the idea of being ‘off-grid’. The grid in this context refers to both material and conceptual infrastructures. Research participants rejected most, if not all aspects of grid-logic, but did so differently, and on an ad hoc basis. According to Ong (2005: 338), ‘particular assemblages of technology and politics not only create their own spaces, but also give diverse values to the practices and actors thus connected to each other’. By considering grid ideas as assemblages of constituent parts they become easier to navigate, borrow from and reconfigure, I shall argue that this is at the core of what being “off-grid”

means. According to Latour, (2005) “Dispersion, destruction and deconstruction are not the goals to be achieved but what needs to be overcome [by application of actor-network theory]. It’s much more important to check what are the new institutions, procedures and concepts able to collect and to reconnect the social” (ibid: 11). As such, off-grid represents a new concept for assembling and connecting the material and social life of low-impact dwelling.

I present networks and assemblages as the units of discussion, in preference to community, which is a category that effectively includes “us” and excludes “them” (Joseph, 2002) and therefore is a concept which is based on the sort of dualisms which belong to a grid. Being off-grid, rejecting the grid, means also to reject the logic of the grid and its expressions. Community is an idea which can reproduce hierarchy and dichotomy, things that were not made visible by research. The idea of off-grid captures more about low-impact dwelling, it conceptualises the practice at the core of low-impact dwelling, further, ideas about off-grid are formed and circulate through a network of different assemblages which emerge from, consolidate around and adapt to the practice of off-grid, low-impact dwelling.

I have suggested that the informal low-impact dwelling which characterises alternative lifestyles in West Wales is in dialogue with the state, via planning for low-impact development. With OPD, which requires low-impact development to be off-grid, the WAG takes the unusual step of incorporating off-grid thinking into its planning strategy. As the body which administers governance and legislation for Wales, the WAG is one expression of what “the grid” represents for research participants, express support for off-grid is therefore an interesting inversion of governance. It

remains to be seen whether the OPD policy's potential impact will be fully realised, or whether, as I shall explore further in Chapter Seven, OPD represents the co-option and weakening of alternative ideologies in the planning system (Abram 1998: 6).

## **2.3 NATURE**

In line with the thesis that a theory of dwelling can inform and critique problematic aspects of rural development, it is vital to consider how ideas about nature feed dwelling practices. “Nature” was a prominent discursive element of low-impact dwelling, and understanding how participants imagined nature—as opposed to how anthropologists have used the term—is vitally important. Throughout fieldwork, research participants continual references to nature indicated that it had its own agency, as we shall see in Chapter Four. The reality of nature that I encountered in the field diverges sharply with nature's position in critical theory, where it has conceptually died, revived and somehow “gotten over” (e.g. Descola, 2013). Here I explore three acts in nature's downfall; death, deconstruction and performance, before asking what might be next for such a faithful concept which has carried so “many of the major variations of human thought” (R. Williams, 1975: 224), whether anthropologists can really reach beyond nature and culture (Descola, 2013).

### ***2.3.1 The death of nature***

In her investigation of the impact of the scientific revolution on nature cosmologies, Carolyn Merchant (1980) attributes the “Death of Nature” to the rise of Modernism. In particular, Merchant is careful to show the many contexts in which nature was regarded

as overtly feminine; from its ancient identity as a nurturing mother, to relatively more recent social movements for both women's liberation and environmentalism emerging coterminously in the latter part of the twentieth century. While Anthropologists have approached the question of nature from numerous theoretical vantage points, certainly making a connection between nature and the feminine, whilst seeking to avoid reproducing hierarchies of knowledge (e.g. Strathern 1980, 1992, 1995), the question of science has not been so rigorously explored (cf. Latour, 1993). Materialism generally saw borrowed causal models from the natural sciences used to explore culture; sociobiological and similar approaches portrayed human cultures as expressions of pre-existing natural and genetic constraints. The opposition of nature and culture was a key foundation in Levi-Strauss' structuralism, and anthropologists used nature as a tool to unpack cultural expressions in structuralism and symbolism (e.g. Douglas, 1970). In spite of clear epistemological differences however, most anthropological theories about nature did not question the implicit assumption of a dualism comprising nature and culture until fairly recently. In addition to this implicit acceptance of dualism, another assumption lies behind such approaches, something rather more subtle. By holding nature to be a qualitatively different domain to culture, theorists have, possibly even unwittingly, reproduced a sort of ontological hierarchy: because nature can be revealed scientifically, it is held to be more "right" than cultures and their wide-ranging discourses about the world, and so nature has come to be regarded as a suitable foil with which to contrast culture. This idea of nature as a universal opposing category is echoed by Williams (1975) who notes that nature is a particularly powerful word, but one which has carried "many of the major variations of human thought" (ibid: 224), and as such it is important to explore social scientific approaches to the role that nature takes in shaping social-spatial relationships.

### **2.3.2 Reconstructing nature**

Once Anthropologists began to question the universality of dualism as an analytical framework to explore cosmologies, for example formulating ideas about monism (Hornborg, 1996), constructionism emerged as a plausible framework to explain variations in nature cosmologies (e.g. Descola and Pálsson, 1996). Pálsson (1996) notes that a matrix of interdisciplinarity, postmodern critique and the greening of public discourse set the stage for “a novel kind of ecological anthropology” (ibid: 64). Rather than exploring only the physicality of nature and environment, social scientists began to pay attention to the conditions from which nature cosmologies emerge. Escobar (1998), for instance, examines how the notion of “biodiversity” which has become so influential in global politics is a historically and socially produced discourse equally as much as it is an empirical scientific fact, if not more so.

Similarly, Milton notes that at its extreme conclusion, constructionism would effectively deny any common reality between “different” cultures (e.g. Sapir, 1961). Even in its moderate form constructivist accounts, which form the bulk of symbolic anthropology, are barely distinct from the extreme form, argues Milton (1996: 51). Certainly, if working towards an anthropologically informed theory of environmental activism, constructionism can be rejected as an impossible choice between a reality that is unknowable from outside it, or a reality that is meaningless without cultural interpretation (ibid). Constructionism is problematic for other reasons too. As Ingold (2001) conceives it, under constructionism nature is held to exist as both a culturally

perceived category *and* as a precondition, but notes that this necessarily reproduces the same ontological bias found in dualist interpretations of human-environment relations, wherein nature is externalised and a natural-scientific ontology takes precedence over alternative worldviews (ibid: 42–43).

Some scholars have suggested that one way to navigate through ideas which have a strong dualist impression, is to locate the other within opposing discourses. This is exemplified, for instance, in Cassidy and Mullin's (2007) collection exploring the idea of domestication and the wild, another pair of concepts which have formed a long-standing analytical dualism. In Cassidy's (2007) introduction she discusses Anthropological scholarship on the subject of nature, which has successfully complicated the notion of wilderness by locating the cultural in the natural and vice versa (MacNaughton and Urry 1998; Whatmore 2002 in Cassidy, 2007: 1).

Latour intervenes in both debates on constructivism, and dualism, attempting to illuminate the sort of “complications” that Cassidy outlines. His thesis is that being modern rests on two concomitant practices, “translation”, and “purification” (1993: 10). Translation creates networks of nature-culture hybrids, whereas purification creates “distinct ontological zones” which partition the extant natural world from both society and discourse; this comprises the “modern critical stance” (ibid 10–11). It is the manner of the interaction of these two strands that interests Latour (ibid: 30), but it is also what he finds so problematic, and paradoxical; the existence of hybrids *ought* to undermine the work of purification, it ought to cast doubt on the substance of modernity, but still these categories endure. Planning is of course heavily implicated in this paradox, as a “universal pathway to modernization” (Healey, 2011: 191). More specifically, “zoning”,

a tool so integral to the devising and executing of spatial plans must represent the archetypal form of purification.

Ingold, by way of accounting for human-environment relations, has attempted to dispense with the notion of cultural construction altogether, questioning whether nature can be constructed at all. (2011: 173). Following Heidegger, Ingold argues that being is expressed materially in the form of dwelling. This has been a powerful theme by which to organise this ethnography of low-impact dwellers, who typically reject the logic of the built environment and mainstream approaches to the use of space. Ingold's theoretical rejection of constructionism is necessary in order to fully posit a theory of environmental perception. Dwelling takes place within the perceived environment; dwelling is of course anathema to building, or construction. I shall argue that dwelling is itself a performance; it is a performance of skill and *techne* which is done on a daily basis in situ; and with particular reference to low-impact dwelling, *techne* is honed and developed and powerful and challenging notions of nature and environment have been wrought in its performance.

Even if we accept, as Hastrup suggests we do, that nature be viewed both as a cultural category *and* as a physical framework which encompasses culture (1989: 7 in Ingold, 2011: 42–43) yet another problem arises; how best for anthropologists to discuss ways in which natures are socially constructed when the sort of dualisms that have been so thoroughly deconstructed since the 1980s still carry a weighty vernacular currency (Lien and Davison, 2010: 238)?

### **2.3.3 Performing Nature**

Berglund (1998) is uneasy about “dissolving the reality” that her activists speak about, by reducing their expressions of nature to mere “constructions”. Dissolving planning's reality might seem like a victimless crime, indeed it might even be a comfortable position to take. Following Berglund however, who takes an interest in “ the consequentiality of the ways in which human-environment relationships can be constructed” (ibid), we can gain important insights if we go further than deconstructing others' constructions; rather than telling us that nature *is* constructed, we are invited to explore *how* it is constructed, and what that *does*. Croll and Parkin (1992) argue that it is feasible to suggest that oppositional or contrastive thinking can be part of the way that nature is constructed, without having to submit an argument about whether all thought is fundamentally binary or not. They use a theatrical metaphor to illustrate how constructions of nature unfold through performances:

Just as development practice may be conceived of as a series of performances placed on a continuum according to participation of local actors in the transformatory design and practice, so the environment might be said continually to incorporate or be inscribed in the history or memory of past performances (ibid: 33).

This powerful metaphor is again taken up by Abram and Lien (2011), but with a renewed significance in the wake of STS, women's studies and relational ontology, which has shifted theorists from a concern with representation to a concern with ontology (e.g. Latour, 1993, 2004; Haraway, 1991; Butler, 1990, 1993; Harris, 1980

Strathern, 1980; Descola, 2013; Vivieros de Castro et. al. 2014). This same disjunction between (development) theory and (local) practice is noted by Lien and Davison (2010) in their article examining the interplay of different meanings given to a small group of pine trees in Tasmania. As the trees grow to occupy their physical space on the shoreline, they are conceptually reconfigured by different parties, and cross-temporally. The history of development and conquest in Australia combines with the history of people as well as social and cultural assemblages seeking to interpret the landscape as theirs. Abram and Lien (2011) note that human practices constantly create and recreate distinctions, such as those concerned with negotiating nature, in myriad and diverse performances (ibid). Lien and Davison's view is that by acknowledging the performativity of nature, how it constitutes and is constituted by its own spatial and temporal materialities ontological distinctions between theory and practice are undermined; by focusing on the specificity of how nature is performed, abstractions about nature can be resisted (ibid: 239).

Taking a performative view of nature, by exemplifying how nature is done, goes partly towards answering some of the concerns that Eeva Berglund reflects on when doing (and writing) ethnography about nature and environment. As she notes “the habit of putting nature in quotation marks can seem preposterous to those who genuinely fear its destruction” (1998: 182). And of course, a focus on the specificities of how natures are performed creates a strong mandate for ethnographic investigation into the everyday aspects of how actors perform nature in any given context, without the need, necessarily, for grand theoretical assertions about the nature of nature. When my research participants said they lived as part of nature, for example, it was tempting to suggest that having the perspective to claim they lived as part of nature implicitly

acknowledges an alternative position in which one could live not as part of nature. This is something I explore in Chapter Four.

Exploring how nature is performative has opened up the possibility for examining different ways that nature is done, performed and produced in West Wales. For example, while planning policy has traditionally separated humans from nature to preserve an unspoilt landscape, environmental activists' perception and interpretation of living with nature means that they conceive of their occupation of this landscape as being a part of nature. It is notable that these two ideas rely on each other to some extent; without a clear idea of what a natural landscape is, living there might not equate to living as part of nature. This thesis will show how there has been a flow of ideas about LID from informal practice to the rather more formal context of planning policy. This trajectory exemplifies that formal and informal models of low impact dwelling have interacted in a complex and changing performance of nature in the West Wales low-impact dwelling movement.

## **2.4 THE ENVIRONMENT IN ANTHROPOLOGY**

I have separated the concepts of nature and environment for the purposes of this literature review in order to navigate through the complex and interrelated literatures. There is, however, some merit to this choice beyond purely organisational convenience. Following Ingold (2011), I also find a useful distinction between what may be regarded as the physical world, an object comprising of objects, perceived from without; and the experienced world, *environment*—a processual engagement in continuous performance, which is produced and perceived from within. With this in mind, at the end of this

section there follows a further discussion about environmental activism. As alluded to above, (e.g. Milton, 1996) thinking through human-environment relations is oriented by the propensity for action. In a sense this also makes the idea of performance appealing; I shall suggest below that environmental activism is a certain type of performance, one in which action is seen as a viable solution to urgent social problems.

Milton (1996, pp 23–68) provides a comprehensive review of anthropological approaches to environment and ecology from around the 1950s until the mid 1990s; it is not my intention to duplicate Milton's work here. What will be useful, however is to take up Milton's suggestion that social science theory is<sup>26</sup> experiencing a fundamental shift characterised by dissatisfaction with cultural relativism, dualism and globalisation. Several prominent theoretical developments which have emerged since Milton's prediction might combine elements to make a useful anthropological perspective on environment and ecology, these are performativity (e.g. Butler 1993), Latour's realism in general, (1993; 2005) and more latterly, what is being called “the ontological turn” (e.g. Descola, 2013; Vivieros de Castro et al. 2014). It is not the job of this thesis to examine all of these theories but aspects of these theoretical insights are, however, useful to the context that I present.

Performativity in planning processes is a theme taken up by Murdoch and Abram (2002), Abram (2011) and then Abram and Lien (2011) to explain situations whereby planners and environmentalists often come to occupy completely polarised positions, in spite of the actions they might be engage in at home, when they are not performing such ideologically opposed roles. Latour (1993) highlights how the notion of separation that underpins modernism, and by extension, planning theory and practice,

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<sup>26</sup> Or, was, since Milton was writing almost twenty years ago.

has never truly been achieved. Latour's assertion that "we have never been modern" calls into question the hegemony of modernism, and he offers the notion of the "hybrid", which has an affinity with Haraway's (1991) "cyborg", to illustrate how prevalent exceptions which would undermine the dogma of separation (and thus, purification) have been.

Finally, the ontological turn, hailed as a "neo-Copernican revolution" (Sahlins, 2013) promises to re-establish anthropology on the basis of intersubjectivity, to further deconstruct the notion that nature and culture stand opposed. In the context of this thesis, low-impact dwellings can be viewed as a hybrid example, and I will suggest that their problematic history, and outspoken demand that we see human dwelling as a natural feature of the landscape, illustrate how far planning policies have spatialised the modernist principle of separation. While the recent ontological turn is persuasive on many fronts, the examples I will explore show that although low-impact dwelling holds the promise of transcending a nature-culture dichotomy, the very political economy in which such radical ecologies are performed cannot set this deeply held oppositional thinking fully adrift. As Bessire and Bond (2014) note, the casting aside of nature-culture misses the rising purification of those terms as basic political coordinates of contemporary life (2014: 441). It is with this caveat in mind, and following Milton's suggestion that anthropology can contribute to environmentalist discourse by providing studies of human ecology, that I explore in the next section the key environmental ideologies which research participants expressed, either explicitly and verbally or through practice and performance or

both. I place these “radical ecologies” in terms of the intellectual theories of deep ecology, and what is termed, the “new ecology”.

#### ***2.4.2 Ecology: Deep, radical and new***

I shall examine research participants' environmental ideologies—which I describe as permaculture and anarcho-primitivism—in Chapter Four. These radical ecologies reflect how research participants expressed views about nature and the environment. The radical ecologies I explore can be seen to emerge from deep ecology—,in fact George Sessions, a foremost deep ecologist, was cited as a direct influence by some residents at Tir y Gafel—but can be usefully critiqued by what is termed the “new ecology” which exposes some of the most deeply held views about the benevolence of nature and its oppositional role to culture. I explore these three strands of ecology in more detail here.

The term “ecology” was coined by Haeckel in 1866, and may be defined as “the set of relationships of a particular organism with its environment”<sup>27</sup>. This is a basic definition usually accepted in scientific approaches to ecology but by no means is it universally useful, nevertheless, it stresses the relationality of ecology (or ecologies) and thus suggests a social aspect of ecology. Such a usage lends itself very well to a relational mode of sociality typical of a Western context. Strathern (1991) notes that in Euro-American thought, persons are considered as a “disjunction of individuals”; it is relationships which connect them, and it is identifying these relationships which renders a “society” visible (ibid: 587). This society of relationships is thought to surround individuals and is thus synonymous with an environment; the relationship between people/environment therefore operates like an ecology. It must be stressed, however,

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<sup>27</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ecology> accessed: 28 August, 2011.

that this specific definition of ecology as the relationship between things seems only to take on significance in the Euro-American context which Strathern outlines. A brief explanation will help to orient this section: deep ecology concerns a deep relationship with nature. Deep ecologists call for fundamental change, and adopt a biocentric worldview as central to their radical ecology. On the other hand, the new ecology calls for a new relationship to nature, one which is not premised on the idea that nature is naturally in balance and benevolent toward human life, or indeed life in general.

***2.4.2a Deep ecology: All things are natural, but some are more natural than others.***

Milton (1996: 223) argues that once nature is viewed as an “all-encompassing scheme of things to which all human cultures and practices, as well as non-human species and physical processes, belong” we are free to examine the ecological value of human practices without first assigning them to a hierarchy based on misplaced ideas about some being more “natural” than others. This view has in fact existed as a countercurrent to the dominant discourse of post-enlightenment thought about human beings' domination over nature, exemplified by Spinoza (1677 in Curley, 1994), and is also a theme taken up by Latour (1993, 2005). Here I shall explore how deep ecology interacts with these theories.

Morris, (1993[1996]) summarises the main principles of deep ecology under three points. Firstly, deep ecology recognises that all life has intrinsic value and human domination over non-human life must be curbed. Secondly, the world is overpopulated by humans. Finally, practices which Morris calls the “high standards of living” enjoyed by Westerners require profound economic, technological and ideological change (ibid: 147). The deep ecology movement links to Spinoza's philosophy through Arne Naess'

(1973, 1989) work, and there is at first glance much in Spinoza to presuppose an affinity with deep ecology. Spinoza suggests that “man”, as it were, nature and everything else all form one *substance* (Curley, 1994); parts of this system are dependent on the whole, deriving their existence from it, but the whole does not depend on its parts, it precedes them (Spinoza, 1677, in Kober, 2013: 50). Deep ecology's biocentric ideology adopts this view of the primacy of the whole substance (or, biosphere), rejecting anthropocentrism which is a more dominant environmentalist ideology. Both Spinoza and deep ecologists claim that nature is not there just for the sake of humans, and that within nature there is no hierarchy based on complexity, rather that everything is part of nature in an interconnectedness of substance, in Spinoza's terms, or a network in Naess' (Kober, 2013: 55–56), but also observed by anthropologists such as Milton (1993). Kober notes, however, that while deep ecology shares much with Spinoza, the idea that biocentrism is an alternative to anthropocentrism indicates that it is optional—a view that cannot be reconciled with Spinoza (ibid: 58).

Critics argue that deep ecology has no real critique of modernity or society. Rather, the inversion of anthropocentrism for biocentrism would subjugate people under the laws of nature, reproducing separation (Morris, 1993[1996]: 145), but cf. Sessions 1995: 157). Deep ecology furthermore ignores the social root of many ecological problems (Atkinson, 1992: 202 in Milton, 1996: 77), due to a misplaced faith in the balance of nature (Morris, 1993[1996]: 145), a concept which the new ecology has firmly abandoned (Scoones, 1999; Zimmerer 1994). Deep Ecologists by contrast see that their ecocentric platform subsumes issues of social justice (Sessions, 1995: 266). As a “social ecologist”, Bookchin (1987) levels some particularly damning criticism, describing deep ecology as “a black hole of half-digested, ill-formed, and halfbaked

ideas” (ibid:5) that furthermore does not acknowledge its intellectual lineage of its social commentary from Kropotkin and others (ibid: 7). This judgement is, according to Black (1997), partly borne out of Bookchin's misplaced view that anarchy is necessarily an urban phenomenon (ibid: 105).

The problematic debate between anthropocentrism and biocentrism within environmentalist politics that deep ecology has fostered can be seen as something of a diversion from the question of how the ideologies of environmentalism can become actionable. Seen as the performance of opposed, but perhaps what are effectively untenable, positions, the debate between anthropocentric and biocentric ecologies can be put into better perspective as a theoretical undercurrent which has little to do with either environmentalist policy or practice. The radical ideologies I shall explore below, Anarcho-primitivism and permaculture, are linked to deep ecology, but as practical experiments grounded in action they take forward implicit, but subtly different, critiques of modernity.

#### ***2.4.2 b Radical Ecology 1: Anarcho-Primitivism***

Primitivism is a political and ecological critique on modernism. Shukaitis and Graeber (2007) define “primitivism”, or anarcho-primitivism, as “a radical current that poses an opposition to the totality of civilization” (ibid: 317). They associate primitivism with “radical elements of ecological and indigenous struggles”. Primitivism has come under fire as part of a “lifestyle anarchism” that the prolific writer and political and ecological critic, Murray Bookchin has sought to discredit (1995). Bookchin's writings span over half a century, and he has been generally associated with ecology and anarchism since

the later 1960s, particularly through texts such as *Post-scarcity Anarchism* (1971) and, with a moderated positioning, *The Ecology of Freedom* (1991). Bookchin's critique of primitivism centres on its apparent “yuppie” individualism, and claims it is antithetical to the development of a radical politics (1995: 19).

Milton (1996) has noted, the notion of primitive wisdom as a panacea for environmental problems is “mythic” within environmentalism (ibid: 31), and though simplistic, some uses of ethnography to establish certain stances on the relationship between work, the state and domestication have proven insightful (ibid). Day (2005) associates anarcho-primitivism with “dropping out”, which he further argues is part of a critique of work also common to autonomist marxism (ibid: 21) and is heavily influenced by Black's seminal essay, *The Abolition of Work* (1986). Black, though elsewhere claiming not to wholly advocate primitivism as such (1997: 105), uses anthropological accounts, in particular Sahlins' *Stone Age Economics* (1972) and “original affluence” thesis, which “exploded the Hobbesian myth” (Black, 1986: 1), to critique the particular cultural definition of work as compulsory productive activity, enforced by economic or political sanction. Smith (2002) suggests that one way to place anarcho-primitivism intellectually is to consider it against other forms of radical environmentalism in terms of the depth of each movement's critique on the ideology of progress (ibid: 412). Harries-Jones (1993) suggests “five shades of green” to describe environmental activism as a spectrum, ranging from conservation advocates, to “radical advocacy or militant activism” (ibid: 44). Anarcho-primitivism, we may say, is deeper than deep ecology, certainly if Morris' idea that deep ecology offers no real critique of modernity rings true.

Day (2005) suggests that “lifestyle” choices such as primitivism or squatting (his example) might be combined with acts which are political in nature, as a way through some of the more vociferous criticism (ibid: 21). Although anarcho-primitivism is part of the anarchisms more generally, in the field it was expressed primarily as an ecological stance, not a political one. Following Day, however, it is argued that living on the land as a moral choice in spite of a planning system that forbids it is in itself an act of resistance and thus political. It is my suggestion that the radical ecology demonstrated at Y Mynydd, as well as adopted by other parts of the low-impact dwelling network in West Wales resonates with anarcho-primitivism. Perhaps not everyone's current practice may be regarded through the lens of anarcho-primitivism, but certainly it was some contemporary residents' ideology: according to many research participants, in the past almost everyone shared this ideology—it was part of the Y Mynydd “origin myth” (Joseph, 2002: xxv).

While participants didn't entirely shun every aspect of modernity, ideologically the village stood against modernity insofar as it may be equated with Smith's (2002) “culture of contamination”. The idea of a culture of contamination refers to the radical ecological assertion that environmental degradation is an integral part of modernity, as opposed to the occasional accident. Smith contrasts this with the modernist view of modernity, in which only the *unintended* consequences of modernity are seen as contaminating: “it is possible to define modernity as a “culture of contamination”; pollution is not its by-product but the systematically produced counterpart of progress itself” (ibid: 413). At Y Mynydd the rejection of modernity was bound up with the ideology of living as part of nature. We shall see later on in this thesis how these sorts of ideas were negotiated in practices as diverse as rejecting the use of fossil fuels, or

idealising the lifestyle of hunter-gatherers or nomads. This latter practice was evident by the problematic approach to working the land for food production and the appropriation of dwelling styles—even down to the seasonal movement of dwelling. The critique of food production as somehow anti-nature is a tacit echo of the notion that food production is held to be a marker of human transcendence over nature, and an account of human domestication (e.g. Engels, 1934, quoted in Ingold, 2011: 78–79), also something held to by anarcho-primitivists (e.g. Zerzan, 1988, 1994, in Zerzan, 1999): “food production by its nature includes a latent readiness for political domination” (ibid: 39). Actually, by the time I conducted my fieldwork, fewer Mynydd people lived in moveable structures than lived in *huts*, most gardened in some way or another, and some even kept domesticated animals. These were, however, points of tension, and as will be seen, the village regularly projected anarcho-primitivist ideas as its ideology. Crucially though, it was seen as unproblematic to live as part of nature, and people regularly expressed those sorts of views.

#### **2.4.2 c Radical Ecology 2: Permaculture**

Permaculture is practiced widely and has found a niche amongst small-scale agriculturists and horticulturists, environmentalists and activists, it is a key organising principle for most of the research participants at Tir Y Gafel. Permaculture was originally developed by Australian bio-agronomists (e.g. Mollison and Holmgren, 1978) who began experimenting with polycropping systems, developing a framework which could work at any scale. Originally consisting of landscaping ideas, such as digging out swales to retain water and encourage biodiversity, permaculture has gradually extended

its remit so as to represent, for some, a design approach to horticulture and dwelling, where humans are not imagined as dwelling separately from a productive natural world.

Permaculture must be viewed as a response to Australian conventional agriculture's increasing reliance on unsustainable systems, and it is grounded in ecology, systems ecology, landscape geography and ethnobiology (Veteto and Lockyer, 2013: 101), however it has not been embraced by the academic community due to its wide-ranging interdisciplinarity, and mismatched approach to the prevailing social, political and economic context (ibid: 98). Permaculture remains a marginal ideology in the mainstream, a discrepancy that warrants a more detailed exploration. Pickerill (2013) notes that permaculture is a principle, rather than a set of rules, and that as such there is no precise shared interpretation of what permaculture is (ibid: 181). Current articulations of what permaculture is equate it with transition to an oil-free economy, sustainability, resilience and self-reliance, but I also situate permaculture as part of an existing critique of industrial agriculture, where many alternatives to industrial agriculture do not rely on the permaculture rubric. There are many manifestations of permaculture, but generally permaculture means either “permanent agriculture” or “permanent culture”, and is organised around the three core principles of earthcare, peoplecare and fairshare (Lockyer and Veteto, 2013: 12). Permaculture is a practical expression of environmentalism which provides a set of skills and *techne* to provide a sustainable future for humans to live as part of nature, by incorporating a set of values and an approach to living, organising space and everyday life.

I would often hear permaculturists use the rubric “to work with nature, not against nature” as a way to describe the sort of permaculture practice that other

commentators have called “lazy farming” (Aistara, 2013: 113). Typically this means not digging the soil up, and growing companion plants to deliberately choke weeds<sup>28</sup>. The time and labour spent in permaculture is in devising and designing, not in labouring as such. Scott's (1998) account of agricultural reform contrasts modernist high agriculture and its emphasis on monoculture with the sort of polyculture usually practised in tropical climates (ibid: 273–282). He notes that the west African practice of shifting cultivation struck (colonial) agricultural officials as backwards or sloppy—soil wasn't ploughed up, hoes or dibble sticks appeared to just “scratch the surface”—but this in fact helped preserve the integrity of soil, which would have been at a high risk of erosion (Scott, 1998: 283). In Scott's account, Westernised agronomists interpreted such labour-saving techniques as sloth, believing that the farming systems that they encountered which involved monocropping and deep ploughing indicated a more industrious population (ibid).

Hart (1996), a pioneer of forest gardening in temperate climates, describes a permaculture forest garden “like the natural forest, it is a largely self-regulating, developing ecosystem that requires minimal maintenance” (ibid: 50). This view assumes not only that nature is a system which is knowable, but that it may be harnessed and put to work. In this regard, I argue that permaculture reproduces a Newtonian separation between humans and nature, which is based on the objectification of nature as a producer. By co-opting nature, permaculture thus offers a radical, anti-Promethean approach to subsistence horticulture, and as such its approach to labour is at the core of its radical ideology: once perennial—or permanent—systems are established, minimal labour input is required.

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<sup>28</sup> Though there might not be any consensus about what constitutes a weed.

### **2.4.2 d The New Ecology**

When participants talk about harmony with nature, being part of nature or working with nature, they make an implicit reference to the idea of a balance of nature (Jelinski 2005). Jelinski (2005) regards the balance of nature as a myth, and as such it is an idea which has had a long and prominent history in Western thought (ibid: 276). In ecology, the balance of nature paradigm meant that ecosystems were regarded as tending towards equilibrium (Scoones, 1999: 481), however when static views of ecology are reproduced without question by social scientists, there is a risk that certain discourses about ecological systems can predominate (ibid: 480). The “new ecology”, by contrast, recognises uncertainty, instability and disequilibria (Zimmerer, 1994; Scoones, 1999). According to Zimmerer (1994), the new ecology also broaches “subjectivity”, which in ecology describes how non-human organisms may adjust and evolve in response to mitigating external environmental factors (ibid: 108). As such, new narratives are explored which suggest that there can be no straightforward relationship between people and the environment through processes of environmental change. In fact, Scoones (1999) goes on to note that studying the influence of “local practices” on the environment can suggest to what extent environmental change is linked to social and cultural processes (ibid: 493). In Chapter Five in particular, I will present different examples of local, low-impact *techné* interacting with and working on the environment and by extension, Welsh society, to effect change—the active construction of what my participants call nature.

### **2.4.3 Environmental activism**

Risk, in terms of pollution and taboo, is a general theme of much of Mary Douglas' writing, as well as being a specific focus in several volumes (Douglas, 1966, 1972, 1985, 1992). Along with Wildavsky (1982), Douglas examined how the rise of American environmentalism in the 1970s interacted with existing frameworks for interpreting risk and risk-related behaviour. Associating the rise of environmentalism with a rise in “sectarian” forms of social organisation<sup>29</sup> more generally, Douglas and Wildavsky's Durkheimian analysis explained environmentalism deterministically, as a moral mechanism by which society protects its institutions. The matter of choice, which Douglas and Wildavsky could not deny, began to expose holes in the logic of the framework (Milton, 1996: 97–98). Different choices about what cause, or “sect” to rally under meant that different moral orders were established, and hence, under Douglas' theory, different social orders were protected. As society itself was held to be the basis for culture, cultural change could not precede new social movements such as environmentalism, and so Douglas and Wildavsky's model held less and less general explanatory value. Or, at least, that is the essence of Milton's critique of their work (1996, pp 96–100).

Another perspective is to be found in Day (2005), whose critique of the “hegemony of hegemony” is applicable to any account of social movements being “single issue” groups. Day shows how members of activist groups' concerns readily cut across “issues” such as gender, race and environment, demonstrating plural voices which undermine hegemonised identities (ibid: 74). As such, the notion of a “sect” in which members engage to the exclusion of others is not characteristic of the Newest Social Movements. Berglund (1998), on the other hand, while noting that Douglas and Wildavsky's deterministic model is problematic, uses it effectively to explore behaviour

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<sup>29</sup> With reference to the grid-group model, sectarianism is one configuration (low grid and high group)

that may seem odd, in which the activist group she portrays actively excludes other actors from the group which at first glance would help their cause (ibid: pp 53– 61).

What does seem under-explored is the question of why action is so often deemed to be a justly solution to problems? At even the most basic level if human (or other) action has caused some environmental problem, why then should further action help? It almost certainly doesn't immediately occur to organised environmentalist groups that environmental *in-activism* should be a plausible option. This thesis will show that a strategy of passive rewilding<sup>30</sup> has proven effective, and is preferable to at least some research participants. Milton (1996) also problematises the premise of action in environmentalism, noting that as well as instances of environmentalists getting things wrong (Milton exemplifies this with an account of harmful detergent being used in an attempt to clean up oil spillages), cross culturally, of course, action motivated by environmentally-focussed concerns differs incredibly (ibid: 34), as Lien and Davison (2010) exemplify so succinctly.

Environmentalism as a social movement is nevertheless intertwined with practical environmentalism, or environmental activism. According to Lee (2013), however, contemporary activism is increasingly about producing and living alternatives in the here and now (ibid: 9), everyday activist practices are used as building blocks to construct a hoped-for future in the present (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 476). This notion of everyday activism is an important way to clarify how low-impact dwelling can be both everyday practice and passive to some degree, but viewed as a form of activism. I place low-impact dwelling as part of the contemporary UK back-to-the-land

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<sup>30</sup> A term which emerged from conservation to describe remodelling landscapes by eradicating non-native species in favour of native species.

movement, comprising a diverse array of co-operatives, practical projects, publications, actions, squats and networks. The historic lineage of this sort of action can be traced through several waves of anti-land enclosure movement, from the twelfth century onward.

Halfacree (2006) links the UK back-to-the-land movement to two key phases of radical politics, the 1960s/1970s and the late 1990s/2000s (ibid: 313). Certainly some of my research participants identified with the countercultural movements in Europe and America, beginning in the 1960s, in an era of heightened political dissent and action. Some of them were part of this movement at the time—one of my participants has said, “we rejected all forms of authority”. Rejecting authority meant devising new ways to operate which would reduce or subvert authoritarian discourses. The idea of going back-to-the-land has taken on a renewed significance and now has affinity with the wider green movement and is part of the debate on “transition” (to an oil-free economy) and the burgeoning movement for food sovereignty, what Halfacree (2006) summarises as “green radicalism” (ibid: 313). Back-to-the-land is now synonymous with a critique on industrial society and often practical projects are off-grid, both in terms of utility infrastructure and quite often operating with systems which lie outside of the traditional conceptual grid of the state, its institutions and bureaucracy.

In the ecovillage and low-impact dwelling context, the major aspect of environmental activism derives from devising and exemplifying alternative modes of land use and extra-legal residence. Beyond that, and as I shall explore in Chapter Four, most research participants were not really activists in any other sense, in fact, many expressed their environmental ideologies passively. This observation is not intended to

detract from the powerfully radical nature of alternative modes of land use. Halfacree notes that consubstantiality—a spatial relation between being and place so as to unite the two—is an important ideological component in the back-to-the-land movement, more so than other forms of counter-urbanisation, noting that this is radical from the point-of-view of contemporary western societies which emphasise separation from nature (Halfacree, 2006: 313), although I have noted that in the rural Welsh context identity is bound up with place, so that in the local sense consubstantiality is not *entirely* radical in local terms, and as I have noted, migration, fluidity and mobility within the back-to-the-land movement are at odds with rural Welsh conceptions of personhood rooted in the landscape.

By confronting planning regimes which have restricted unregulated small-scale occupation of rural land, low-impact dwelling represents a very particular form of environmental activism, essentially it demands the right to shape one's own environment in tangibly physical and meaningful conceptual ways. Lockyer and Veteto (2013) suggest that ecovillages should be seen as an attempt to overcome the nature-culture dualism (which is more a concern for social scientists than ecovillagers) by putting environmental and social justice into action (ibid: 16), yet this has important ramifications for the relationship between low-impact dwellers and planning regimes that discursively project the morality of the separation between human dwelling and nature. It is no surprise then that the politics of low-impact dwelling in West Wales should be so heavily intertwined with a critique on planning. This also means that the interplay between formal and informal models of land use is an important research context in which to explore how a combined dwelling-provisioning theory might

enhance academic approaches to the question of how far, and in what ways, environmental activism intervenes in and influences policy decisions.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEARCH FIELD**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the key field sites and research participants and give an overview of the field itself. I introduce Tir y Gafel and Y Mynydd, two low impact ecovillages, as well as non-village-based low-impact dwellings and other participants in the low-impact dwelling network in West Wales. I examine their views on, and motivations for, low-impact dwelling. I present narrative accounts, life-history, excerpts from unstructured and semi-structured interviews, observed data and passages from field notes to provide a varied sample of research participants commensurate with the plurality of approaches to low-impact dwelling.

### **3.2. Y MYNYDD**

#### ***3.2.1 Exploring Y Mynydd***

Y Mynydd is primarily an ecovillage lying on and around a river valley in Ceredigion, about one mile from the nearest existing village. Including the ecovillage, neighbouring houses and parcels of land, the Y Mynydd network covers around 200 acres of land which is partly owned privately and partly owned by a trust. The trust was set up in the first place shortly after a group of like-minded people had bought land in the area that now comprises Y Mynydd. Rhys, speaking for the village, told me that “we don't believe in ownership”. Agnes explained this to me in further detail:

“We wanted to occupy the land, but we didn't want to own it. The idea was we would come together, pool the land that we had already bought, and it would just be a free space. We thought that there must be some

way of doing this legally. I went to see a solicitor, we chose him because his name was Merlin so we thought it was a sign. ... So we set up a trust. This was as close as we could get to not actually owning the land.”

Thus the land has become inalienable since the trustees do not have the authority to sell any land even if they had the inclination to. This has created some 100 acres of shared land, which residents say is “held in common”, and which has been mostly left ungrazed and uncultivated to regenerate into woodland. In practice, the Y Mynydd trust is able to take donations; money from sources as diverse as savings, salaries, rent, inheritances, fundraising and compensation has been donated in order to buy more shared land, the most recent shared land deal happened around 2000.

Aside from the Trust there is no other structure, body, group or entity that can be said to represent Y Mynydd in any formal sense. Group consensus is strongest amongst those who occupy the shared land and my research at Y Mynydd mainly focussed on this group. Mainly families with young children, extremely long-standing residents, and some “newcomers”<sup>31</sup>, such people lived in moveable structures such as tipis or yurts, or more recently in *huts*; residents referred to Mynydd homes as *spaces*. The only consensual and overt aim of the group, and something that I was told quite often, is that residents “live with nature as part of nature”. This was reinforced in action, as strict taboos, or what participants often called *vibes*, were followed consensually to limit the scope and the scale of human inscription on the landscape. For example, motorised machinery or transport was not welcome in the village, one should not cut down any

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<sup>31</sup> The idea of a newcomer is very much dependant on who is involved, of course. Length of stay at Y Mynydd seemed more important to newer residents who, though occasionally unsure of who had lived there longer, looked on long-standing residents for guidance.

green (live) wood or build any structure from permanent materials (such as concrete or bricks), and no structure or *space* on the shared land may be sold.

In theory, anybody may join Y Mynydd and as such Y Mynydd can be characterised as an “open” group (which later will be seen to differ from the arrangements at the pre-planned Tir y Gafel settlement). This openness is often cited as a point of pride at Y Mynydd, as people celebrated the fact that anybody may visit and they are not obliged to pay or work for their access, something which is very unusual in the wider ecovillage context. Joining is usually initiated by visiting the village and staying at the *big lodge*—a large tipi used as a communal *space* and as a guest *space* for visitors. Once newcomers have gotten to know people, they would then make a *pitch*<sup>32</sup>, or improve an abandoned *pitch*, for a *space*, usually a yurt or tipi. It is regarded as important that newcomers initially make a gradual move to the village, those that rush in to building or occupying vast areas tend to be criticised.

While it might have been a point of pride, openness is not necessarily a point of principle at Y Mynydd. For example, during a conversation about the potential purchase of neighbouring land, one Mynydd resident remarked,

“We just want the land to stay as it is. Wouldn't it be beautiful to buy it, and just let it stay the way it is? ... You know, we are actually quite full and it might be time to just *close the door*” (my emphasis).

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<sup>32</sup> A *pitch* refers literally to somewhere to *pitch* a mobile structure, the best *itches* were flattened, drained and surfaced with shale.

This point of view is in fact a complete contradiction of the group's overt image as “open” and a non-hierarchical<sup>33</sup> space. In fact when I mentioned it to others the statement puzzled some residents who could remember the place being physically much smaller but also much fuller. What one villager called “throughput” explains how the community is constantly configured and reconfigured, that is, visitors come but do not necessarily stay, and if they do then they do not necessarily stay forever.

### **3.2.2 Physical and social organisation**

While I have observed that anybody may join Y Mynydd it is also true that young people who had been born at Y Mynydd had an innate sense of belonging to the place. Practices such as the planting of a “placenta tree” (discussed in Chapter Four) reinforced a sense of belonging to the land. Equally, a certain amount of deference from newer residents directed towards this generation reinforced this, though other long-standing residents vehemently rejected this idea. It was easy to observe a sense of belonging amongst the younger people, who often described themselves as a “Mynydd boy/girl”. This group often levelled criticism at newcomers, some of whom they described as *drongos*, which means a drop-out or slacker. The idea that you would want to move to Y Mynydd to live simply on the land was unfathomable to many of those who had always taken it for granted and aspired to different things. As a new village with no ancestors (at least at the time of research), relatedness and proximity to children who were born at Y Mynydd and belong to the place/ place belongs to them, must be seen as socially advantageous and an important part of the process of belonging to a kinship-based group.

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<sup>33</sup> Non-hierarchical in terms of occupying space, some of the longest-serving residents had some of the smallest *spaces*. The group is in fact intensely hierarchical, due mainly to pockets of privately owned land and buildings looming large on the margins of the shared land.

Family is therefore the most important idiom with which to understand social relations at Y Mynydd. One of my earliest encounters with some of the Mynydd children demonstrates this. Whilst visiting a friend and her family at their yurt prior to research, five or so children,—three of the household and two or three of their friends—were playing near me. One girl aged around seven asked me if I had any children. When I said no, she replied decidedly that in that case I was a “big sister”. Conceptually, therefore, social aspects of the village are organised along the lines of “nuclear” families, of which membership is due to allegiances between parents, past and present. Children at Y Mynydd often recognise brothers and sisters or forms of relatedness which are not based on consanguinity. For example, I never heard people refer to half- or step- siblings even when it would have been appropriate to do so (to me at least who was used to such categories).

If family is an important idiom with which to understand dynamics at the Y Mynydd community, then we must look at households, since that was the organisational “shape” which family took. At Y Mynydd the vast majority of the 100 full time residents are organised into small households typically based on parents and children, there are no instances of full-time shared households outside of a family arrangement or cohabiting couple. A typical household at Y Mynydd consists of one or two parents and their children, arranged in a series of *spaces* which are often connected to each other—this means that there are separate areas within the dwelling. By looking at the process by which children leave the family's *space*, firstly to their own *space* then to their own household, it can be seen that there is a general norm for a household to contain one kitchen. If a family has more than one kitchen, then really there are multiple

households. Interpreting household as based on kitchen is pertinent for Y Mynydd. In Chapter Four I present a typical example of the group's usual form of community expression—a shared meal at the *big lodge*—where momentarily all comers share a *space*, share a kitchen, share a household and share *communitas* through the sharing of food.

### **3.2.3 Kitchen, space, family—Ross' account.**

Ross' narrative illustrates the fluidity of space and the relationship between *space*, kitchen and family. Ross was born at Y Mynydd in the late 1980s, in a tiny *hut* made of sticks and thin thatch, which his father had built. Ross' family ran a smallholding and kept goats, Ross can remember taking the family's goats away to give to a neighbour because they were leaving to emigrate to New Zealand, when he was about three years old.

In New Zealand, the family toured around hippie communities, Ross remembers how productive they were, he told me about all the fruits, especially citrus, and seeing a pumpkin house. In the end the family decided not to stay in New Zealand and returned to Wales, via Nepal. Ross and his family watched riots from a hotel rooftop, which were part of Nepal's revolution. This would have been in November 1990. Ross remembers eating chips on a hotel rooftop and seeing the king's “grubby helicopter” flying in and out of the palace.

The family returned to Y Mynydd after Nepal, and lived in a tipi below the library<sup>34</sup>. Here, Ross can remember planting out snapdragon plants. Ross' father built a

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<sup>34</sup> Although practically defunct at the time of my fieldwork through lack of use—due to the vast majority of residents occupying the shared land—the library was a timber shack which still housed a few books.

*hut* at the bottom of the field near the clay-pit. This was a moveable *hut* consisting of panels of canvas and a thatch roof; they had a fire in the middle, like a tipi. Later they moved down to a lower terrace that had been vacated by someone else. This was not a good time for the family. Ross remembers his dad throwing a bucket of water over his mum; there was lots of arguing. Ross' mum eventually had her own *hut* in the corner of that field, and the parents divided the garden and outdoor space with “the raspberry curtain”.

Ross spoke vividly about his first compost which he had about age six or seven; he was already a keen gardener by this time and grew many vegetables. Ross remembers walking across the moor to collect manure for his compost. Ross brought in trees from the little forest to build a small *hut* of his own when he was 7. The *hut* was a canvas-sided thatch with a fire in the middle. Ross didn't really cook his own meals there, apart from the odd token meal cooked over the fire—there wasn't any gas, it was frowned upon; Ross said that gas was considered high-tech at that point—he still mainly ate with his parents. Ross stayed in his *hut* sometimes, his friends also stayed with him there, he said they would listen to story tapes.

When someone at Y Mynydd started making yurts Ross asked him to sew him a cover, and he did the woodwork himself, getting some help with knotting the lattice tight and using the equipment to steam the wood beams so they would curve. Ross was about ten at this stage. He told me that he lived in the yurt properly, he often prepared his own food, simple stuff like beans or sandwiches or pasta, but he usually ate with one of his parents anyway. Ross always had other young people hanging out or staying with him, they would play cards all night, drink coffee and listen to CDs. Ross said he would

stay up all night reading books, from about aged 11. This was when he first began to read himself.

Around 1998, Ross' mother got a house. Ross was about 12. Ross used money that he had saved up and bought a TV which was the ultimate treat for him. As he put it, he became a slob and grew fat for a year. By this time Ross was getting regular tuition at his Gran's in Norwich. He would visit her for weeks at a time, and she would hire a tutor for him for a couple of hours each day.

When they were at Y Mynydd, Ross' mother would stay at Ross' yurt, then when she got her own yurt, Ross stayed with her. At this point, Ross began renting out his yurt to someone who would later become his older sister's boyfriend and have a child with her (Ross' nephew). The rent was only £5 a week, but the principle seems outrageous. We laughed about it when Ross told me and he agreed that the only reason he got away with it was because the sum was so paltry and he was so young. Ross eventually took his yurt to a festival and sold it for £400, his mother had already agreed to match what he raised so that he could buy a PC. Ross used the PC to learn about computing and to play games.

At this point, when Ross was aged 14 (2000), Y Mynydd had acquired new land and Ross and his mother moved there (they still kept a town house). Ross also began building a proper *hut*. Again, he got timber from the little forest, much bigger trunks this time. He carried it up in stages, moving a pile of it part of the way each day. The

tractor<sup>35</sup> was going at that stage so he thinks he got the tractor to bring the wood the last bit of the way.

Ross moved into his *hut* aged 16 in 2002, although he said it wasn't finished. He also began his first formal education, studying an IT course at a local college (that required two hours travelling on the college bus). The course would last three years, and to aid attendance Ross stayed mostly at his mother's place. Later, when his friend at the same college was learning to drive, Ross stayed at his friend's place at Y Mynydd which was just next to the road and he got a lift to the local town in time to catch the college bus. During his time at college, Ross moved into a house-share with other Mynydd kids in the local town and attended college from there.

At college, Ross applied to study an engineering degree at Cardiff University, but deferred until 2006, taking a gap year in order to “chill out” and spend more time at Y Mynydd and get back in to keeping a garden. For social reasons, and to pursue relationships, he also stayed in town fairly often too and did the odd bit of work, usually informally. He left many belongings at his *hut*, including a laptop, and it was safe for five years of intermittently staying there.

Ross began university in 2006, successfully passing the first year. He was driving by this stage and preferred to commute to Cardiff and remain in his house-share with other Mynydd kids, plus keeping his *space* and something of a garden at Y Mynydd. Ross began the second year of university but left half way through the year. At that time, Ross and his girlfriend were experiencing some difficulties and were having a

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<sup>35</sup> A very old and very small tractor belonging to one Mynydd resident was the only motorised machinery to occasionally enter the shared land.

bad time. They moved in to Ross' *space* at Y Mynydd and spent a few months living there, as a sort of retreat from their problems. Things weren't easy between them and Ross' girlfriend didn't enjoy the lifestyle at Y Mynydd after a while. She moved to Bristol and Ross describes coming back to Y Mynydd after visiting her and “coming over the Severn bridge to see dark rain clouds and feeling, aah!” (appreciative sigh).

Eventually, Ross' relationship broke down completely. He began university again in 2008 but realised that the course wasn't for him and things looked bleak. He spent most of this time away from Y Mynydd and trying to focus on his university course, but he didn't stick to it. Ross couldn't keep up his car and found travelling to and from Y Mynydd too difficult at that stage so spent less and less time there. During this time he allowed many people to use his *space*, this time as an adult knowing not to try to charge anybody. He also let the village use his *space* as a temporary *big lodge* when the *big lodge* had blown down and was beyond repair.

Ross finally quit his degree course and started spending more time at Y Mynydd. He also spent time away, pursuing a social life and whatever work opportunities he could find, often staying at friends' places and getting lifts in and out of Y Mynydd wherever possible. By 2010, the time of my fieldwork, Ross seemed to have settled down at Y Mynydd with a steady girlfriend, he had his own car again and was doing gardening jobs for people and forestry work from time to time. They were living in his *hut*, which he claimed was still unfinished, and they grew an extensive garden.

#### **3.2.4 Extending the “space”**

Ross' story is typical of many of Y Mynydd's young people, as interactions with the formal sector are seen to curb the practicalities of living off grid, and remotely. The work involved in maintaining one's own *space*, and many hours travelling to college each day make Mynydd life unattractive, especially in the winter months. This fact—a condition of rural life in general—is exacerbated for young people who do not drive, either because they are too young, or it is prohibitively expensive. As soon as Ross' age-mate was learning to drive, and took them to the college bus, Ross gravitated back to Y Mynydd. After Ross' initial affair with television, his choices to live away from Y Mynydd are characterised as pragmatic, a way to make education easier, to pursue work, or to find a mate.

Ross exemplifies the flexibility which the young people at Y Mynydd show regarding guests in their *space*. Ross was one of the first of his contemporaries to have his own *space*, and therefore he was always hosting friends. Later, he would stay at friends' places to facilitate his new lifestyle, defined by going out to college, and would eventually take a room in a house shared by an almost constantly changing stream of friends and contemporaries from Y Mynydd. Even when he was not based in Y Mynydd, Ross and his pals demonstrated the same approach to dwelling, and the almost boudariless occupation of “our *space*”, as and when required—acquiring new *spaces* without relinquishing the Mynydd *space*. Bristol was a favourite destination for Mynydd kids, and there households comprising different assemblages of Mynydd kids seemed to emerge on a regular basis, and were always a destination for other Mynydd kids either to stay at or move to.

Where Ross' story differs from the usual trajectory amongst his peers (although it became evident amongst some younger Mynydd kids) is that he almost always maintained a *space* at Y Mynydd on the shared land, whereas others that have maintained *spaces* have done so on land privately owned by their families. By maintaining a *space*, and keeping some form or another of a garden, Ross has continued a lasting relationship with the land at Y Mynydd, which takes on a therapeutic character. Ross has looked upon it as a sort of a retreat, away from the pressures of full time education or work, and a place to go to when other aspects of life have proven difficult. Ross describes a feeling of relief when returning to Y Mynydd after spending time away, rather dramatically describing dark rain clouds amassing over the mountains<sup>36</sup> as he crossed the Severn bridge as a reassuring sight after sojourns in Bristol, where weather was either less important or less noticeable in a sprawling urban centre where he spent less time outdoors.

The feeling Ross described, and the manner in which he described it, is explained with reference to the concept of *hiraeth*, an emotion experienced by Welsh people when they long to return home. The experience of Wales' landscapes and weatherscapes were a cure for the *hiraeth* that Ross felt when away. This sort of a *hiraeth*, although expressed in a less acute manner (perhaps as a result of distance), is evident in some of the strategies that some of Y Mynydd's young people take, which is to go out to work, then save enough money to eventually buy a piece of land next to or near enough to Y Mynydd to facilitate a homecoming of sorts, and the chance to build their own home. This narrative was more typical of those whose parents hadn't bought land at YM and lived on communal land. Those whose parents had bought land tended

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<sup>36</sup> Although technically hills, the landscape of South Wales is dramatic in contrast to the flat Bristol Channel area.

to build a place on their existing plot if at all. None of the Mynydd kids I met aspired to the simple lifestyle their parents had chosen, except perhaps Ross. Even so, Ross' *hut* was quite grand at the time of building and his continuing division of time between different homes meant he could enjoy the simplicity of his home at Y Mynydd.

Ross' experience is typical of many of the Mynydd kids that I met, in that they never really made a complete break from the place. Even those who did not maintain, or even those that never had, their own *space* there retained an element of involvement in the social life, if not the material life of Y Mynydd. An ever-changing group of people over nearly forty years translates to a lot of children who have kept some form of connection to Y Mynydd. Some, like Ross, have *spaces* or parents who live there and spend stints of time living there. Others remain connected through their social networks and may rarely, if ever, visit Y Mynydd (and would be as strangers to those that live there now). Ross' story is characterised by more than just his home, though, his garden has been equally a source of connection to Y Mynydd. The group at Y Mynydd then is perfectly described as an assemblage: it does not just comprise of those that live there, it is an inclusive position defined by connection, lapsed or not, to the land, but experienced in many places other than that particular land.

### **3.2.5 Hywel: A light “trip”**

Hywel lives all year round in a tipi. For pleasure he sits outside to read, naked or wrapped up in layers of coats, hat and scarf as the weather demands, sat on a folding chair, facing south and following the sun every single day without heavy rain. Hywel doesn't garden very extensively; he may or may not plant a single potato, and he keeps a small perennial herb patch. When we spoke, Hywel used to occasionally bemoan the

culture of smallholding which had developed at Y Mynydd, as more and more newcomers staked out extensive gardens, complete with large polytunnels<sup>37</sup>. To Hywel, the practice set a standard which new people expected to emulate. Others referred to this in passing as “suburban”, but Hywel had more to say. As a consequence of the contentious siting of a polytunnel, which I describe in Chapter Seven, Hywel explained in detail his reasoning for opposing a polytunnel that would occupy his favourite view:

“The thing is, when people make the argument that they want to feed themselves, there's nothing you can say, I can't argue with that. It just closes down the argument, you know? And, in a way, in most contexts, she's right, it is probably one of the most important things you can do. But, this place wasn't set up for that, this place is about living simply, as part of nature, not so that a few people can have big smallholdings. If they want to do that, they should get a piece of land for that purpose. I mean, look at Ryan, he's only been here six months and he's already got a farm *and* a baby!<sup>38</sup>”

I suggested then that perhaps what was at issue was the amount of individual garden projects which ended up encroaching on the “wild” space that Hywel clearly respected. I asked whether it might be better to pool efforts and cultivate ground in the periphery of the village:

“Oh, no! I mean, it would probably be more *efficient* or whatnot, but you'd never get that organised! [incredulous laughter]. No, when I came here, more than 20 years ago now, something special was going on, a whole generation of children were brought up in tipis. That's what we did, and that's what this place was about.”

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<sup>37</sup> Although I had collaborated in just such a process during fieldwork.

<sup>38</sup> Shortly after he arrived at Y Mynydd, Ryan had moved in with a woman who was already several months pregnant and began keeping goats and poultry.

When Hywel was expressing his views he was showing his tacit approval of the anarcho-primitivist ideology which would see humans reject domestication; the attempt to raise a generation of children without most of the trappings of modernity was a practical anti-modernity critique. Ross' narrative shows, however, that it was not necessarily the case that living at Y Mynydd really meant rejecting modern technologies. It was true, though, that by the time I was at Y Mynydd all the children were in school by the age of six, and most of them had up-to-date gadgets such as portable media players and handheld game consoles. Even so, an element of anti-modernism prevailed. Even residents who had themselves become more gentrified over the years held an antagonistic point of view towards tilling of the soil, and in particular animal domestication. For example, some residents referred to a large muddy chicken run as a “concentration camp”, even though the chickens were given free range within its confines. Y Mynydd's practical take on anarcho-primitivism, for those that had affinity for it, rejected the idea of working the land and domestication in all its forms. It represented, therefore, something other than the rejection of modernity; rather it was a rejection of the idea of using other parts of nature, such as the land or other animals, as a resource.

Such examples capture something of the subtleties of the two points of view, living *as part of nature* or living *on the land*. Certainly, at times as I worked on a shared garden across the field from Hywel's tipi, where he sat reading in all weathers, I couldn't help thinking about Sahlins' (1972) observation in *Stone Age Economics*, that hunter-gatherers enjoyed abundant leisure time (ibid: 14). This demonstrates certain points of contention and self-reflection within a group where, after all, no real authority existed that could realistically force change or maintain the status quo beyond what

people would reasonably yield to. In other words, some residents felt that living as part of nature was an ideology which pertained to how to treat the land in question which did not need to encapsulate subsistence, since for now at least food was available elsewhere and this particular slice of nature was not charged to provide it all.

Darren, speaking partly in response to Hywel (though much later) conflated the morality of small-scale horticulture with family values:

“If Kylie wants to grow veg there's nothing wrong with that. She grows veg because she wants to feed her kids a big plate of veg every day, of course she should grow veg—otherwise she would constantly have to be in town”.

Here, a natural discourse is implied with reference to a mother feeding her young. In Darren's view—a commonly held view—nature was imagined as a resource, a provider, and one's part in living on the land was to exist in the immediate environment as much as possible and responsibly turn this to the task of meeting as many subsistence needs as possible. What was revealed in practice was that both points of view could be catered for (the latter being more usual, however) in different lifestyles, taking either the form of a peasantry, who worked the land and tended to settle in one spot, perhaps even erecting a *hut*; or a more mobile, nomadic class who tended not to settle or garden and, as my participants would say, kept their *trip*<sup>39</sup> light whilst foraging for food and supplies in the local town.

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<sup>39</sup> A *trip* is difficult to exactly define but occurs in slang with many meanings. It is worth striving for clarity here because participants used this term so often, from statements referring to excessive use of space, such as, “I can't (do something) because (someone) has put their *trip* there”; to one's own affairs, e.g. “(groan) well, I'd better go and get my *trip* together...”; or a comment on someone else's affairs, “(someone's) space is so lunched-out, they need to get their *trip* together” [(someone) is making no effort with their domestic space, they ought to organise themselves]; to the entirely cryptic description—a *lunched-out trip* [a state of dereliction]. With the connotation of the recreational use of psychedelics, the idea of a *trip* as a journey or a thing which is experienced best describes the usage in this context. There is some similarity in usage to the idea of a “head-trip”, but this term was never used.

### 3.3. Tir y Gafel

The ecovillage at Tir y Gafel has to be explained in the context of Lammas. Lammas is an Industrial and Provident Society with the remit to promote and enable the building of ecohamlets through advocacy, and the promotion of Tir y Gafel as an exemplary site; as such, Lammas engages politically and through official channels with the Welsh planning system. Lammas members must buy shares of £50 in order to join. By fundraising this way, Lammas was able to buy the land at Tir y Gafel in one piece. After purchase, Tir y Gafel was divided into plots which were leased to residents on 1,000 year leases that are inheritable, and which give clearly defined boundaries for each plot. Though it was widely perceived by other research participants that you needed “a lot of money” to apply to the Lammas project, in practice it seemed that not every resident paid for their lease up-front. Participants were reluctant to discuss such matters, but I gathered that several complicated arrangements existed to allow different plot-holders to pay for their leases gradually. As tenants, Tir y Gafel plot-holders have a sense of ownership derived from the long nature of the leases, reflected in permanent and extensive dwellings and long-term subsistence projects such as orchards and a dairy.

Tir y Gafel is an “ecohamlet”, not a communal group. The land is divided into nine separate plots, this separation is reflected by the fact that local council tax is paid by each of the nine households, not as a whole site. Five plots of five acres are fairly large compared to the other four plots, which have around one acre each and are grouped closely together. Although plots are quite clearly demarcated there has been

some re-negotiation of boundaries and plot locations, particularly amongst the one-acre plot-holders. There are also shared areas at Tir y Gafel which are not part of individual plots. This includes a shared woodland and areas such as the millpond, *hub/ hwb* and hedgerows. The four smaller plot-holders also share almost 20 acres of hay meadow. Residents contributed personally to the maintenance of shared areas, plus they have to pay Lammas for the infrastructure—road building, plumbing and power distribution.

Group consensus about how to live at Tir y Gafel is mediated by Lammas' remit to promote low-impact development, and as such, residents must respect the low impact ethos. Many residents of Tir y Gafel are also part of Lammas but people do like to see these as different things (cf. Lee, 2013). I was told by a Tir y Gafel resident, speaking as a member of Lammas, “We (Lammas) don't care what people want to do on their plots. They've got them for 1,000 years so it's up to them; as long as it's low impact, it has to be low impact”. Sharing this ethos is not enough to facilitate group membership, however. Tir y Gafel's status as having full planning permission mean that the site is effectively closed to further development; the current residents had to go through an application process in order to join. Any rite of passage associated with joining Tir y Gafel had already been played out through a lengthy process of paperwork, meetings and the requirements of the planning department, mediated by the over-arching Lammas structure. This exemplifies how the performance of bureaucratic functions has become socially efficacious in its own right (Graeber, 2012: 108), in this case by forming a new village. Lammas also had resident-hopefuls' applications screened by members of an established ecovillage in Somerset—a form of peer review, as it were.

After almost five years of preparation, by the time planning permission was granted most Tir y Gafel plot-holders were keen to start work on their projects. As a result, during the period of research Tir y Gafel was quite starkly a building site. Admittedly, many of the buildings which sprung up were pleasant and aesthetically complemented the landscape—most initial structures were timber-framed and turf-roofed roundhouses. A large-scale road network, plumbing system, drainage projects, buried power lines and areas where earthworks were being made to accommodate hedges—including one plot where the project involves excavating to a depth of several metres to benefit from thermal energy—meant that at first glance the site was mainly brown. The landscape at Tir y Gafel was being intensively altered and new plantings of hedgerows, trees and gardens were only just beginning to emerge. This intense phase of activity was necessary to meet the requirements of the planning application which stated that any temporary dwellings, such as caravans, trailers or camper-vans will not be permitted after the initial five years. It was remarkable that the requirement to explain and account for livelihood on a bureaucratic level, as well as compliance with building regulations, fire regulations and health and safety for a “low-impact” development meant that initially the site was “high-impact”, visually and energetically.

The question of provisioning was dealt with in the embryonic stages of applying to Tir y Gafel; since planning rules under Policy 52 stipulate that a high proportion of applicants' needs must be met from the venture of dwelling on the land, applicants must satisfy planners by submitting a robust management plan. To this end, residents already have an idea of what they can do to make a living, be it selling salad, weaving baskets or breeding worms; from the outset provisioning is woven in to the group's plans.

Nobody at Tir y Gafel was particularly concerned about where their living will come from, given that DIY shelter, land, renewable electricity and a garden meant that most ongoing “needs” could be provided from home. I saw that two approaches to livelihood were emerging, and one participant confirmed this; one approach was to look for ways of making a supplementary income either through working or activity linked to living at Tir y Gafel (e.g. selling foodstuffs, crafts or consultancy work). The other was to “downsize”; to reduce external dependence significantly enough to be able to meet needs from the plot.

### ***3.3.1 Being straight: Jenny and Craig***

Personal trajectories among Tir y Gafel residents vary. I spoke to many of them who had led what may be termed “alternative” (e.g. J. Williams, 2003) lifestyles for many years prior to joining Lammas and applying to Tir y Gafel; yet others had not led alternative lifestyles, or at least not in the conventional sense of the term<sup>40</sup>. Jenny's example shows what the idea of being conventionally alternative might mean. On a guided tour of Lammas Jenny explained to me:

“Before all this I was completely straight, just living a normal life”.

I discovered later, however, that Jenny was only referring to her mode of dwelling when she described herself as “straight”. As well as finding out through a mutual friend that she had spent some time on the road working a festival kitchen, I began to find out that Jenny had been involved with alternative or new age spirituality and took part in and

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<sup>40</sup> As will be seen, it was possible to hold many alternative points-of-view about politics and in particular spirituality, without having lived either in a community, a low-impact dwelling or other such alternative space.

organised activities such as sweat lodges to coincide with the full moon— a range of activities similar to those that Muir (2004) describes (ibid: 189–190). Jenny had even changed her name to one that she said reflected her personality more, under the guidance of a bard. Over time, Jenny revealed more and more about her being alternative that led me to question what she could have meant by saying that she had been “completely straight”. It was apparent that by designing and building her own ecosmallholding—along with her husband, children and a host of volunteers—Jenny felt that she was taking a somewhat larger step into an alternative world than she had previously done.

In Jenny's case, her previously-developed alternative or new age spiritual and political values were part of a process of moving to Tir y Gafel; she embraced low-impact dwelling as something that brought her “in tune” with nature and closer to the earth, in line with her new-age values. Other Tir y Gafel residents had a seemingly very different trajectory having already experienced low-impact dwelling outside of the planning system, in homes that were illicit. That is not to say that such people had no spirituality, alternative/ new-age or otherwise, or such values, just that these were not at the fore of what they presented to me and how they represented their low-impact dwelling practice. Jenny's husband, Craig, was one such person. He did not come across as overtly involved with alternative or new-age matters, in fact at the time of research he was mainly involved with planning, and was instrumental in the Lammas group's successful bid for planning for their site, and seeing that through to a near-completed project. At the same time, however, I knew very well that Craig shared many of Jenny's alternative values, this was a safe assumption, given that they were married to each

other, but this assumption was later vindicated during several years of research and social engagements.

Craig told me:

“In many ways I was living an ideal life. I had built my own home, I grew my own veg, I used a horse for transport and laid hedges for a living. I felt that I was equipped to cope with whatever changes would come, but it wasn't enough! I thought that my life, anything positive I was doing, was pointless because I couldn't openly share my experiences and say to people, 'Look, it is possible to live very well and at no cost to the environment'. So, I moved to Swansea, became a painter and decorator and began working on Lammas”.

Craig's trajectory shows two interesting things. Firstly, it shows that an alternative lifestyle, in a low-impact dwelling was already attainable—I knew the ecovillage where Craig had lived was also in West Wales; Craig's story also indicates why in that case, Lammas was such a change from the existing norm for low-impact dwellers, it was about engagement, dialogue, confronting and working with the existing systems which had made low-impact dwelling something of a niche and alternative lifestyle.

At other points in our discussions, Craig discussed how resource consumption was at the heart of his personal approach to low-impact dwelling, and by extension, what Lammas had come to represent for him. The idea of self-building was crucial in that respect; by dealing with power, waste and water personally, Tir y Gafel residents took greater responsibility for these components of everyday life. It was here that life at

Y Mynydd and Tir y Gafel had the greatest affinity, and where their versions of low-impact dwelling stood most opposed to the notion of low-impact development; under low-impact development the right things could be consumed in earnest, under low-impact dwelling consumption was almost always problematised. The solution was cast in terms of taking greater responsibility for both production and waste. As such, low-impact dwelling represents an entire process of provisioning.

### ***3.3.2 Changing points of view: Sam***

I got to know Sam when I worked as a volunteer on his plot. I had chosen the task as part of my Lammas volunteering stint based on the fact that we would be doing building work, and I wanted to know more about that process. Sam lived with his partner, Cathy and their three children. When I volunteered with them they had recently completed a roundhouse, were establishing a garden and were adding an extension to house a bathtub. Prior to getting a plot at Lammas, Sam told me that the family had lived at Bryncrws, a housing co-op based at a manor house on the Pembrokeshire coast. Most of the people living at Bryncrws lived in trailers or converted vehicles in the grounds; Sam's family had lived in a static caravan, but they still had their old live-in van which was now on their plot at Tir y Gafel. Sam said the drug scene at Bryncrws made them want to leave, and so they applied for a plot at Tir y Gafel. The plot they were working on was to be a new departure for the family, from what I gathered it had been a long time since they had settled somewhere where they enjoyed the independence they did at Tir y Gafel. Sam said that before they lived in Wales they had come from Richmond and I imagined that there was a certain enthusiasm about the project derived from it being more or less the first time the family had had a bit of land that they could shape for themselves.

My first encounter with Sam went very well. We seemed to have an instant rapport and he was very forthcoming in relation to the thesis I told him I was working on. He asked me what it was about and I told him that I was thinking about framing the question of low-impact dwelling as part of a broader question about land rights<sup>41</sup>, to which he replied “Excellent! I could write *that* thesis, that's for sure!”. As I will discuss in subsequent chapters, our work also consisted of a generous helping of political debate and complaining. I owe the bulk of my data on permaculture to Sam who dispelled my previously-held, and very dismissive, view that permaculture was basically *yogurt-weaving*<sup>42</sup>.

On subsequent visits to Tir y Gafel I would bump into either Sam, Cathy or their eldest boy and have a brief chat. Some months later I spent a couple of weeks at Tir y Gafel, and rather than staying on one or other plot by invitation, I positioned myself near to the village hub building site. When Sam drove past the hub area as I was milling about there I managed to catch him and arranged a good time to visit him. When I turned up as arranged I found Sam very busy trying to co-ordinate an upcoming volunteering week, which without Cathy's help (she was away at the time) he was struggling with. My main motivation for catching up with Sam in this more formal manner was to continue research into ecovillage volunteering, particularly how volunteers and volunteering was working out as part of the household economy over time.

It may have been poor timing, but by this stage Sam's outlook on my research had changed considerably, From his initial enthusiasm, he now expressed indifference:

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<sup>41</sup> This is what I thought I might do at the time.

<sup>42</sup> This was an often-used phrase in the field which dismissed something as overly New Age or something which, like trying to weave yogurt, wouldn't work in practice.

“I’m not really the person to ask to be involved. You’d be much better off talking to Cathy. She’s done university and all that so she would be able to help you”.

Sam suggested that I e-mail Cathy, but to wait until the upcoming volunteer week had taken place to be sure to catch her at the right time. I did so, but unfortunately got no response. I was not used to e-mailing research participants, since most of them did not have internet access anyway so I did not have a strategy worked out as to how many times I should e-mail and how long to wait for a response. I was not sure whether to write again, in the end I decided to leave it. I did see Sam and Cathy from time to time after that, and we would always say hello and chat as normal. In general it must be noted that formalising research encounters never worked out particularly well for me in the field, I therefore had to rely on immersive participant observation.

Even though Sam expressed reservations about getting involved in research at that time, he had at a prior time agreed wholeheartedly and offered plenty of insight into low-impact dwelling. I was puzzled, but not deterred by Sam's later indifference: I interpreted it as Sam declining to renew consent, rather than his withdrawal of consent. The material I had gathered with his approval was still legitimate fieldwork, but I could not expect all participants to remain endlessly patient and forthcoming about matters that seemed trivial or boring to them. There was also the issue of factionalism that had started to shape life at Tir y Gafel; this was already something that affected the possibility for research at Y Mynydd, and as I noted in the introduction it is likely to always be an issue for researchers in small villages. As a researcher, particularly one

that was not there full-time, I was not involved in or witness to some of the occasional personality clashes, arguments and inter-personal problems that I later heard that people at Tir y Gafel had experienced, and so I had to consider that closer involvement with some people would necessarily mean that others withdrew. I cannot say for certain whether this was the case with Sam, but it highlights some of the issues and potential difficulties that must be navigated in the process of ethnographic fieldwork.

### **3.3.2 Taking the plunge: Alex**

At Tir y Gafel, I spent most of my time at Alex's plot with Alex and her volunteers. Alex was the last resident-member to join Tir y Gafel and her example represents the only case so far of a volunteer moving to Lammas permanently. Alex volunteered for Lammas as part of one of the first volunteer experience weeks, having spent years volunteering in different locations and on a wide range of projects. When the plot became available unexpectedly, Alex was well placed to take it on.<sup>43</sup> Alex's story exemplifies a process of “becoming” which volunteering can initiate.

The first time I met Alex we were paired through a Lammas volunteer scheme. I remember being overly concerned with the spatial organisation of the Tir y Gafel site and the implied social dynamics; Alex and her three counterpart households were to form a terrace of dwellings with one-acre each and a share in a larger 20 acre field, whereas the remaining plots were relatively extensive 5-acre sprawls. It soon became apparent that this sort of issue was far from Alex's mind, and as I listened to her concerns I began to learn her views about an extensive and what seemed to be limitless

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<sup>43</sup> Alex's itinerant status offers a useful contextual aside: The ecological footprinting audit adopted by the WAG to assess low-impact dwellings means that a volunteer lifestyle based entirely at ecovillages would score a very low weighting, and indicate an applicants potential to sustain this.

alternative, land based and low-impact dwelling network of people and locations, largely devoted to permaculture.

Alex interested me immensely, and she was the ideal research participant whether she knew it or not. While I knew other Lammas volunteers were busy working on their hosts' plots Alex was usually content to sit around with me, drinking tea and discussing her plot, Tir Y Gafel, her own life and many other things. Over time, this changed somewhat as Alex's projects got underway, but I think she found me a willing worker, a fairly useful sounding board for ideas and always ready to act decisively at moments of her own indecision. When I first met Alex, although she had not had the length of time at the site that some other residents had, she was nevertheless applying the principle, derived from permaculture, of observing her plot of land through each season before beginning any significant projects.

Before Tir y Gafel, and before ecovillage volunteering, Alex had lived in Manchester and had worked for the Co-Op. She described her role as in community engagement, and it was clear that she had been happy in that role because the organisation generally subscribed to an ethics that Alex could agree with. Eventually, though, Alex began to yearn for something which her work could not fulfil, in fact she was rather scathing when she described the hypocrisy of the idea of “corporate culture”: large office buildings, individually wrapped biscuits and nylon carpets, and all the while boasting of ethics and telling others to be ethical to boot. Simultaneously, Alex said that through her support of organic, fair-trade and locally sourced food she had become aware of the burgeoning scene of alternatives to industrially-organised agriculture: workers co-ops, permaculture and volunteering. Alex described her first volunteering

experiences as a career break; she had intended to go back to work, and to her flat. Alex's first residential volunteer experience was through WWOOF, and she sent herself to southern Spain, for three months volunteering work with an armed survivalist who was preparing for the imminent end of the global capitalist system as he saw it, but who was not easy company. Undeterred by the intensity of this first experience, and with a desire to learn and to “up-skill” kindled, Alex described volunteering post after volunteering post in a tour of some of Europe's most well-known destinations for ecovillage volunteers, and many other lesser-known but rewarding locations. It seemed as she talked that Alex was undiscerning, not at all put-off by some of the more outlandish characters she met, but I soon realised that Alex's volunteer life was an alternative education, and I saw these skills put into action many times at Tir y Gafel. On the many occasions that we spent discussing Alex's plot she would whip out books and literature about forest gardening; Segal-style architecture; biodynamics; aquaponics; reed bed systems; and so on—the list was exhaustive. Socially, too, it was clear that Alex could smooth out many petty differences and stay out of much of the trouble and politics in the village. Though she did of course have her own share of difficulties it seemed that Alex was equipped, by her wealth of experience, to put things in perspective, and readily inclined to reach accord for the happy functioning of the group. At some point along the way, Alex decided she would sell her flat; I never figured out whether the timing was right by coincidence or design, but when the vacancy came up at Lammas, Alex was poised to take it.

I shall discuss volunteers separately below and shall make the assertion that volunteers are transient and do not stay at their host locations as a rule. Rules are, however, well-known to be bendy, and Alex's example is one case of an ecovillage

volunteer staying permanently. I shall discuss the impermanence and permanence of volunteers in due course, suffice to say now that while volunteer personnel does change, the fact of volunteers is a permanency at Tir y Gafel, and many other similar projects. While volunteers themselves remain transient, as will be seen, eventually most do hope to settle somewhere eventually. For Alex, the transition to Tir y Gafel residency was the realisation of her “apprenticeship” as a volunteer.

### **3.4. LID networks**

We will meet Pat and Mary shortly, two participants who live and work on their own smallholding. One day whilst visiting them, Pat showed me how he had been growing and curing his own tobacco. He gave me some seeds to pass around when I went back to Y Mynydd. If nothing else, Pat said, the plants were attractive to slugs, and would keep them off the rest of the garden. Once I had grown some plants, I also brought some to Tir y Gafel, I didn't think that many people there would want the tobacco, but I thought a harmless slug barrier might have been useful. The following year I was paying a visit to Cox, a housing co-operative at a Carmarthenshire farm<sup>44</sup>, and noticed some yellow tobacco plants in the garden. It transpired that one member of Cox had been a volunteer at Tir y Gafel and had picked up a plant that I had left there—these plants were its seedlings. The life of a mere tobacco plant, and its germplasm demonstrate the interconnectedness of people sharing the same ideas and practices (e.g. Ellen and Platten, 2011), located at different sites with different ideologies, advantages and constraints who share above all the ethos of DIY, what Day (2005) represents as a network of networks, infinitely interconnected (ibid: 182).

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<sup>44</sup> Cox is not part of this thesis in any in-depth way. During and just after the period of field research a series of events transpired which brought about the end of the co-operative. I had already consolidated my research focus on planning and it would not do justice to the Cox story to squeeze it in here.

This section introduces other key research participants who are part of the broader networks of people who are involved with low-impact dwelling in West Wales. Firstly I discuss members of the existing low-impact dwelling network in West Wales, and secondly I discuss the ecovillage volunteering network which was so instrumental in the development of the Tir y Gafel site—both physically and conceptually—as a hub for interaction and sharing of low-impact techne. I discuss volunteers in the context of volunteering practice later on, in Chapter Six, whereas this section introduces several volunteers in order to precede the discussion of the broad low-impact dwelling network which takes place in Chapter Four.

These examples not only supplement the ethnographic material gathered at Y Mynydd and Tir y Gafel, but by inclusion provides a fuller account of low-impact dwellers, their interactions with planners and with each other, and links their activism with the wider network of land-activism and activism around low-impact dwelling. As such, the main thesis comes into sharper focus. I claim that low-impact dwelling and low-impact development are two differing land-use models which interact with each other, and that this interaction acts upon planning policy, showing that a significant element of planning, at least in the rural Welsh context, has been to react to more ad hoc uses of space within its own territory. As well as qualifying the distinction between dwelling and development in this context, this material also qualifies the claim that there is a flow of ideas between formal and informal models of land use. By incorporating a host of characters and places which, superficially at least, lie outside of the examples given of more “pure” (Latour, 1993) versions of low-impact dwelling/development models. Extending Latour's approach, though low-impact dwelling can be seen to create a “hybrid” space, here I present a hybrid people, neither purely illicit

low-impact dwellers, such as at Y Mynydd, nor purely licit low impact developers, such as at Tir y Gafel. The material included here shows that for many people living in or encountering low-impact dwelling, the lines drawn between themselves and interactions with planners and other bureaucracy are not rendered as clear as either village so far described would indicate.

#### ***3.4.1 Pat and Mary: Being on and off the grid***

Pat and Mary are research participants who are part of the interconnected research field, for example, their daughter and grandson lived at Y Mynydd. They live on land of about 10 acres just outside a small village in Pembrokeshire. Their land is diverse, with fields, a stream, a large fish pond, woodland, orchard and coppice. They have many buildings, a home, workshop, sheds and barns for animals—all self-built. The materials used are things like locally sourced and milled timber, plus reclaimed materials such as panes of glass. Pat and Mary's dwelling has mains electric, wood-fired central heating, TV, phone and internet, and Mary works several days a week at a nearby leisure centre. In terms of utilities Pat and Mary are not really off-grid, but conceptually they have remained off-grid, because for several years they kept a very low profile, preferring not to reveal their newly built home in case they were evicted. One of the first few times I met Pat and Mary, Mary told me that if their home was discovered, they would be forced to sleep in their tiny camper-van. At that stage, Pat was waiting to collect seven years' worth of evidence to show they had occupied the land without cause for complaint. In fact, it turned out that news of their presence was already out in the small village nearby, where Mary's elderly father lives, but the planners did not call until quite recently. Pat and Mary's dwelling is now getting retrospective planning permission—although Pat tells me he is finding it complicated to provide accurate floor plans for part of the

dwelling, which was built to fit the space out of reclaimed materials and without initial plans. Because Pat and Mary had run their smallholding and lived in their home for more than eight years, and they were entitled to apply for a retrospective right of use with the planning department.

Of all the research participants, Pat and Mary have been most interested in and able to pursue self-sufficiency. Because of their mains connection they can reliably run a freezer, so they freeze meat and vegetables, fruits and their products, such as blackcurrant cordial and even eggs. The couple keep animals for their produce, such as poultry, pigs, goats and rabbits, some of which they sell on. Most of the time the pair live off their own produce. Without any restrictions about the space they can take up, the materials they use or their activities, and with a reliable source of electricity, Pat and Mary have reduced their dependence on imported food and shopping and have begun to see a return on their cider apple orchard. When I asked Mary why they had decided to live self-sufficiently, she told me simply that they always had done, ever since they were married.

### ***3.4.2 Rachel and Mervyn: Autonomous dwelling***

Rachel and Mervyn live in an entirely autonomous dwelling deep in the forest, it is not connected to any grid and it has not gained official planning permission. Rachel is from Pembrokeshire but told me that she had owned a house in Oxford years ago, she sold that and used the money to buy the acre of land they now live on. I learnt that Mervyn, who is from Ceredigion had lived at Y Mynydd many years previously, but as a family they had lived in a large bus before moving to rented accommodation. Like many marginal dwellings in rural Wales the house they rented had been dilapidated, but once

they improved it they found themselves in conflict with the landlord. Rachel explained that this conflict and their feeling of insecurity led them to move on to their land before they had even thought about building there.

Rachel and Mervyn's land was once the site of a farmhouse that was now a ruin, it had become a marginal site. More recently it was a clearing in a large forest plantation, the arrival of which had seen most of the upland tenant farms and farmland bought out or abandoned. Now the family had a vegetable garden, chickens, fruit trees, a patio, bees, ponds, and many other plants and shrubs dotted around an acre of land, halfway up a steep hillside. Because of the terrain, paths crossed each other as they zig-zagged up and down the land, leading to a terrace, a pond and a swing, and at least one path led up onto the turf roof of the house. It reminded me of an Escher painting. It always seemed to me that the terrain made this acre seem very big, and I occasionally wondered whether the site was really four-dimensional<sup>45</sup>. This site was certainly out of reach for housing developers—it couldn't even be reached by a conventional car, although clearly it had at one stage been deemed suitable for a farmstead before the surrounding area had become a plantation.

Rachel and Mervyn's dwelling was self-built and powered by solar panels and a home-made water turbine and heated by a large wood burning stove. It is a modest-sized home for a family of five. Rather than making a large building to accommodate a growing family, the two eldest children occupy their own caravans. Like at Y Mynydd, this means that dwelling was modular—*spaces may* be added or taken away as necessary. Mervyn described the dwelling itself as a “plastic sandwich”

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<sup>45</sup> I later learned that an acre is a two-dimensional measurement projected onto land for the purpose of measuring, so a hilly acre would have more surface area than a flat acre.

but that was a deliberately deprecating comment which refers simply to the fact that layers of waterproof membrane were used underneath more “local” materials (turf) in order to keep the damp from the inside of the dwelling. Mervyn and Rachel's home was burrowed into the hillside and the roof was turfed, outside you could walk on to the roof without even noticing until you were there. The effect, coupled with earth plaster and a hand crafted wooden interior—made from trees felled and milled on site—was dynamic, irregular and organic. Unlike a roundhouse, Rachel and Mervyn's home had not been built according to a set form, but to fit with what existed already. Building dimensions matched the available timber, and the space the dwelling occupied reflected the existing terrain. I got the impression that such *techne* could not be reproduced exactly—no two cases would be the same. Mervyn, a tree-surgeon by trade pointed out that he had felled the best and biggest tree to build their house with, it was an obvious choice he said, it was “ready”. Without taboos to encourage regeneration or a nature trope, or leasing arrangements which retained rights to hedgerows, Mervyn and Rachel's wood was theirs to use and enjoy, as a crop. With management the remaining trees are thriving and apart from the carpentry within their home, only stumps betray the fact that once there may have been a few extra trees around.

Mervyn and Rachel's status as regards planning is unclear. Officially they are not permitted to occupy their land, but this has not stopped them either paying council tax or obtaining a satellite internet connection. They are quite open about occupying their land in the immediate community—as local people involved with local people they see no reason to obscure their existence. In this family's case, surrounded by either farmers or forest, Mervyn finds work as a tree surgeon and wood carver and Rachel works outside of the home.

### **3.4.3 Philippe: DIY dwelling**

I shall discuss more about Philippe in Chapter Seven, which deals more thoroughly with the way research participants imagined the state and the planning system; of all participants, research data gathered with Philippe had been the most clearly focussed on planning because at the time of research Philippe was in the process of a convoluted planning dispute.

Philippe had converted an agricultural shed into a dwelling. His place was situated on a small piece of, very marginal, agricultural land. The land itself would have been considered productive, however years of use by a previous owner in a semi-industrial manner had left significant amounts of rubble on the land, which Philippe's pigs were usually busily digging up.

I had known Philippe for a few years, but his inclusion in this research project came about almost by accident. Philippe was a regular wheelchair user and had never fitted comfortably inside a house. In his adult life he had either adapted, converted or self-built *spaces* to live in; from old vehicles, to new trailers even to houses designed with dimensions and a layout to suit someone who was usually seated. At the time of my research, however, Philippe had recently moved to the agricultural site that I described. This site was completely off-grid; it had no sound water supply, no electricity and, crucially as it would turn out, no planning permission for a dwelling. The site did have a large hard-standing, the aforementioned agricultural shed, and was very accessible from a single track road.

I had known Philippe to be something of an engineer and a large part of his dwellings always housed a workshop, yet I was surprised by the challenge he set

himself in moving to an off-grid site. He soon set about installing a power supply system based on a wind turbine and solar panels, a rainwater harvesting system, and of course making a dwelling within the existing shed. Philippe's approach to his dwelling was qualitatively different to the vast majority of research participants. Ironically, given that Philippe has been refused planning permission for his home, the materials used to construct and adapt it would have easily satisfied the zero carbon requirements of OPD. Philippe used standardised building materials, all of which are rated zero carbon, his home is off-grid, as mentioned, and he heats it all and produces hot water using a single wood-fired stove. Philippe's approach to low-impact dwelling is remarkably similar to the low-impact development outlined by OPD, yet it was a mystery to me why he did not attempt to argue for permission based on OPD. Instead, he has both successfully *and* unsuccessfully defended himself against two planning enforcement notices served on his land, the upshot of which situation has been remarkably vague. Undeterred, and with few other realistic options, Philippe continues to spend some of his time at his workshop, and some of his time in France.

What is notable from Philippe's example is the irony that what might otherwise be considered an exemplary, zero-carbon low-impact development, almost entirely in line with the aims of OPD, is absolutely not supported by the local authority. This must stem in part from Philippe's inability to engage with the correct bureaucratic procedure, his inability to perform a “planning way of being”, an idea which I will return to in Chapter Seven. This issue is not unilateral, as noted above, the local authority had to serve two planning enforcement notices on Philippe, due to errors with the paperwork. What differentiates the two is that the local authority have been willing to enforce against Philippe as many times as necessary. As will be shown throughout this thesis,

the volume of paperwork and complicated nature of planning procedure is an oft-cited obstacle to the uptake of policies such as OPD and its forerunner, Policy 52.

#### **3.4.4 Separation: Sandy**

Sandy was very guarded at first about the fact that she lived discretely in the hills in a self-built home. Although I figured out whereabouts she lived very soon after meeting her, it took almost a year for her to tell me this herself, and still longer to reveal some of the details. I never actually visited Sandy's home. I think this was almost a crucial part of the research process: once Sandy was sure I would not disturb her by actually coming to her place, she was much more forthcoming with details about it, and equally happy for me to reproduce some of these details here, especially given the assurance that the details I did use would be obscured. Sandy and I met through a mutual friend, and although she lived in a fairly concealed manner she was regularly in the nearest shopping town, so I began to bump into her from time to time.

Sandy's home sounded very intriguing, she told me that there were no boundaries between human and animal, she allowed all animals inside her home. When meeting up with Sandy, I would often hear about the latest animal to take up residence, a pine marten or an owl or some such creature. I began to see that Sandy looked upon her dwelling primarily as shelter. Politically I had Sandy pinned as an anarcho-primitivist, this seemed to ring true; for instance, when I discussed rewilding with Sandy, in particular the way this happened passively at Y Mynydd, Sandy said

“Exactly! That's what's so wrong with these big conservation programs! I mean, up at the holding (how she referred to her place) I planted a few trees, but I soon saw that the self-seeded trees established quicker and soon overtook the plantings. And these were *native trees* I was planting, too! You're better off leaving things alone; just let nature take its course”.

Sandy's approach to dwelling was based on a separation; her town-life and her home-life were separate, and she seemed unwilling to let the two mix. Her home life, however, was not based on separation. Based around a simple shelter, Sandy had a presence there, but she was happy to share her shelter and did not separate herself off from her immediate surroundings. Sandy did very little to interfere with the land there, she grew no vegetables and she soon gave up trying to plant trees. That is partly why she was so often to be found in town, provisioning.

### **3.5 Volunteers: Transient people but permanent category**

The next category of research participants to introduce are the diverse and mobile volunteers who were attached to Tir y Gafel. I shall argue that they were an integral part of the village, though most often as a category, rather than personally. I shall focus on volunteers in Chapter Six, where I suggest that the interactions between ecovillage hosts and ecovillage volunteers represent a community of practice. Volunteer presence at Tir y Gafel was limited by the terms of planning permission; the vans and trailers of the core group of volunteers who were working on the village “hub” building were to move when the work was completed. Besides, after some time Tir y Gafel residents agreed to

limit volunteer stays to six-months. This is remarkable in the wider context, as oftentimes volunteering is the first step that people take in a transition to ecovillage life. The cap on volunteer stays subtly reinforced the formality behind Tir y Gafel—as a planned village there would be no room for informal expansion.

### ***3.5.1 The importance of mobility***

Stew's tale illustrates how many volunteers prefer the mobility that ecovillage volunteering gives them. Stew was part of a crew of volunteers who had been recruited to progress the work on the village hub building. I describe aspects of the hub-building story in Chapters Four and Five, here it is important to note that a dedicated team of volunteers had set up camp at the hub-building site and were responsible for the vast majority of progress that was made on the building.

Stew was highly mobile, living mainly out of his van, and travelling between locations in the UK and further afield where he could stay and learn or swap skills. I knew Stew to be a skilled carpenter and he had completed an apprenticeship with craftsmen in Germany; he made small wooden items, handsomely carved with very intricate designs.

I interviewed Stew towards the end of the building project. For Stew, being located at Tir y Gafel had been a useful sojourn. He told me: “this is great for now, I'm not 100% sure what's next but there will definitely be a project to go to somewhere”. This was an allusion to the growing trend in ecobuilding and the number of new project proposals that were being made under the new OPD regime. Stew regarded his volunteering stint at Tir y Gafel as a way to equip himself with skills that would open

further opportunities to get involved with more eco-building projects. Presumably these would also be residential, so for Stew this was a viable way to stay mobile, travelling has become an increasingly marginalised lifestyle in the UK since the 1990s.

As it happened, Stew later joined a crew that were squatting an organic farm in Pembrokeshire. The farm had once been a thriving co-op, but due to a lengthy misappropriation of power and resources, was winding down in order to be sold on by the last two members of the co-op. Meanwhile, Stew<sup>46</sup> and a band of fellow travelling activists had occupied the farm and hoped to mount a legal challenge to the sale. Ultimately the legal challenge failed and the squatters were to be evicted from the farm. They had decided to go quietly by a certain date, but this deadline had caused quite a panic in the group so that by the final day Stew was pretty stressed. I helped Stew to pack the last of his things, which included saplings of rare fruit trees and small fruit bushes all in plastic bag pots.

Stew told me he was destined for Gloucestershire where he would set up an orchard for a community garden project. Even though his fate was fairly uncertain, Stew accepted his transience, it was the basis for his activism:

“This could have been wicked. There's so much potential here, I mean we could have had it all going on ... Yeah, Lammas was great, too. I mean we had a great team....But I didn't want to stay on there, I mean, there's nothing to do now!”

For Stew, and many other volunteers, ecovillage volunteering enabled a mobile lifestyle.

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<sup>46</sup> Stew was responsible for bringing the tobacco plant seedlings I mentioned in chapter three to the co-op.

### **3.5.2 Volunteering as extraordinary practice**

In contrast to those whose volunteering enabled them to live a certain way, other volunteers had just decided to take a break from what they were usually doing. Many of Alex's volunteers could be classified as such, and another couple, Rita and Huw, exemplify this approach. A couple from South London, they usually worked in creative industries in the city, I gathered that Rita was a musician and Huw a designer. On a regular basis the pair would travel to Tir y Gafel and help on one of the plots and they always stayed with the same plot<sup>47</sup>. As such, the motivation behind Huw and Rita's volunteering was bound to an ongoing relationship with The Plot. The jobs that Rita and Huw did could at times be pretty mundane, and were far removed from the skills they used for making their living in London. As Huw observed, work at The Plot was such a big difference to the work and lifestyle the couple had in London that doing almost anything at The Plot was “an experience” for them. Plus, as The Plot developed there was a sense of satisfaction as they saw the results of their input.

When I last saw Huw and Rita at The Plot, although they were set to leave the following day, Huw told me that he had already arranged his return visit. I did ask then whether he had something like The Plot in mind for himself one day, or with Rita, and he replied.

“Oh no, it's not for me full-time, but these visits are just so rewarding and it's great to be able to help out The Plot, [it] really helps [it] out”.

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<sup>47</sup>This plot opted out of the research so I cannot produce a great many details here- instead I refer to The Plot. The rather clumsy prose is an attempt to avoid personal pronouns which might indicate who the resident(s) might be.

Here Huw expressed the central principle behind his volunteering, which was to help The Plot. Huw's labour, though largely unskilled, formed an important aspect of The Plot's economy, and Huw's involvement with The Plot was premised on providing that labour. In general terms, this approach was unusual among ecovillage volunteers, who tended to see themselves as receivers of instruction and tuition, as opposed to providers of labour. Many other plots at Tir y Gafel had such regular volunteers, but of those that I met very few were taking time out from a regular job in order to volunteer, and even fewer did not express the relationship in terms of them being able to learn skills.

### **3.6 Chapter Conclusion**

I have intended to show that research participants were recruited in order to provide a representative sample of a diverse field. Aside from this being a pragmatic arrangement, (since many people in one or other ecovillage and other low-impact dwellers in the area did not want to take part) it works well as a way to investigate some of the varied approaches to community that I outlined in Chapter Two. Research participants had adopted a mode of dwelling and a techne that was variously impermanent, discrete and low impact. A concern with planning often affected key decisions, such as where to locate dwellings to remain undetected, and everyday approaches to using the space. Politically, mobilising against what was perceived to be a repressive planning regime was a key trope of participants' accounts of their lifestyles. This chapter has also illustrated that to explore low-impact dwelling in West Wales the idea of a network, or even assemblage is useful in a greater sense than "community". I have explored how networks and assemblages differ; certainly if the notion of individual subjects could be challenged philosophically by this research context I might prefer not to use the term network, but on that basis I don't think it matters much. Where assemblage thinking does come in is in understanding how groups can be said to link and network with other

groups; they do so by their constituent parts, coming together to form an assemblage for one purpose, yet enduring and extending beyond that assemblage in many other ways. This thinking resonates well with the partiality of any ethnographic account. I am sure that another researcher might bound (Candea 2007) and construct (Amit, 2000) this field differently, should they be faced with different issues at different times. For my part, the overwhelming experience was in learning about how to learn about *techne*—technologies, techniques and tools, to enable low impact dwelling in practical, moral and conceptual terms—and how such *techne* was shared and spread through a network of assemblages which emerged from, consolidated around and adapted to the practical experience of being off-grid.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RADICAL ECOLOGY AND RADICAL ASSEMBLAGES.**

### **Introduction**

This chapter builds on the material introduced in Chapter Three by offering a more sustained analysis of how the everyday practices which comprise low-impact dwelling, as well as ideologies and discourses about nature, the environment and communities distinguish dwelling from development. I suggest that it is commonality in practice, rather than ideology, which forms a wider low-impact dwelling network through which ideas and know-how about low-impact dwelling and techne flow, and have come to underpin Wales' formal low-impact development plans. I begin with a short appeal to field notes to orient the later discussions which centre around the broader themes of nature and community, where it is argued that practice, rather than ideology unites low-impact dwellers.

### **Impressions of the field**

During the initial part of fieldwork I spend almost all of the time at Y Mynydd, I was living in a small turf-roofed *hut* and settling in to life off the grid. This was tempered somewhat by my obligations as a researcher to maintain some sort of communication with my supervisor. At the very least this entailed seeking out a source of electricity in order to keep a mobile phone charged, then walking to somewhere with signal to make calls<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> In this respect I had several options. I could make a donation and charge my phone on the mains electric connection up at the house, or I could pay £1 to charge a leisure battery and use a 12-volt charger to charge the phone. Or I could charge the leisure battery from a solar panel at the hut. I opted for the latter, not least because I also ran a 40W laptop to facilitate my research.

My field diaries document some of my first encounters with the Lammas site at Tir y Gafel, which consist largely of comparisons drawn with Y Mynydd. I initially perceived the developments at Tir y Gafel as “intense and severe”, given the attitudes I had developed while living at Y Mynydd. Clearly I had become used to the conservative pace of life at Y Mynydd, when I wrote “40 years of habitation has resulted in a temperate “rainforest”, not some sort of straw “Barratt Home” with parking for two cars”!

Notes in my diary claimed that the issue was one of scale and the way that low impact was imagined:

“Surely Tir y Gafel residents and council Planners agree on one thing, and that is how low impact is imagined. It is something that can be built, it requires planning (and planning permission!) and it must happen quickly—the main objective being to be able to demonstrate that environmental footprint can be reduced by such a venture”.

I thought that the practice and aim at Tir y Gafel was incompatible with the practice at Y Mynydd—the two sites were already markedly different:

“Y Mynydd's strength and longevity lies in its ambiguity, impermanence and amorphousness—It's early days but Tir y Gafel's apparent strength, and certainly its legitimacy, lie in its precision, ambition and testability—there is no shortage of interest in Tir y Gafel, it is very likely to succeed”.

### **impressions within the field**

Research participants sometimes held views about others which were at odds with what I found, as someone who moved between many places in the pursuit of research opportunities. For example, during a Lammas open day Jenny was leading a guided tour, and began to explain the permaculture theory called zoning, interestingly enough, zoning. Like zoning in planning policy, in permaculture zoning means planning out how each spatial zone in or around the dwelling will be used in order to make the space useful and used optimally. Some people use the principle to organise other aspects of their lives too, including tackling their building projects: one “zone” would be completely functioning before work started on the next zone. It was at this point that Jenny began describing her requirements for a washing machine and hot running water, facilities which she required, she said, in order to send her kids to school—“clean, on time and presentable”. Jenny then appeared to notice some of the people from Y Mynydd that I had visited with—and possibly some raised eyebrows showing scepticism—and continued:

“even though, we're low impact we don't want to leave all technology behind. I said to Craig (her husband) there was no way I would do without my washing machine. It's not like at Y Mynydd where they live without things like that, it's *total anarchy* down there”. (my emphasis, my parentheses)

This statement was interesting since it pre-supposed attitudes and activities that were very different from people's aspirations in reality. Jenny's husband had lived at Y Mynydd some years previously, and as my comments in Chapter Three suggest this was likely to be at a time when most people shared a primitivist ideology. It was understandable in that case that Jenny should have this impression. At the time of my fieldwork though, most Mynydd parents sent their kids to school. On Sunday evenings

in good weather one would see parents heating large vats of water on outside fires and kids in large flexible buckets or tin baths. Jenny's comment illustrated quite a gap in perceptions of what low impact (and perhaps, anarchy) meant.

### **Reconciling the field**

Tir y Gafel appeals to a relatively affluent, but environmentally conscious, section of society who are open to the idea of low impact, but wish the compromises to come in the form of technology and supply chains which are not exploitative; also known as “Light Green” (Harries-Jones 1993: 44; Sargisson, 2000: 83; 2009: 180). Groups such as Y Mynydd demonstrate an approach to low impact which approximates the “deep ecology” approach (Naess, 1973 Naess, 1989), these “Dark Greens”, as it were, seem to prefer to make ecological “savings” through their own labour, as the taboo on machinery illustrates. It was intriguing too, to note the Tir y Gafel resident's view of Y Mynydd as anarchic. The comment about “total anarchy” was perhaps a misnomer for that particular example, but it was also a perception expressed by others. A lack of formal ownership on much of the land perhaps implies this, but in everyday practice, a hardcore environmental ethos and the lack of officially designated boundaries has led to a degree of conservatism which is often missing from popular portrayal of the site—still others have characterised it as a place with many rules to adhere to.

This lack of ideological consensus should not prohibit a treatment of low-impact dwellers as similar. In light of their relationships to formal planning models they do appear more aligned to each other than to the planners' vision of low-impact developers. The basis of my argument is that shared common practice can stand in for complete ideological agreement. In any case, and as will be discussed, the notion that low-impact

dwellers must adhere to a strict ideology comes dangerously close to undermining the politics behind, particularly, off-grid low-impact dwelling. In all cases, shared practice and techne are articulated as more important than shared belief.

## **4.1 RADICAL ECOLOGIES**

### ***Introduction***

Here, I explore the ideologies of anarcho-primitivism and permaculture, environmentalist critiques of the influence of modernism on agriculture, with links to the deep ecology movement. The ecovillages that I researched were premised on these radical ecologies. Tir y Gafel was self-described as a permaculture project but Y Mynydd iterated no collective paradigm, although it represented itself as and was widely regarded in ways that approximate anarcho-primitivism. As we shall see, however, this ideology was idealised rather than uniformly followed. I present ethnographic data from both villages which illustrates how everyday practice shapes and is shaped by deep ecology, living as part of nature, and how the idea of acting in the immediate environment differs from the idea of acting in a global environment. The differences between the approaches at Tir y Gafel and Y Mynydd are thus highlighted but also commonality is established vis-à-vis the global environmentalism articulated through OPD. We see that permaculture reproduces the separation between humans and nature and relies on the objectification of nature, whereas the practical anarcho-primitivism at Y Mynydd, while not necessarily being a realistic portrayal of day-to-day life, is seen to emerge from the ardent belief in being part of nature and the position that human life is just one of multiple experiences which take place within

nature. As such, the case studies examined here intervene in the current anthropological debates about nature outlined in Chapter Two.

#### **4.1.1 Practical primitivism: Y Mynydd**

People in Y Mynydd expressed the idea of living as part of nature readily in conversations which affirmed group membership, for instance as advice given to potential residents, or in conversations about the community's direction or achievements over the years<sup>49</sup>. This claim to being natural was extended to an organisational structure which was self-regulating, acephalic, simultaneously answerable to everyone and none, and largely driven by informal consensus. This popular *big lodge* song illustrates how participants conceptualised this closeness to nature and the idea of dependence, as if nature were a mother:

“The Earth is our Mother, She will take care of us,  
The Earth is our Mother, She will take care...  
of... us...”

In spite of the ideology of living as part of nature, there were clearly instances where this was not practical. I learnt that in the past, several residents had at different times hoped to extend living as part of nature to living entirely off foraged wild food, with limited success. During my time at Y Mynydd, it was more usual for residents to keep productive gardens complete with greenhouses to serve most, if not all, fruit and vegetable needs. Some even kept animals for various foods, not always meat, but animal

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<sup>49</sup> One particular point of pride amongst longstanding residents was the gradual rewilding of a large proportion of the village's land. In the early days the land was still arranged in fields, not long since under grazing. By the time I was conducting fieldwork, land with a more northerly aspect seemed like an impenetrable forest, gradually rewilding as residents began to favour newly acquired land with a brighter, southerly aspect.

husbandry and any inclination of “farming” tended to be derided somewhat and in some cases, such as Hywel, discussed in Chapter Three, was disapproved of as not being part of an ethos of living as part of nature.

One way that people expressed being part of nature was by not cutting green (live) wood. Although by the time I was there many people practiced coppicing (which in certain cases seemed to be a euphemism for cutting green wood), preserving and encouraging the growth of trees had been a key part of the village's passive rewilding strategy. Trees, therefore, are in this case good to think with, and in this section I shall use the tree as a basis to explore the everyday and ideological notions about living as part of nature that people at Y Mynydd shared.

#### **4.1.1a Placenta Tree**

Dwellings at Y Mynydd, including most huts, are considered impermanent, but since small-scale horticulture has become a major pastime and element of household economy for many residents, gardens offer an alternative history of the landscape.<sup>50</sup> In seeking to learn more about the cultural landscape, I employed historical ecology, a methodology which combines oral history, phenomenology and social archaeology (Rival, 2006: 580).

It became clear that Y Mynydd's landscape features were important reference points in participants' everyday situations and conversations, as well as more abstract stories and histories which, in telling, seemed timeless. Since the plant world is largely given preference over human projects at Y Mynydd, environmental features supersede man-made ones as useful reference points. However, encompassed within seemingly

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<sup>50</sup> Even most *huts* would be unlikely to outlast a perennial plant, shrub or tree.

superficial conversations, such as sets of directions, one would often come across surprising snippets of local folklore, such as the existence of a tree made meaningful by the burying of a baby's placenta underneath it. Mike and Conor, two youths “native” to Y Mynydd were talking about directions to an old *pitching* spot:

C—You know the one, you go up the motorway<sup>51</sup> and left after the beech grove. It's before you get to the monkey puzzle tree.

M—Did you know that monkey puzzle trees are really valuable? Even small ones cost loads from a nursery.

C—Don't dig it up! That's MY monkey puzzle tree!

M—You can't own a tree.

C—Yeah? It's got my placenta buried underneath it so it IS mine. My Dad planted it when I was born.

During this conversation the monkey puzzle tree was singled out as a unique planting not every ash or oak tree could act as a reference point in this case, but ones that are particularly big, or may have a swing, a special feature or a singular history, could be referenced in this way too.

The reaction to the claim of ownership is notable. Ownership in terms of land or dwelling is not a category which is encountered on an everyday basis at Y Mynydd, at least on the core 100-or-so acres of shared land. Even though the monkey puzzle tree is a deliberate planting by someone, it is clear that once planted it becomes “ours”. This is a theme of negotiating ownership on the shared land, and in this case the obscurity of ownership is compounded by the lack of occupation, which could be considered the

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<sup>51</sup> The name of a very wide footpath.

active element of ownership, given that this particular dwelling site had been abandoned some years prior.

The burying of placentas beneath trees is usual practice in Y Mynydd and is common amongst alternatives and throughout the world's cultures, with ethnographic examples recorded in Java (Seligman, 1938: 21; Beatty, 2002: 484), amongst Brazilian Amerindians (de Matos Viegas, 2003: 27), historically amongst Nigerian Edo-speakers (Thomas, 1922: 251), in Thailand (Quaritch Wales, 1933: 447), and amongst the Ngoni people of Rhodesia [sic] (Barnes, 1949: 89). Just a cursory literature search reveals that the practice of burying placentas was usual in Java, Amazonia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Thailand, though I am sure there must be more instances. For instance, Rival (1998) notes that after a new baby is delivered, a Huoarani father “wraps the placenta in the large leaves on which the baby was born, and buries the bundle with the afterbirth in the nearby forest, at the foot of a slow-growing tree” (ibid: 624). I will return to the Huoarani example later, as we will find other parallels between the two groups' practices.

It is notable that Conor was able to trump the discussion using a biological idiom. It may have been quite feasible to argue that his parents had bought the tree, which would be an economic claim, or at least to claim that his father had planted the tree, which expressed in Locke's terms would mean that the mixing of labour with the land produced private property in the form of this tree. The sense of ownership in this instance was based on a biologically-expressed claim that amounts to a connection by virtue of having shared a source of nurture with the very tree.<sup>52</sup> This is not only the *only*

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<sup>52</sup> Strathern (1991) notes that in Euro-American bio-medical discourse, a placenta is genetically identical to the child it supports (ibid: 588).

claim that would have worked, which I established in later conversations with participants, but it was actually quite notable as a way to demonstrate how in fact features of the everyday environment are given particular place within individual and group histories. In the ongoing process of imagining, creating and maintaining nature, such acts reinforce meaning in the environment, a sense of belonging rather than ownership, which is dialectical and—like the Huoarani case (that is, embodied in a slow-growing tree)—enduring.

#### **4.1.1b Holding Space**

The deliberate planting of trees—which in this context was a permanent thing—was often used as a device to hold space<sup>53</sup>. Holding space to effectively prevent anyone else from occupying it is a contentious practice which leads to frequent complaints about others' actions. Several times I heard complaints about the excessive planting of trees and each time the tactic of holding space was mentioned. Carla, a tipi dweller, was outraged that someone had planted pine trees all over the moor where she intended to pitch. This was a controversial move, as the moor did not belong to Y Mynydd. Equally controversial was the planting of trees on the land. The moor neighbouring Y Mynydd is Crown Land, and as direct neighbours the Y Mynydd group could exercise common grazing rights, and some people did graze horses up there. I learned that in the past people has been asked not to *pitch* on the moor. After complaining about the idea of trying to hold space by planting pine trees, Carla continued...

“Anyway, we don't want that sort of tree up here, it's not part of the moor's natural habitat. Trees like that would ruin our lovely moor”.

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<sup>53</sup> *Holding space* means to claim space and to somehow impede others from using it. At Y Mynydd, planting trees was one of the key ways to *hold space* or to reinforce a boundary. Snyder (1996) notes a similar strategy amongst Iraqw farmers in Tanzania, as timber trees are seen as having a long-term intrinsic value and so boundaries planted with trees become immutable (ibid: 331–332).

As a human living as part of nature, Carla did not view her temporary presence on the moor in the same terms as a permanent “foreign” and utilitarian pine tree plantation<sup>54</sup>. Carla's comments indicate a relative obscurity of human dwelling at Y Mynydd, to the point where a tree is thought to have more of a lasting impact than a person's dwelling. This view forms part of the ideological approach which claims that people are part of nature, but is also pragmatic given the precarious legal status that the group experience.

#### **4.1.1c Historical ecology**

Just as Huaorani forest-dwellers recognise their archaeological heritage by virtue of certain fruiting shrubs growing almost exclusively on old hearths (Rival, 1993: 642), in the rewilded landscape of Y Mynydd perennial flora provided a useful way of piecing together certain histories. Residents of Y Mynydd, especially longer-term residents, seemed almost to have a layered memory of the landscape, often expressing occupation of certain places in terms of several residents, none of which were contemporary. For instance, Brian's spot could also be Keith's, Dan's or Mandy's, depending on who is talking, and what they are talking about. This sort of continuum between past and present, despite significant changes in the local landscape, is evident in certain features of speech that are fairly common. It is quite usual to hear about “fields”, e.g. place A is two fields away from place B. For instance in this landscape some Mynydd people could point out several different fields, however to the casual observer there are no apparent field boundaries.

Rival (1998) also notes that there is a misperception about what is known as the “pristine” rainforest (ibid: S82). Trekking Amazonian groups are in fact revisiting

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<sup>54</sup> for a more in-depth discussion of the contentious politics of pine trees in particular, see Lien and Davison, 2010.

productive fruit and nut groves established by their ancestors. Revisiting these sites is not only part of provisioning, it reproduces society over time (ibid: S89). While walking one day, Tomos showed me an old *big lodge* spot. The spot was by this time an almost perfect circle of willow (Figure 3). Tomos explained that the trees would have rooted from the willow pegs used to secure the canvas cover. Even a tiny piece of willow can root and grow vigorously. It was only after I learned this that I could even notice that the willow was a circle.



*Figure 3 Photograph showing a circle of willow (c) Forde*

Gardens and topographical changes pertaining to cultivation at Y Mynydd provide a visual legacy for those who come later, which is markedly different to the *pitches* that in this village are regularly left vacant in order to recover—a deliberate method to ensure few, if any, traces of habitation are left. As such, evidence of earlier dwelling (like the haphazard circle of willows discussed above) is found in long-lasting

perennial plants, shrubs and trees—either enduring specimens, or ones which are slow to mature, such as the monkey puzzle tree.

This brief historical ecology of Y Mynydd's landscape uses trees to yield important data about how residents have approached the question of living as part of nature. What stands out is the idea of environmental perception. The idea that one must live as part of nature requires residents of Y Mynydd to respect that which is already there, this is why holding space by tree planting is an effective strategy. There are of course other approaches to nature in the low-impact dwelling movement, and before I compare the Y Mynydd data with the Tir y Gafel data it is worth contextualising the idea of living as part of nature with recourse to the views of other low-impact dwellers.

#### ***4.1.1d Dwelling as part of nature***

The idea of living as part of nature was not confined to Y Mynydd; other participants expressed similar ideologies, although perhaps not in the same way. An interesting example was Rachel's views on dwelling. One day, whilst at Rachel and Mervyn's place, we had been discussing planning. The couple were in an unusual position of having been refused planning permission under any circumstances; they had been taken to court and had been fined, but so far no further action had been taken. Rachel explained to me that she thought the planning system was unfairly stacked against self-builders: “after all, every other animal can build its nest, it's no different really”. Even though Rachel went out to work most days in a town almost 25 miles away from her home, on the matter of making a dwelling-space she was in no doubt that the process was not much different for a person or another animal.

Rachel's ideas about nature didn't really refer to an imagined pristine environment. Being surrounded by forestry plantations it would be almost impossible to

simply equate trees with “nature” by virtue of being trees, when clearly humans had put them there. Instead Rachel's views about what was natural necessarily encompassed human action and the way she expressed the process of making a dwelling indicated that she thought it was a natural process, shared by all creatures, and should not be considered a right earned by a citizen and mediated by laws. By placing human dwelling behaviour on the same analytical plain as non-human animal dwelling or nesting behaviour Rachel's views show a key way in which low-impact dwellers views diverge from the development agenda. Chapter Eight in particular will explore how development policy makes certain assumptions about how to mitigate even low-impact human dwelling activity, whereas for low-impact dwellers there is nothing inherently problematic about dwelling.

#### ***4.1.2 Tir y Gafel, a permaculture project***

Tir y Gafel was clearly described as a “permaculture project”<sup>55</sup>. From some of the Lammas literature, it was clear that the perceived environmental benefits of permaculture spilled over into social benefits too.

“The Lammas project has chosen to use permaculture as a way of designing their project, not only reduce the impact of their living, but also to provide a model for how to live sustainably in harmony with the resources of the earth. The intention is to inspire many others and help broadcast the ideas of sustainability, low-impact living and permaculture far and wide. The example set by Lammas, in its entirety, will help the local council meet their objectives and demonstrate how other councils can do the same.”

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.lammas.org.uk/ecovillage/documents/Permaculturereport.pdf> (accessed on 08 August 2012).

Sometimes permaculture was an implicit principle in everyday practice, discoverable only through observing the use of methods which are derived from or feature in permaculture, such as the planting of a reed bed system with bog plants to process *grey water*<sup>56</sup>. Revealing the use of permaculture therefore required a certain amount of knowledge about what permaculture was to begin with, as well as the ability to tell what was specifically permacultural, and what was common gardening practice anyway. My work on a shared vegetable and fruit garden at Y Mynydd (not specifically permacultural) was a good grounding in investigating permaculture further.

#### ***4.1.2a Permaculture practice in context***

During a visit to Tir y Gafel, on one of the Open Days, Cathy was showing a group of us around her garden. I was looking at small garden beds which contained a mixture of plants. Some of these I recognised as kale but I didn't recognise the finer, purple-flowered plants. As Cathy passed by, I asked her about them, and to my horror she started pulling them up as if absent-mindedly destroying them while she talked:

“These? Oh, these are buckwheat.”

[Are you growing grain here?]

“Oh, no. They're a green manure.”

I must have looked blank, so she continued:

“You just grow them alongside other plants. They harness beneficial nutrients. When they're flowering like this, you just pull them up and leave them to compost around the plants like a mulch. Easy.”

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<sup>56</sup> A common way to describe post-first-use water.

It certainly did seem like an “easy” system, as Cathy was essentially able to feed her plants and condition the soil by simply strolling past the bed, pulling up a few flowers and dropping them *in situ*. Cathy's views on this system were expressed in terms like “easy”, and describing the plants as doing the work that otherwise she might have to do to keep her crop (kale) healthy (e.g. harnessing beneficial nutrients). Cathy did not use terms like labour and/or time to explain the practice, but labour saving and time saving was certainly observable in Cathy's practice.

Permaculture practice is aimed at reducing effort, and embraces the reuse of “waste” where practicable. Graham, a resident of Y Mynydd who was a keen gardener, balked at the aesthetics of permaculture:

“Permaculture? Hmm. No. I'm not sure about *that*. It seems to me like a lot of rubbish strewn all around the garden, margarine tubs, old motor tyres and *black plastic*. No.” [original emphasis]

Despite this approach to utilising all sorts of materials which may otherwise be considered “waste”, one of the main casual criticisms I would hear about permaculture is the perception that the practice has been commodified, and the way its material culture is marketed through magazines, catalogues and websites. In general however, non-permaculturist research participants had a mixed response to the idea of permaculture, some even mocking the concept as a “concept”, whilst tacitly adopting many principles which are used in permaculture, though it was not always clear in which direction the ideas were flowing. Ross, whom I already knew was a permaculture detractor, told me:

“It does seem to work, I have seen some good examples but a lot of it is quite common-sensy. There is a bit of a... *cult* surrounding it. They're

definitely trying to make the most out of the least effort. Co-planting and mulching, that's basically what it is.”

Clearly, then, for its detractors, “permaculture” is just a new name for existing *techné*. It is a category which can be inclusive, or exclusive, much like the use of the term “community” discussed above. The use of the category permaculture to describe what might otherwise be termed “gardening” conceals the tacit assumptions of inclusion/exclusion, anti-work and anti-waste. Those people that were involved with permaculture, however, identified it as a movement of sorts with its own politics.

#### **4.1.2b Permaculture as politics**

Whilst volunteering at Tir y Gafel, I worked helping Sam to build a wall for a bathroom which was to be tacked on as an extension to the family's existing roundhouse (I discuss this more fully in Chapter Six). The wall was of classic low impact design: old halved ton-sacks from the builders' yard filled with hardcore (produced as part of the landscaping at the site), in-filled with straw bales then coated with a cob (dung, lime and straw) plaster. As we worked we talked about many issues and came on to permaculture. I kept bumping the wheelbarrow into a herb planting in a pretty spiral that was between me and the rubble heap. The design suggested to me permaculture as I then understood it: a breast-shaped mound planted with scraggly-looking herbs, some of which I recognised. The planting struck me as pure aesthetics, more effort spent on beautifying the “sacred geometry”<sup>57</sup> than on the care of the plants. Sam, however, explained the functionality of the design, as moisture-loving plants were situated at the bottom of the mound and ones preferring drier soils were at the top: the plants' needs were met and complemented each other with the minimum of input or tending. I was

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<sup>57</sup> I would occasionally hear people describing anything spiral, curved or circular in such a way.

incredulous; I had thought that permaculture was New Age, or what other participants called *yogurt weaving*, not scientific.

I explained to Sam how surprised I was that there was a theory behind the herb spiral, and he assured me that permaculture had a wide-ranging application, especially in emergency situations:

N—You must have heard about Havana, right?

EF—Well yeah, but in what respect?

N—Well, because of the US embargo on Cuba, they've already reached peak oil, the country needs to produce its own food sustainably now. Even though Havana's urban, they've had Australian permaculturists out there and now Havana itself meets 70% of their own food needs within the city. They've had permaculturists there since the '70s. There's a film about it, you should check it out.

I did indeed check out the film Sam recommended to me, *The Power of Community: How Cuba survived peak oil* (Morgan, 2006). The film recounts how after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba lost its source of oil. Cuba had relied on fossil fuels as part of its agricultural revolution, and without a source, food shortages ensued. Gradually people began turning empty lots<sup>58</sup> and even rooftops in urban areas into gardens, with advice from Australian “permies”<sup>59</sup>. Without petrochemicals, companion planting and food forests (forest gardens) were utilised—the diversity of species reduced the threat from pests. The Cuban Government sold large farms to small, private co-operatives and

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<sup>58</sup> What I presumed to mean unused building plots.

<sup>59</sup> A more succinct way to say “permaculturists”.

leased fields to farmers under a usufruct system<sup>60</sup>. Throughout the film, small-scale gardening using organic technologies and permaculture ideas is presented as a key way to avert crisis. Permaculture's consideration of the potential of every space to produce is very intriguing. Permaculturists would often explain how viable small-scale food production does not require acres of land, or even necessarily a garden. This idea was clearly presented in the Cuban film: by de-centralising agriculture under its urban agriculture programme, in which 140,000 people are employed, Cubans were able to access fresh food without relying on transportation.

#### **4.1.2c Permaculture as activism**

Some of the low-tech principles of permaculture seem to have an application to emergency or impoverished situations. Activist Sam Rich has produced a series of posters aimed at Ugandan householders, one of which explains how to set up a kitchen garden (Figure 4). The idea is to grow vegetables on a small mound which encircles a 1-2 foot diameter opening in the middle (retained by a small loop of fencing or similar material, or even refuse if that is all that is available), into which *grey water* and peelings are thrown. The vegetables are kept watered by the dishwater which would otherwise be wasted or might stagnate somewhere else to cause problems. Above all, dirty waste water and kitchen compost is contained in one place, not easily accessed by vermin, and put to good use. With a small outside space, anyone could attempt this with a combination of food plants suitable for their climate, or even perennials or ornamentals. Such techniques—whether presented under the rubric “permaculture” or not—can change the way that space can be used, running counter to the categorisation of zones of land by planners which is such a prevalent idea in the UK.

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<sup>60</sup> This means the land is leased without rent or taxes until the owner needs it back; it is an insecure form of tenancy.

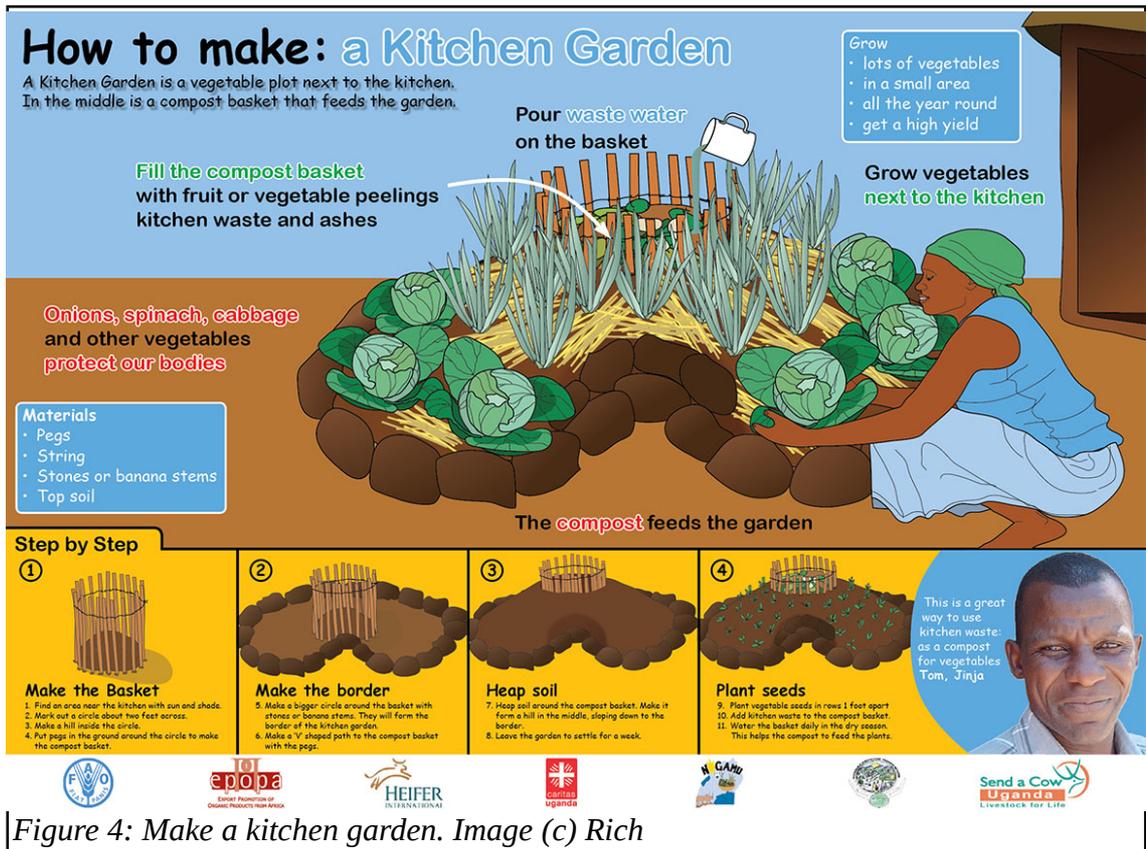


Figure 4: Make a kitchen garden. Image (c) Rich

Permaculture helps to challenge certain assumptions, such as the idea that a garden is increasingly becoming a leisure space, and is not a site for serious food production<sup>61</sup>. Ellen and Platten (2011) note that although in 1996 84% of Britons had access to a garden, the proportion of food produced in domestic gardens had fallen sharply from the 1944 figure of 10% of all UK food production. It seems significant that the UK's first permitted ecohamlet (Tir y Gafel) is located in an agricultural area—I was told that Pont y Gafel farm had Wales' largest milk quota before it was broken up— and

<sup>61</sup> That the home garden is popularly viewed as a leisure space is reinforced by the material culture available to gardeners. Gardening tools widely available at UK DIY shops are designed for leisure gardeners (the tacit assumption is that serious food producers will have mechanised processes). This belies the ongoing process of hedonising technologies (Maines, 2009)—prior subsistence activities which required effective tools have become trivialised, hedonised, and are now for hobbyists. In the course of fieldwork at Y Mynydd I tried European tools such as an *azada* from Spain—a form of mattock—which was easier to use and more effective than a spade for digging and didn't require footwear.

explicitly describes itself as a “permaculture project”. The alternative mode of dwelling and occupation of space mounts a two-pronged critique on industrial agriculture.

#### **4.1.2d Permaculture as (a)moral practice**

In permaculture, labour is minimised, this was evident by Cathy's plant feeding practice. To “work with nature” permies advocate “no dig” gardening, heavy mulching and companion planting—exemplified by the forest garden. A forest garden is a selection of complementary food-bearing perennials which grow at different physical levels; they act in a mutually beneficial way by suppressing competing plants and recreating a “guild” of complementary food and resource plants. Typically, a permaculture garden uses heavy mulching and beneficial ground cover plants to suppress weeds—bare earth is not desirable because it is at risk of degradation. In general, everyday permaculture practice can be described as *laissez-faire*, though setting up systems which can be left to take their own course might require input. Still other practices see permies deliberately *not* intervening. For example, broken tree branches might be left to decay to provide a habitat for beneficial insects, rather than be cleared away.

There is an aspect of labour saving in permaculture that runs counter to established ideas of garden care, and especially soil management. For instance, allowing plants to self-seed indiscriminately does not fit with the producer who must practice crop rotation as a matter of soil hygiene. As Aistara (2013) points out, traditionally trained Latvian farmers called permaculture “lazy farming”, quipping that if permaculture was just farming amidst weeds, then permaculture was everywhere on their farm (ibid: 113). Perhaps the labour saved in gardening could justify extra time spent on the sort of aesthetics described above? I discussed this idea in relation to Scott's account of the clash between local practices and high modernist agriculture in

section 2.4.2 c, so there is no need to repeat that material here. What is useful however, is to note that there is clearly a fundamental tension between the ways that people regard land, whether it is naturally sustaining for humans (or can be designed to seem so), or a productive canvas that is given meaning and value through human industry. Equally, the perception of industry and its value in the dominant political environment runs counter to an emerging definition of activism in which human intervention is increasingly problematised, or at least, not heralded as a solution to environmental problems. Permaculture emerges as a set of practical skills and as a way of talking about a shared understanding that I had experienced, researched and come to know, but had hitherto been unable to name.

#### ***4.1.3 Discussion: Permaculture and practical primitivism.***

I have used examples from Y Mynydd and Tir y Gafel to illustrate how different ecologies and environmentalisms shape groups' practices and discourses, I have also indicated that such ideologies are by no means exclusive to either village. While Lammas openly describes Tir y Gafel as a “permaculture project”, I have used the label “anarcho-primitivism” to sum up much of the ideology and practice at Y Mynydd. Perhaps not everyone's current practice may be regarded through the lens of anarcho-primitivism, but certainly it was some peoples' current ideology; according to many research participants, in the past almost everyone shared this ideology. While participants didn't entirely shun every aspect of modernity, ideologically the village stood against modernity insofar as it may be equated with Smith's (2002) “culture of contamination”. At Y Mynydd the rejection of modernity was bound up with the ideology of living as part of nature. This is a very specific iteration of anarcho-primitivist ideology and it may be thought of as practical primitivism. Crucially though, it was seen as unproblematic to live as part of nature whilst also pursuing

extra-natural activities such as work, building, going to school, driving a car and so on, and people—even those participants who were not attached to either ecovillage—regularly expressed these sorts of views, using terms like “natural” or “organic” to describe their dwelling strategies.

#### ***4.1.3a Practical primitivism***

At Y Mynydd, research participants said that they live as part of nature, and importantly this is the only overt requirement explained to newcomers. In practical terms, living as part of nature meant accepting that which is already there. This indicates that rather than nature being imagined and constructed, it is perceived and accepted. Dwelling in this context emerges from the perception of a pre-existing nature, and not the construction of an environment for living in—whether or not that environment may be discursively regarded as “natural”. Even in the early days Y Mynydd's rewilding took place through a passive process of non-intervention, an approach very opposed to the design and shaping of nature evident at Tir y Gafel. Y Mynydd's ethos and the possibility of living as part of nature has a resonance with the notions of deep ecology, and the philosophy of Spinoza which has offered an alternative to the ideas of separation from and domination over nature that have been at the core of modernity (Scoones, 1999: 486).

In spite of assertions that it is right to live “as part of nature”, this is a problematic statement to analyse; especially so when trying to use philosophy such as Spinoza's to explore these ideas. Spinoza's key argument is simply that humans, nature and everything we do are all part of one substance—for Spinoza there is no option (Spinoza, 1677, in Kober, 2013: 50). Even making the distinction might tacitly affirm a separation from “nature”, which participants had simply chosen to address through

practice. Participants' belief in living as part of nature might have indicated that they may have felt, at some point, outside of nature, or at least that they recognised that people dwelling in a different way do not live as part of nature. Crucially, they are able to live as part of nature by adopting certain practices, which I discuss more fully in Chapter Five.

When I probed people about what being part of nature meant, it was clear that nature was imagined to be external and had agency, it was something with which humans can have a relationship. The character of this relationship was less clear. Often nature was imagined as a regulating force, in the absence of other authority. I noted this as one particular strategy that people could use in order to curb others' activities. For instance, examples ranged from the idea of *holding space* by planting trees (which could not be cut down, hence acting as a boundary or distance), or curbing building projects with statements alluding to the moral character of living on the land as it is, without making an impact. In the absence of formal authority, tacit authority may be discovered, and categories such as “nature” may be used coercively, for instance, to counter territorialism. Other participants, notably Rachel, naturalised the idea of rights, at least when it came to the question of making a dwelling, by drawing comparisons with squirrels, or other creatures' nest-building.

#### **4.1.3b Permaculture**

Like living as part of nature, permaculture also requires the decentring of human activity, belief in the prospect of living as part of nature, and letting nature take its course. However that is not to say that permaculture practice is not articulated scientifically and is not either planned or contrived. The idea of the natural in

Permaculture is undeniably a construct, based firmly on the belief in the balance of nature given certain parameters. Unlike the wild nature imagined at Y Mynydd, through permaculture people were discovering a domesticated nature, or domesticating their own take on it. Under permaculture, the inevitable processes of nature could be harnessed in order to provide kind and productive human habitats, such as forest gardens or reed beds.

Permaculture represents a paradigm by which practitioners set out to understand “nature” and natural processes in a systematic way. This understanding is translated into a set of skills and a framework which can manipulate any sort of space to replicate processes derived from nature. Such systems are thought to be inherently sustainable, but tailored to be human-scale solutions either to a sense of impending crisis, striving towards seemingly better ways of life, or indeed as the solution to emergency and disaster situations. However, at the core of the practice lies a familiar assumption: the quest for the revelation of the laws of nature, and the assumption that nature has laws, is a continuation of the Enlightenment project.

Underlying permaculture therefore is the belief in the inherent laws of nature and balance of nature (Scoones, 1999; Jelinski, 2005); it depends on the idea that nature is in some way knowable, that it has rules and ways of working which are there to be discovered. As such, Newtonian physics and enlightenment philosophy, which reduce the idea of nature to a set of laws that are separate to the human domain, must underpin permaculture to some extent. Although permaculture was by no means a universal ideology, practices which form part of a permacultural approach to land use were widespread. Nevertheless, permaculture represents a way to talk about an emerging

insistence on the potential and demonstrable harmony between human activity and the natural landscape, in which the morality of labouring is absent. Permaculture does not appeal to a work ethic—it is quite definitely anti-labour—in permaculture everyday labour does not create value, it is something to be minimised. This was evident in observing practitioners, like Cathy, and also a widely held perception, evident by viewpoints such as Tomos’ comment about “least effort”, or Aistara’s quote about “lazy farming” (2013: 113). Such ideology represents a profound anti-Promethean departure from the tradition of Western radicalism, and as such, it is illustrative of an emerging theme that this thesis highlights: the belief in human action as a solution to human-induced environmental problems must be scrutinised.

#### ***4.1.3c Conclusion***

Whereas the groups and people that I have presented differed in their approaches to low-impact dwelling, having variously strong ideologies about nature, or more piecemeal beliefs about how best to dwell, the examples illustrate a difference between an ecology in which individuals imagine themselves as relating with/to their environment on a daily basis, and an environmentalism or “light green” politics (Sargisson, 2009:180) mediated through other institutions and not imagined or performed as a direct relationship or as part of an everyday ecology. As working radical ecological projects both Y Mynydd and Tir y Gafel must be considered to be successful examples. It is my suggestion that these sorts of radical ecologies have been impactful and have helped to formulate certain characteristics of OPD. OPD is after all a version of sustainable development articulated by and for spatial planning. Unlike other planning regimes that adopt sustainable development which mitigate development with offsetting, OPD requires a significant amount of everyday interaction with the site in

question. This must be seen in the context of the existing low-impact dwelling network in Wales where this sort of engagement is commonplace, whether through formal models like permaculture, or evident in ideological statements about living as part of nature. The next section discusses the question of community among low-impact dwellers, asking how significant the concept is to people living within groups, or separately, for their conceptions of low-impact dwelling.

## 4.2 RADICAL ASSEMBLAGES

“This isn't a *community*; it's a village” (Brenda, Y Mynydd).

As discussed in Chapter Two, community is not a taken-for-granted shape that larger amalgamations of smaller social units necessarily take. Literatures vary, but community is just as likely to be symbolic (Cohen, 1985), hegemonic (Day, 2005) and exclusive (Joseph, 2002) as it is natural, beneficial or inevitable. Here, I will show that community did emerge during research, but that its emergence was predicated on certain political situations. My key concern is to ask, if not community, then what? As such, this section explores the idea of communities of practice, networks and assemblages to explain the social dynamics and the propensity for grouping together as low-impact dwellers that people, groups and their constituent parts demonstrated.

### 4.2.1 *Finding community: three examples*

In Chapter Two I discussed the category community and when use of the term “intentional community” might be a problematic way to describe alternative forms of co-residence or shared space. I maintain that this literature (e.g. Sargisson, 2000, 2007b, Sargisson and Tower-Sargent, 2004), tends towards a presumption of community,

whereas I found that community was not a given and was usually explicitly denied. To illustrate this idea I discuss three typical examples of when community emerged during research. As will be seen, community was a political category; it could be explicitly stated to mobilise action, it could be implicitly performed when people gathered in shared spaces, or community could be an image portrayed to, or sometimes, *by* outsiders.

#### **4.2.1a Mobilising community: the strimmer**

One key way in which participants at Y Mynydd used community was to mobilise support for or against controversial or transgressive behaviour. For example, when one resident began to use an electric strimmer to cut grass, another resident visited each *space* to draw attention to this transgression. The complaint was framed in terms of the use of power tools to stake a claim to more land. This example reveals one of the ways in which “the community” would appear, in the guise of conventions about types of behaviour. I gathered that the complainant had received a mixed response about the strimmer. Because it was an electric strimmer which could be charged from solar power, and not a petrol version, a lot of people didn't find it ethically concerning. The complainant, however, was more concerned that the use of power tools for cutting grass would lead to imperialism over shared space. The use of the term community to mobilise support was in fact quite tenuous in this case because most other residents didn't seem to have a strong opinion on the matter.

One way to explore community is to pay attention to beliefs, practices and values that members of a so-called community share (e.g. Aull-Davies, 2003), such as the apparent ban on power tools discussed above. Sargisson notes the particular difficulty with defining community values in a similar research context: “intentional

communities rarely retain the exact vision of their founders across more than one decade. Rather, it shifts and changes over time” (ibid, 2007: 400). The meaning of community thus emerges in context, and is subject to change over time. Attempts to mobilise “the community” on issues of personal or collective significance thus provide opportunities for intentional communities to either “retain the exact vision of their founders”, or to moderate a collective response so as to begin to permit new behaviours. I gathered that perhaps 25 or 30 years ago, the strimmer would have been unacceptable but attitudes had changed considerably. For example, I heard that other residents had borrowed the strimmer to see how effective it was on their grass. The use of the term community in the strimmer example thus indicates that the issue was one which was thought to be crucial in defining what the community stood for. In other words, an ordinary complaint, for instance that somebody had parked their car in somebody else's usual parking spot, would not be juxtaposed with the idea of the community.

#### ***4.2.1b Affirming community: the shared meal***

This excerpt from my field notes describes a shared meal which took place in the *big lodge* at Y Mynydd in March 2011. Residents stipulate that the *big lodge* is primarily a shared space and is liable to be used for anything at any time whether visitors are staying or not. Shared meals took place often, but not regularly, and I suggest they were a way to affirm community by emulating the key locus of household organisation, the shared kitchen.

*I had already been told that there would be a shared meal in the big lodge, as a get-together, but also to fundraise for the land fund, so when I heard the conch shell blowing at about 7.30pm I knew it was time to grab a plate a cup and some cutlery—and a decent log—and to*

*head over to the village fields. It was a grey (March) evening, just getting dark but not properly so, as I walked over I could smell the smoke from stoves in different dwellings that I walked past.*

*I could smell the fire and see the shadows flickering in the big lodge as I approached, as well as hearing the hubbub inside. There were different kids darting around in and out of the door, and especially behind the lining. I shook my wellies off leaving them to fate in the huge pile of boots by the door and stepped in. The floor of the big lodge was covered with a thick layer of reeds (called reeds, but actually rushes), dry and surprisingly pleasant to walk on. There was an enormous circle of people sitting round a huge merry fire (not the 3 log type for day-to-day tipi use, but a huge social fire giving warmth and light to the lodge) and I could hear the clinking and clatter of about 50 plates and cups as people chatted, kids howled and everyone waited for the meal to be served. I squeezed into a gap in the existing circle, it will not do to sit in front of someone in the big lodge or to make a breakaway circle or inner circle unless absolutely desperate. The meal consisted of rice and dahl with onion bhajis all home-made by an ex-Hare Krishna family, there was a massive amount of food based around 3 gigantic cooking pans, one was apparently “vegan” rice. This part goes by in a blur as it consists of passing a plate round in rough sequential circle order right to left (based on kitchen position) getting it back piled with food then tucking in. Kids were served first, then adults, then seconds dished out, then pudding (cake and custard) to kids, then adults, then pudding-second. Later more seconds were*

*eaten then it was a free-for-all until the food/ everyone was gone—  
tonight the food went first.*

*By the time the meal was over, a top hat was passed round for  
donations—to the land fund—suggested at £5 each person, but this was  
by no means compulsory or actually given. The magic hat system is  
trust-based and accommodates the poor without requiring means  
testing or making an issue of it. I can't be sure, (because the magic hat  
is not checked or regulated) but I gather that kids (and youths) eat free.*

*Nowadays alcohol is enjoyed—sometimes copiously—in the big lodge,  
although this was not always the case. This evening, drink and song  
started flowing after the meal as kids started to disappear to be  
replaced by drums and the odd bottle of whisky. I played the  
tambourine until my shoulder hurt, it's actually quite difficult to keep  
shaking it. It was during this time that I noticed the visitors to the big  
lodge, two Cardiff University students, girls who had found the place  
on the internet and had come for a look. Their presence was not  
unnoticed, but wasn't problematic, until one began to take flash  
photographs (dissent was heard to come from some parties, but it was  
not a major argument). One girl even ventured a song.*

*The night ended at around dawn, with a drunken old posse keeping the  
poor students awake and pretty tired looking by the time I sloped off  
near to 5. I heard that someone had wandered into a hedge on their  
way home only to be pulled out by one of the students.*

In this account, a shared meal takes place in Y Mynydd's communal tipi. As discussed in Chapter Three, household ordering at Y Mynydd centres on kitchens. The momentary shared kitchen at the big lodge meal implies that all residents are one household, even if this is fleeting. Shared meals are a significant part of many communal living spaces, sometimes happening daily (e.g. Sargisson, 2000: 35, 42). As such they are an important but common way to affirm community.

#### ***4.2.1c Community Building: the hub.***

At Tir y Gafel, plans for the site included a large and well equipped community hub building. Lammas were awarded a generous grant to enable the building of this community space which was intended as a place to share with and educate visitors and guests. Building the community hub was not always a smooth process. Neil, a Tir y Gafel resident had taken on the role of foreperson for the project, and had a very firm view that an ecovillage's community space should project their ecology. In theory, this meant that Neil rejected planners' demands that the building be lined with plasterboards. In practice, however, and to appease the regulations, Neil devised a way to make low impact plasterboards out of a lime plaster and off-cuts of wood, harnessing volunteer labour which always seemed plentiful. I return to this example throughout the thesis; it is useful here to illustrate how ideas about community can be embodied. The form of the community hub structure was thought to reflect and project ideas about community and community values. The idea of community at Tir y Gafel was interesting because of the Lammas organisational structure; ideas about community were mediated by this organisational layer. In theory, the individual plot-holders at Tir Y Gafel had no need to interact with each other because of the overarching Lammas structure, and the necessary interactions with Lammas were specific to each plot. In the absence of many other institutions, a perception of community was reflected in the surroundings, especially the

built environment, and the built environment was thought to project and shape the ideas about community that were being portrayed to outsiders.

#### ***4.2.2 Alternatives to community***

At Y Mynydd, kinship was the idiom with which to make sense of everyday social relations, participants often talked about family, rather than community, and things tended to be “shared” rather than referred to as “communal”. This is demonstrated by the fact that the occasional community events took the form of an extended family meal. At Tir y Gafel, community-building was embodied by the community hub, although in my experience, as a space for hire the hub brought *external* people together, either with or without Tir y Gafel residents. Volunteers and other low-impact dwellers in the wider area encountered ideas about community but approached the idea externally; they were not “in communities”, however I argue that no research participant was really actually “in a community”. I have presented different manifestations of community which may be said to be typical ways in which an array of people and ideas are brought together for a specific purpose, either to mobilise, affirm or project a concept—in this case, “community”. Actions such as these can be said to be the location of community, as outside of such events, discerning community was not clear.

Community could be considered a useful way to explain collective action that did not project ideas based on personal, familial or factional values. Rather, projecting ideas about community suggested that what was at stake (physical boundaries, environmental ethics, group coherence etc.) was of wider and non-partisan importance. As such, it appears that community emerged in response to different triggers, not vice versa. The feeling of community is affirmed through a shared meal, the notion of community is mobilised by perceived transgressions, the ethic of community is projected through the built environment. Therefore, community seemed to accompany

other activities, it did not exist as a constant factor, immovable and hegemonic, rather community was continually being negotiated.

#### ***4.2.3 If not community, then what?***

A problem arises: if we accept what my research participants have said, and agree to reject the idea of community, at first glance we appear to be left in an uncomfortable space defined by rejection and “dropping out”. As Day, (2005) notes, however, “[J]ust as the rejection of coercive morality need not necessarily lead to passive nihilistic relativism, so the rejection of Hegelian community need not necessarily lead to an anti-social individualism” (ibid: 180). This suggestion is nevertheless typical of the literature on “alternative communities”. Various referred to as estrangement (Sargisson, 2000, 2007b, Sargisson and Tower-Sargent, 2004) or dropping out (Day, 2005: 20) alternative living is characterised in the literature by some degree of distance. Halfacree (2007) is a good example, he compares two alternative communities, characterising one as a place of “drop-outs” who rely on benefits and have little else to do with the outside world, whereas a nearby community which has been resourceful enough be granted funding to maintain a woodland is presented in a more positive manner (Halfacree, 2007: 4). Arguably, funding is akin to benefits or even farm subsidies. The money in all cases is an effect of the state, but the perception of maintaining a woodland is apparently more neutral than the idea of maintaining a person. I argue that analyses like these overlook the pragmatism of dwelling that is inevitably found when people must balance an arcadian idealism with everyday life, and especially bringing up children. School, shopping, lifts, money—all these reminders of the outside world infiltrate life at Y Mynydd—the state encroaches even in the guise of whimsical *Radio 4* and its hourly pips. Furthermore, Ross' account of growing up at Y

Mynydd (Chapter Three) is typical of the way people may juggle life in an ecovillage with a life outside of an ecovillage.

Analyses like Halfacree's quoted above simply reproduce values which belong to the logic of the grid, which my participants rejected. There seems to me to be little point spending some years researching and portraying an ethnographic account of off-grid, low-impact dwelling to simply judge participants activities in terms which they reject. Day (2005) portrays dropping out in a more favourable light, arguing that it can be viewed as a tactic to counter hegemony (ibid: 20). In fact, Day's account of the newest social movements uses such critical currents in an attempt to deconstruct the hegemony of hegemony. In other words, why evaluate the newest social movements by the same categories that they reject and mobilise either politically or in critical terms? Day (2005) suggests that the post-structuralist rejection of hegemonic constructs of community ought not also to stand for the rejection of community as such—that strategy simply perpetuates hegemonic thinking (ibid: 179). I concur; the political deployment of the term community to stand for values which needed to be affirmed at different times and in different ways suggests that while it was not necessarily an everyday reality, community was certainly used as a powerful concept and it was recognised as such.

#### ***4.2.4 If not dropping out, then what?***

Shared low-impact techne suggested that low-impact dwellers in West Wales were part of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), and this might be an interesting way to think through what united research participants in spite of varying locations, interpretations of low impact and the problematic nature, and typical rejection of the label “community”. Pálsson and Helgason (1998) note, however, that a plausible theory of practice should account for the reproduction of practice through social

relationships such as master and apprentice, as well as physical structures which situate learning (ibid: 910). I explore these ideas more fully in both Chapter Five and Six, as they have direct relevance for the main thesis, which is that informal low-impact dwelling is in dialogue with formal models of low-impact development—exemplified by the development of low-impact *techne*—despite the ways in which development agendas actually curb chances to experiment with alternative forms and modes of dwelling. Here, I shall suggest that information and ideas about low-impact dwelling circulated throughout a low-impact dwelling network. This network is only made analytically visible by the rejection of the fixity of “community” either as a real context within which people are said to operate, or as a way to account for the practice of living off-grid.

As a descriptor, “network” is primarily a spatial metaphor, but delving deeper into network theory, to ask what a network does, can help us to understand how there has been a flow of ideas about low-impact dwelling through a network in which different groupings, including collectives like families or communities, become involved with each other, and learn and share low-impact *techne*. In keeping with the aims of STS scholars, which are to democratise the narratives of scientific knowledge production, in this context I can say that whereas only Lammas, as a collective, have opened a dialogue with the planning system, it is important to remember that Lammas is only one part of a wider network of low-impact dwellers and their *techne* in West Wales, from which it has emerged; when Lammas “talks to” planning, it also mobilises its position and knowledge in/ of the wider network. Here, I shall focus on contemporary examples of off-grid which demonstrate the salience of the network and the potential that theories about networks and assemblages might hold for exploring this research field, and other groupings under the rubric “new social movements”.

#### **4.2.5 Off-grid networks**

A network does not connect points through linear hierarchies, such as grids, that reproduce binaries in order to make knowledge about the world in particularly dialectic forms. But what does it mean to refer to “network”? How might the concept of a “network” be appropriate in this context, beyond being employed as a simple descriptor? Following a broadly material-semiotic approach can illuminate this context. I suggest that low-impact dwellers that had engaged with the planning system found that non-human, and non-animate things did hold a sort of agency, or at least, a potentiality. In other words, while an object, such as the sheet of plasterboard discussed above had no intrinsic propensity for action in and of itself, different assemblages that encountered the plasterboard gave it meaning and potential. More than that, the effect of the encounter with plasterboards has opened up new building possibilities: the plasterboard eventually reconfigures the network that configured it. Buildings inspectors knew that commercial, standardised plasterboards would be safe in the event of fire; for environmentalists however, the plasterboards were unethical. In the scheme of an environmental footprinting exercise furthermore, the use of a plasterboard would mean the unfavourable accrual of “global hectares”, and so on. On the other hand, home-made plasterboards were regarded as ethical by environmentalists, and a plentiful supply of volunteer labour and time were invested into their production. Home-made plasterboards were a new idea, combining extant ecobuilding know-how regarding lathing and plastering into a form recognisable by buildings inspectors; the low impact plasterboard therefore “supports many viewpoints” (Latour, 2005: 145). A low-impact dwelling network therefore unites a range of people, ideas, ideologies, materials and

values in order to develop subject-specific knowledge through interactions with other networks and modes of knowledge. These interactions may be called assemblages.

Following Anderson et al. (2012) assemblage becomes pertinent for social theory, and not merely a descriptor akin to network, when it deals primarily with the assembling of *partial aspects* of other subjects, objects and groups thereof. In this case, not every element of the low-impact dwelling network in West Wales developed knowledge of low impact plasterboards, and certainly this knowledge would not have been developed were it not for the specific assemblage of ecobuilders, environmental footprinting, the hub building project, buildings assessors, volunteers, raw materials and so on. While the low-impact dwelling network of course held the potential to make a low-impact plasterboard at almost any point: the fact is that without this particular assemblage it didn't. Ecovillage volunteers, in particular, are an integral part of the process by which knowledge about low-impact techne circulates. The matter of low impact knowledge creation is undoubtedly complicated by the process of translation into the existing formal and legalistic structures of bureaucratic and political institutions, but I argue that this context is exactly what makes the suggestion of networks, and in particular emergent assemblages of different networks coalescing momentarily around one or more themes or problems, all the more salient.

#### ***4.2.6 Network as a way that skill moves.***

Throughout the thesis I emphasise how skills, knowledge, technology and expertise are shared amongst low-impact dwellers, and how ideas, as well as a whole range of things flow from place to place, much like the tobacco plants I mentioned in section 3.4. Ethnographic data has shown that skills and ideas circulating in this network has had a

greater relevance for low-impact dwellers in West Wales than some of the information about “green technologies” available from other well-known sources, such as the Centre for Alternative Technology near Machynlleth.

For example, I regarded Mervyn as particularly interested in micro-generation technology. In fact the first time I visited his home my specific aim was to find out about the hydro-electric system which he had built from reclaimed component parts from lorry engines. I was later surprised to learn that he didn't think that much of CAT—as he put it “it was rubbish”. CAT was widely thought of as a cutting-edge centre for the creation and dissemination of knowledge about alternative technologies as well as being a degree-awarding institution, so Mervyn had gone to look at their water turbine to get ideas, but had not come away feeling very impressed. That is not to say that Mervyn necessarily “knew it all”, although he was clever and knowledgeable. What I found intriguing was at a later date, Mervyn was at a social gathering that I also attended at a nearby housing co-operative. For what seemed like many hours Mervyn was part of a noisy group, deep in animated conversation about the merits of this or that hydro system or way of setting them up and what ideas could tweak or enhance them. Some of the parties to the conversation I knew were part of a mobile team who set up hydro-electric systems in places like Welsh National Parks or farms. Mervyn later discussed that particular conversation with me, full of praise for the “good bunch” of people and their ideas. It might be that the information available at CAT was not new to Mervyn, or it might be that it was authoritative rather than didactic. It is certain, however, that the views, experiences and opinions of professional hydro-electric engineers would not have been qualitatively different from the knowledge of Wales' best known centre for research into and development of alternative technologies: both were

professional in that sense. Instead, what I suggest is that there is a pedagogical difference between “information” on display to visitors to places such as CAT, and the sort of enthusiastic knowledge creation processes shared between low-impact dwellers who clearly regarded themselves as part of the same network. I return to this theme in Chapter Five.

Viewing networks as the vehicle for co-production of knowledge therefore democratises the narratives by which know-how is arrived at. This is an important observation to make in the context of people living off-grid, it counters the importance placed on “estrangement”, as it is often referred to (Sargisson, 2000, 2007b, Sargisson and Tower-Sargent, 2004), suggesting that in this context it is a spatial feature of rural life rather than integral to identity. I do not disagree with Sargisson, who suggests that some intentional communities practice estrangement as a part of their ideology, and certainly many of my participants did not engage as fully with others as their peers did. However, the key trope which participants shared, which was the DIY ethos of autonomous dwelling, was something with which people loved to engage with and readily engaged others. And of course Lammas, as a particular aspect of the low-impact dwelling network, was formally engaged other forms of knowledge-production, through bureaucracy, politics and a wider public outreach.

### **4.3 CONCLUSION**

I began this chapter with an appeal to field notes, which highlighted some of the inconsistencies between field sites and indicated inherent difficulties with pursuing analytical ideas such as ideology or discourse. In short, there was no single unifying ideology or discourse to analyse and, with the possible exception of nature, no coherent

ideology or discourse to encounter. I explored how ecovillages went about de-centring human activity, and how peoples' own narratives became intertwined with cultural landscapes. That people and place dwell along similar trajectories is evident in the processes of rewilding and gentrification at Y Mynydd, with different landscapes that appealed to different residents but which co-existed as parts of the same space. I presented permaculture as another version of living as part of nature, an anti-Promethean design framework based around adapting human habits and needs in order to work with nature. Aside from nature, the only issue which drew a consistent response from research participants was planning, and I devote Chapter Seven to exploring participants' accounts of planning encounters. Instead, my aim here has been to explore commonalities that were discernible, and to show that in this context, this means an analytical focus on practice. Again, practice is explored more fully in Chapter Five, where I examine certain ideas about embodied knowledge and the interplay between cognitive process and physical space.

The first major section explored radical ecologies, which I suggested were perceived systems of environmental interaction. I focused on practical primitivism which I differentiate from the more ambiguous anarcho-primitivism—and permaculture. I showed how these radical ecologies relied on different perceptions of nature, the physical world and human activity within it. It can be seen then, that the artificial division of zones which is part of usual planning practice would appear illogical to people who insist that they live as part of nature. And although permaculture uses zones to order human and non-human interaction with space, it can be seen that this type of zoning is not predicated on a clear distinction between natural and non-natural agency. In fact permaculture approaches nature from the point-of-view of designing systems and

landscapes in which the existing agency of nature is harnessed and put to work for human benefit.

Permaculture's ideology of work, although clearly anti-Promethean is nevertheless antithetical to the way that nature's agency is conceptualised by the sort of practical primitivism expressed at Y Mynydd. There, work is not a factor that produces either value or rights. If anything, the passage of time and a certain passivity in the face of nature establish people as more a part of things and more knowledgeable about life at Y Mynydd than newcomers, in spite of how hard they might work. I used trees as an example to think through the idea of living as part of nature, showing that reverence for trees meant that they might be viewed inter-subjectively, as landmarks or even as political agents. In all cases, trees produce and reproduce their own landscape. This reverential relationship with trees has been central to Y Mynydd's rewilding project which I argue is an important example that shows how environmental passivity is a viable, but overlooked alternative to the concept of action/ activism as the basis for practical environmentalism. In other words, rewilding has occurred without intervention, as participants would say "letting nature take its course". This is not to be equated with doing nothing, since the norm not to cut trees, not to graze animals and not to clear scrub has been tacitly promoted or, at times, enforced.

In order to account for why one single ideology was not common in low-impact dwelling in West Wales, it has been necessary instead to think through the idea of community and what it might do in an analysis of low-impact dwelling which is defined by its practice. I have argued that community is a less useful concept. I have traced the emergence of community, noting that it is important, but rather as a political category

which is capable of mobilising certain action or behaviour, rather than a lived reality. This line of reasoning began from the very simple and clearly articulated rejection of the term community by many research participants. I suggest this is due in no small part to the presumption of community that dogs the literature on alternative co-residence, as well as creating sometimes incompatible social expectations for those who live in that world.

I apply what I think of as a lightly material-semiotic approach to the question of the low-impact dwelling network, a fitting approach for a social grouping which is defined by practice more strongly than anything else. I use assemblage theory then to augment this approach, and this I think is crucial to the arguments set out in this chapter; assemblages account for *partial* engagement between aspects of people, groups, villages, networks communities and so on. When I described the development of the low impact plasterboard, this necessarily involved aspects of the low-impact dwelling network, as well as aspects of other networks. The difference is nuanced, but also in keeping with an anthropological approach to subjects, and qualifies somewhat the relational view of ecology as a distinct product of Euro-American notions of disjunct persons relating to other persons (Strathern, 1991: 587).

This chapter has illustrated that low-impact dwellers, villages, or communities, have been active in developing and spreading low-impact *techne*, and bringing it into policy. Low-impact *techne* and know-how circulate through this diverse network which is predicated on face-to-face encounters and physical interaction with other networks which form temporary assemblages through which knowledge is produced—the following chapter will be concerned with low-impact knowledge production. Given the

recent incorporation of low-impact into policy, low-impact may itself be viewed as an emerging ideology influenced by the radical ecologies that I have presented. Although a consistent ideology is absent, and many of the practical ways that low-impact dwellers construct and perform nature are distinct, they can be analytically grouped together as “radical ecologies” so as to be distinguished from the way that state/ society performs nature/ acts upon the environment using spatial planning. 196

## CHAPTER FIVE: SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE: TOWARDS A TECHNE

### Introduction

Low-impact dwelling is regarded by research participants as a moral choice within a framework of ecological ethics centred around different interpretations of living as part of nature. In practice this means reducing both personal and domestic consumption and minimising reliance on mass-produced materials. Now that low-impact dwelling is becoming part of planning policy in Wales, it is also considered a viable way to lower the environmental or ecological footprint<sup>62</sup>. Unless low-impact dwellers follow the official channel, however, their dwellings can be demolished, owners fined, or both. Those who, illicitly or not, live in a low-impact dwelling are making a personal change in consumption and scope of consumption which the state theoretically supports, as evidenced by Wales's strategy on sustainable development and the adherence to the environmental footprinting paradigm. One Planet Development thus represents a contradiction: while low impact practice is approved in theory by the National Assembly, elements of the Welsh state bureaucracy in the form of the local authorities do not support DIY low-impact dwellers. This position is expressed by ever-tightening regulations, which practitioners regard as barriers that have constrained their practice and potential to make positive environmental impacts. One key example of this is building regulations—what participants often just referred to as *regs*. Though not strictly part of planning departments, obtaining planning permission means that one must also satisfy *regs*. Building regulations seem not to have been written with low impact construction in mind, and as will be seen, this has caused participants at Lammas

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<sup>62</sup> The terms environmental footprint or ecological footprint are used interchangeably. I explore environmental footprinting in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

some difficulty. Low-impact *techne* cannot be easily translated for inspectors, and difficulties arising as a result of this mismatched knowledge have meant that as a result, low impact practitioners still equate the local authority with attempts to curb their projects or to somehow impose impossible conditions upon them. Participants' dealings with building *regs* will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Seven. This chapter, however, explores how participants have developed a *techne* for dwelling and provisioning and suggests reasons why this material culture may be challenging for those used to conventional building.

This chapter begins with the premise that low-impact *techne* is a technical and situated knowledge. I explore some of the literature about anthropologies of knowledge-making and embodied knowledge. I outline what is meant by a low-impact *techne*, which I offer as a way to bridge practice theory with situated learning and enskilment in the specific context of low-impact dwelling. I use Barth's (2002) framework for comparing knowledge to contrast low-impact *techne* with formal approaches to the built environment. It is my concern to highlight commonalities—chinks in the armour of institutional hegemony—that might indicate how it is possible for the formal order to adopt knowledge which has been formulated in informal settings. The second section examines more contextual data about low-impact dwelling, exploring some of the key principles and how these interface with the idea of planning and being on or off the grid. I focus on elements of material culture with a specific focus on wood and the roundhouse, as well as provisioning strategies such as borrowing.

## **5.1 Ways of knowing**

### ***5.1.1 Anthropologies of knowing***

Barth (2002) states that ‘an understanding of the balances of sharing and difference in knowledge that predicate social cooperation should constitute a vital part of any theory of human society’ (ibid: 1-2). Likewise, according to Marchand (2010), knowledge about knowledge-making is absolutely fundamental to the practice of anthropology, yet the majority of anthropological accounts do not establish how learning, knowing and practice take place, that is, how these processes are situated and embodied (ibid: 2–3). Marchand shows, however, that this is a question being increasingly asked by neuroscientists who are drawing on an increasing range of source material, including anthropology, to explore the integration of the biological, environmental and social that learning entails (ibid: 5). The emergence of this interdisciplinary research space has been shaped by the “anthropology of knowledge” of the late twentieth century, in particular, anthropologists’ outspoken rejection of computational models to explain human cognitive developmental processes (Toren, 1993; Martin, 2000; Ingold, 2011; Marchand, 2001, 2007).

The anthropology of knowledge has been shaped by thinkers such as Foucault (1977) who, in *Discipline and Punish*, explores how power relations are reproduced by the unwitting internalisation of surveillance techniques; according to Foucault this occurs mainly by the adoption of technologies of the self or the built environment which mask underlying forms of coercion. This influential interpretation of embodied knowledge might be pertinent in exploring how planning disputes centre on the problematic presence of unplanned development; clearly it is viable to explore how in a Foucauldian sense coercive or hidden impositions of power over subjects is aided by planning regimes, however this is not the particular focus of this thesis and furthermore,

this chapter is devoted to exploring how low-impact techne is created from within the community of practice.

More so than Foucault perhaps, and certainly offering a more generalising concept, Bourdieu's theory of the habitus has also been influential (1977; 1990). A central tenet of much of Bourdieu's work, the *habitus* explores how knowledge of practice is transmitted, action is seen as a product of an unconscious *modus operandi* which supersedes conscious intention (1977: 79). Because Bourdieu proposed that the habitus mediated practice and culture imperceptibly, it was intended to be a conceptual bridge over a problematic divide between cultural determinism and individual autonomy. According to Downey (2010) however, the habitus might in fact be an obstacle to the consideration of embodied knowledge, if “it leads researchers to consider corporeality only as a theoretical solution to other social and political questions rather than as a site for close examination” (ibid: 23). Downey’s research on capoeira learning in an ‘intercultural setting’ (ibid) shows that such transmission is neither uniform nor deterministic; instead, Downey proposes a neuroanthropological approach to skill-learning. Whereas Downey’s research context deals with physical mimesis, where verbal instruction is rare and room for improvisation is reserved for advanced *mestres* as they develop a distinctive style. In contrast, the sort of ecobuilding techniques at the core of low-impact dwelling are coproduced, refined and shared throughout a wide network of low-impact dwellers and their connected networks. In this sort of practice, however, the functional intention of building supersedes some of the possibility for innovation, in such a context it is more legitimate to talk of a *habitus* which is co-produced, by bodies, *in situ*.

### **5.1.2 A framework for knowing knowledge**

Barth (2002) proposes a generalised framework for comparatively assessing ethnographic accounts of knowledge-making which consists of three interacting facets: “substantive corpus”, “communicative medium”, and “social organization”. Furthermore, these categories cannot be separated, they occur together and are mutually configured every time an aspect of existing knowledge is communicated in a particular social context. Though Barth tries to simplify his framework for the purpose of his lecture (and the subsequent article to which I refer) by focussing on the internal realities of knowledge-making, he does acknowledge the impact of externalities. In my research context externalities define the problematic, in Barth’s words: “an environment of non-local others and their knowledge systems, practices, and strengths will always impinge on local worlds from the outside”. Following Barth, I deal more fully with these externalities later in the thesis (Chapters Seven and Eight).

Marchand (2010) augments Barth's framework by focussing on the material aspects of how knowledge is made. For Marchand, cognition is individual to some degree, but he suggests that it is also the case that “making knowledge” emerges from the mutual interaction of people and their “total environment”, though a list of every possible contextual element of knowledge making would be impossible to provide (ibid: 2). Certainly in the low-impact dwelling context different approaches to ownership and ideas about property have converged to create experimental spaces for the development of low-impact dwelling *techne*, a key factor in the potential to influence formal policy.

This is all the more paradoxical, given that OPD relies on a formal sort of low-impact techne that can be tested and evaluated, but has hitherto relied on illicit contexts for its specific development for the Welsh context and—as we shall see—climate. Barth (2002) raises a salient point about the ownership of, in particular, indigenous knowledge (ibid: 3). I do not go into this matter much because the main problematic that low-impact dwellers find is that their knowledge is not acceptable to buildings regs, though many wish it were. The issue is not one of appropriation of local knowledge, rather, how to get vernacular architecture recognised as legitimate knowledge.

It is hoped that the accounts given in this and the next chapter will go some way towards addressing what Marchand (2010: 3) refers to as the omission of individuals' histories and their specific accretion of experience and “the particular dynamics that animate nested communities of practice within larger social groupings” (ibid: 3). Marchand's reference to communities of practice is of course a nod to Lave and Wenger (1991) who forward the notion of legitimate peripheral participation as a way to understand how learning takes place; “being there”, as will be seen, is a key part of the ecovillage volunteer motivation and cannot be underestimated as a main route of transmission for low-impact techne, which is learnt but not necessarily taught. What makes this possible is, in part, Lave and Wenger's (1991) assertion that “the notion of participation thus dissolves dichotomies between cerebral and embodied activity, between contemplation and involvement, between abstraction and experience: persons, actions, and the world are implicated in all thought, speech, knowing, and learning (ibid: 52).

As I present it, low-impact dwelling knowledge is both a total system of knowledge about how to live, but also contains smaller bodies of knowledge about specifics, it is co-produced largely through the interaction of the differing networks through which it flows (e.g. ecovillage volunteer networks). In particular, and what constitutes the main focus for this thesis, the external interaction with planning and buildings regs is shaping a new approach to low-impact dwelling, one which can be formally recognised.

## 5.2 *Techne*

I employ the concept of *techne* in order to bring together the diverse range of thought, practice, tools, materials and skills which comprise low-impact dwelling. *Techne* is useful, since its classical Greek meaning was concerned with the “kind of art or skill that we associate with craftsmanship” (Ingold, 2011: 294). Scott (1998) identifies a similar need: “to conceptualize these practical skills, variously called know-how... common sense, experience, a knack or *metis*” (ibid: 311). Inspired by Odysseus, Scott opts to use *metis*, but acknowledges *techne* as a plausible alternative (ibid: 313). For my purposes, and the thesis’s focus on practical activity, *techne* is an appropriate term to use. It encapsulates the difference between the knowledge that low-impact dwellers have acquired through practical engagements and which is not primarily about formal exposition and the sort of epistemological knowledge that planning—and most especially buildings regs—demands that “development” should demonstrate.

Why, as I have framed it, should *techne* and *episteme* work here rather than the more familiar dualism of theory and practice? This thesis does not have space to

deconstruct *episteme*<sup>63</sup>, so its use here serves only as a foil to the question of *techne* discussed above and I offer no exploration of how it may differ etymologically or otherwise from theory. For Bourdieu (1977), practice represents a *modus operandi* in which the agent *performs* practice, but does not produce it. Although he acknowledges an “objective intention” inherent in practice, for Bourdieu this is characteristically different to conscious mastery (ibid). It is the *habitus*, a sort of cultural repository for knowledge, which can allow this; the habitus thus represents a “commonsense world endowed with the *objectivity* secured by the consensus on the meaning (*sens*) of practices and the world” (1977: 80). Because low-impact *techne* must be consciously acquired, it is characteristically different from practice, thus I am arguing for a key difference between *techne* and practice, which is the issue of skill.

### **5.2.1 Techne and skill**

According to Ingold (2011), technical skills are “properties of persons, developed in the contexts of their engagement with other persons or person-like agencies in the environment... (and are) constituted within the matrix of social relations” (ibid: 289). In the case of low-impact dwelling, the acquisition of technical skills pertaining to ecobuilding requires intimate knowledge of the practice of low-impact dwelling. This is reflected in the way such skills are learnt and shared, through on-site voluntary service and not through formal accredited training as is usual in the UK. I explore the social context for the acquisition of such skills in the following chapter. I suggest that it is skill and the process of enskilment that distinguish *techne* in this context, more so than the idea of “practice”. *Techne* encompasses skill as well as practice and thus constitutes “knowledge”. The idea of practice as an unconscious “doing”, as opposed to a theoretical “knowing”, is incomplete. At the heart of this distinction lies the assumption

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<sup>63</sup> But see Foucault, 1970 (1966), *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*.

that practice can be unconscious, which in turn raises the question as to how such a fundamental split—between doing and thinking—can be imagined and reproduced.

Pálsson (1994) applies “practice theory” to approach the question of enskilment amongst fishermen. Instead of assuming a normative approach in which a hierarchical ordering of knowledge is assumed, Pálsson shows that enskilment is part of a complete social picture, an idea which invokes the concept of the *habitus*. Pálsson states that “assuming a social or constitutive model of the individual is to introduce purpose, agency and dialogue into the process of enskilment” (1994: 904).

For Ingold (2011) too, enskilment is always situated: it is a matter of being-in-the-world, it is bound to and defines the process of dwelling. Accordingly, the process of acquiring technical skills is assured by the continuity of technical tradition; key social relationships are reproduced, in a system of apprenticeship (ibid: 37). The following chapter further explores one of the key social relationships which has ensured the sharing and acquisition of skills for low-impact dwelling: the volunteer-host relationship.

### **5.2.2 Evaluating practice, skill, techne**

Practice theory does not go far enough to account for the sort of *techne* which forms part of low-impact dwelling, a sort of practice that was not unconsciously part of a *habitus*. The vast majority of research participants had chosen a low-impact lifestyle for themselves, consciously creating and reproducing new social relationships and skills, and as such participants continually produced and reproduced their own *habitus*, in conversation with the planning regime articulated by the state. I suggest *techne* as an

analytical concept to bridge a gap between the idea of unconscious practice emerging from the *habitus* and the formal epistemology which characterises the discourses of planning and building regulations which are reproduced epistemologically as professionalised practices (Ward 1976, Yiftachel 2001). In terms of Barth's framework, eco-building skills form the major part of the substantive corpus of low-impact dwelling. Low-impact *techne* itself is reproduced through a didactic process of enskilment, particularly in ecobuilding, which is shaped by the distinct volunteer-host social relationship—the social organisation aspect of Barth's framework. The volunteer-host relationship has an affinity with the idea of apprenticeship, but is inherently more fluid and mobile, and thus potentially more egalitarian. I explore this relationship in greater detail in the following chapter, with recourse to accounts from and about volunteers that I met and volunteered with whilst in the field. The communicative medium in low-impact *techne* is of course the material form of the dwelling itself. This is shaped by the physical constraints of the site of its location, and the conceptual constraints of planning. The communicative medium of low-impact *techne* is a particularly important component to reflect on, which exemplifies the main thesis: without informal low-impact dwelling, low-impact *techne* could not have informed low-impact development.

It is useful to think of the tension between policy (particularly building *regs*) and low-impact dwellers in such terms. The Tir y Gafel residents' conflict over their vision of an ecovillage community hub building is a key example. The insistence on fire retardant materials on one hand but ecologically sound (and accessible) materials on the other reveals the interplay of two different substantive corpus of knowledge.

“Regulation” materials must adhere to certain standards, and when confronted by materials which embody low-impact *techne*, regulators have no framework to evaluate them. The fact that autonomous dwellings as the communicative medium are differently configured to standard dwellings—for instance not on electric or water mains, and not using such flammable materials as plastics—is not always factored into regulations. Of course, this can be seen as symptomatic of the way policy (and building regs) is codified, delivered and learnt in contrast to low-impact *techne*. Using Barth's framework, policy knowledge about the built environment is socially organised in the institutional context of local governance, by those who are regarded as professionals (Yiftachel, 2001). Low-impact dwellers/ ecobuilders generally learn experientially, do not receive accreditation and while some emerge as experts, they are not considered professionals in the sense that planners are.

### ***5.2.3 Informalising: how knowledge is made to flow.***

To qualify my assertion that informal dwelling practices are adopted by formal planning regimes, it is useful to illustrate how this is possible. If planning is held to hold institutional hegemony, how could it possibly adopt *techne* developed in illicit—*illegal*—contexts? Scott (1998) complicates normative accounts of the oppositional nature of the interaction between formal planning and informal development when he asserts that the plans and policies which make up the formal order can in fact be dysfunctional without informal processes (ibid: 310). Scott uses the work-to-rule strike to exemplify how rules and procedures are often idealised more so than practical. According to Scott formal order is underpinned by practical skills grounded in common sense—in practice the idea that formal order is complete in itself is something of an illusion. Similarly,

Abram (2011) notes that through formal training, planners bodies are disciplined into a certain way of performing their roles (ibid: 40). Planning knowledge is embodied in that case, though perhaps to a lesser extent than knowledge about other things, and certainly not exclusively so. This observation helps to unsettle any planning hegemony as ideas and pedagogical techniques are fluid between formal and informal land use—in this case the formal order has informalised, as much as the informal order has formalised. Nevertheless, the flow of ideas has hardly been smooth; in spite of the new planning policy there is a continuing conflict about the practice of low-impact dwelling and whether ecobuilding techne can meet building regulations.

Graeber (2009) discusses the political economy of policy in terms of the way that “building code” is enforced more readily at New York squats than for incompetent landlords. Graeber argues that the process of enforcing regulations conceals the process of enforcing a specific model of society—a process that is backed by violence (ibid: 284). Not only does the need to meet regulations force people into contact with the formal sector<sup>64</sup>, the risk is that by not complying, one will fall victim to violent treatment. The result, as Graeber notes, is that alternative projects regularly fail for these reasons (ibid: 285).

Even Tir Y Gafel, which was assessed under a special policy for low-impact development, must adhere to a standard set of building regs. Although building regs are not the work of planners the two areas of policy are concomitant and are viewed as such; it is generally the case that low-impact dwellers outside of the planning system

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<sup>64</sup> This applies to the whole Lammas planning process, not just the latter stage of conflict with building regs.

cite building regs as a barrier to applying for planning permission, citing arguments similar to Graeber's (as we shall see in Chapters Seven and Eight). Given the ultimate concern with environmental viability that low-impact dwellers and the state both purport to share, a change in planning policy is not enough; if local authorities insist on applying every last regulation to low-impact development, which represents a very newly configured form of building technology, it might undermine the validity of the OPD planning strategy.

#### ***5.2.4 Assuming the expert position***

From the outset, Lammas' express intention was to engage with planning and to pioneer the low impact ecohamlet as a development model for Wales. In order to do so Lammas, and individuals within the organisation, have assumed the role of experts in their interactions with planning. This happens in two main ways. Firstly, Tir y Gafel must make regular reports about how their aims (under the planning system) are being met, and secondly Lammas has acquired a degree of expertise and acknowledgement in a much wider context.

Residents of Tir y Gafel have had to make regular progress reports to the local authority that demonstrate their aptitude for making a living. Participants describe this process as part of overcoming a clash between two ways of knowing, where the inspectors quite often “don't get it”. In Craig's words:

“There are two worlds: there's the world of planning where everything has to be just so, and there's the alternative world where we're from, where this sort of thing is tried and tested and there's no question. The difficulty is to work out how to communicate. Often it's a trade-off.”

The key challenge iterated by activist groups such as Lammas and people like Craig is to bridge a clear divide between these differing ways of knowing. The compromise that Craig implies is common in planning disputes, but as Abram (1998) notes “[W]hen the subjects of development object to the assumptions and notions held by the developers, their objections are usually ruled out unless they can translate them into the terms set by the developers” (ibid: 6)—of course, in Abram's example the issue is between developers who want to develop against the environmentalists' wishes, in my example (low-impact) development is portrayed as environmentalism. There is a danger that the structurally weaker form of knowledge may become subordinated, and thus alternative rationalities become diluted as a result of the interaction. This indicates what is remarkable about Lammas' approach: by organising and “officialising” (Bourdieu, 1998: 141–145) they have overcome the disadvantage inherent in their position as “alternative”. Even so, as Craig notes, this requires certain trade-offs (which I detail later in the thesis, in particular Chapter Eight).

Scott (1998) characterises the tension between “scientific knowledge” and “practical knowledge” as “part of a political struggle for institutional hegemony by experts and their institutions” (ibid: 311). In the planning vs LID case the ideological issues are highlighted by the fact that both parties purport to share similar goals. OPD can thus be regarded as an attempt to compromise between otherwise incompatible ways of knowing. Low-impact dwelling is a situated knowledge, based on skilled practice not easily replicated in any exact manner; it is thus elusive. It is non-professional, and not professionalising, especially given the sorts of labour

mobilised for low-impact building projects (mainly volunteers, see Chapter Six). Practitioners regard each building project uniquely; each site is part of its immediate environment, and while rules of thumb are useful, specifics are arrived at *in situ* and there is little point in creating exacting standards beyond basic techniques. The situation is compounded by building *regs* which limit the use of experimental techniques *in situ*. By contrast, planning and building *regs* demonstrate a differing knowledge base, and the reliance, for OPD at least, on the ecofootprinting model indicates a commitment to rigid models which demand that activity is quantifiable by reducing complexity. Such models are inflexible and participants express frustration that they are mismatched to real life.

### **5.3 Low-impact dwelling: towards a material culture**

Because research participants were drawn from what I have portrayed as a network of low-impact dwellers in West Wales, not all of these participants lived in the same way. Key sites were the ecovillages Y Mynydd and Tir y Gafel. Participants in those villages shared a consensual approach to living; at Y Mynydd the trope was “as part of nature”, while at Tir y Gafel the requirement was “low impact”. Outside of these locations research participants shared many aspects of techne that were also evident in the ecovillages. In general, research participants from all locations shared practices organised around several key points, which I explore below.

#### **5.3.1 Ways to be off-grid.**

In chapter four I suggested that the notion of off-grid can reconfigure the problematic idea of “dropping out” as the primary interpretation of alternative living. Here I explore what off-grid can mean for this context. Many participants lived off-grid, and this was interpreted as not relying on mains utilities such as electricity, water or sewage. By

extension, some participants equated off-grid with notions of social and political autonomy, and did not participate in civic institutions either.

### ***5.3.1a On and off-grid***

Pat and Mary are a good example, during research their dwelling was “illicit” since they had built it without permission from the planning department. On the other hand, it was connected to mains electricity and they ran many appliances such as a freezer and a TV. One day whilst visiting Pat and Mary we began discussing off-grid power systems, Pat was working out how much power they would need if they were to start making their own electricity. Mary was aware that a significant part of my fieldwork was spent at Y Mynydd, and she made a point of telling me: “even though we like doing things ourselves, we don't reject modern technology if it helps us live our life” Pat and Mary's case is interesting as it shows some possibilities in the idea of being off-grid. For instance, although their dwelling was always “on” the power grid, it was “off” the bureaucratic grid. In order to be as self-sufficient as possible, which represents a shunning of the grids of wage labour, market and economy, the pair have relied on the power grid to keep their freezer going. Pat and Mary's lifestyle and livelihood is made pragmatically, without adherence to any ideology beyond DIY, and even then, this is not taken to an extreme point.

### ***5.3.1b Off and on-grid***

Tir y Gafel is entirely off-grid in terms of utilities—in fact planning permission demands it—but it is firmly on the system-grid in terms of its participation in planning. The village was creating its own network with a presence in media and the internet, its

status on the volunteer trail and the sorts of outreach activities that the village instigated or took part in. Lammas' open, prolonged and deliberate interaction with planning led to an ethnographically rich scenario of negotiations, contradictions and drama, but overall a very uniform approach in keeping with the dominant political/environmental ontology. The village at Tir y Gafel was off-grid, but it was required to be so under Policy 52, additionally the group was rewarded by a generous Government subsidy for generating its own power and keeping itself off-grid. For Tir y Gafel, being physically off-grid was integral to and enabled its being conceptually on-grid.

### **5.3.1c Off-grid**

Y Mynydd is almost entirely off-grid. There are no utilities services, no dwelling on the shared land has legal status, and as a group the village does not participate in interactions with the state<sup>65</sup>. For instance, during fieldwork I heard some muted discussion about seeking grants for activities like woodland creation. Some village residents worked planting trees for landowners who were taking part in a WAG-sponsored woodland creation scheme and knew how to access grants. Ultimately nothing came of these discussions as, on the whole, the village did not organise around the idea, and some members were very forthright about rejecting the idea. Individual households within Y Mynydd interacted with the state, as for example schoolchildren, tax-payers, drivers, patients or claimants, but as a group, Y Mynydd outwardly rejected authority and so must be considered to be off-grid in both the senses of the term which I have outlined. The general derision by which ecovillage volunteering was openly equated to slavery meant that Y Mynydd had created its own word-of-mouth network

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<sup>65</sup> I did find it odd at first that there was a bin collection. I later realised that the collection was probably for the neighbouring houses and that those living in low-impact dwellings had to bring black bags up to the roadside.

based on personal association. Y Mynydd had some internet presence, but gaining access that way did not, as observed in the introduction, actually gain meaningful access to the village.

### **5.3.1d Common themes in the wider off-grid network**

Being off-grid even in a small way can lead to a reconfiguration of other forms of provisioning. Harkness (2009) explains how many of her “Earthshipper” participants worked only part-time, or had even taken lower-paid but less stressful jobs. Emphasising a process of “downsizing”, this meant that they reduced their overall level of consumption, enabled by the lower running costs of off-grid Earthships compared to conventional housing. Because many of Harkness' Earthshippers self-built, by reducing their external workload they had more time to spend on building their homes. (Harkness, 2009: 180). Elgin (2006) describes such a lifestyle choice as voluntary simplicity, in an echo of Gandhi's politics. Voluntarily living simply is not the same as being impoverished; it is not imposed and debilitating, it is voluntary and enabling (ibid: 460). Neither is living simply to be equated with dropping out. Rather lowering consumption in order to work less and live simply is a powerful socio-economic critique.

In my research field this sort of provisioning was a common strategy which might be said to be shaped by the punk DIY ethos which is based on the rejection of consumerism and professionalisation. In practice this might take many forms, such as the use of recycled materials, sharing *skipped*<sup>66</sup> food, gathering firewood (which participants called *wooding*), voluntary labour for one good cause or another,

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<sup>66</sup> Otherwise good out-of-date food taken from supermarket bins.

self-building or squatting, and in all cases sharing an emphasis on the acquisition of relevant skills and techniques. Even for those participants who were engaged with planning the requirement to meet a high proportion of needs from the site (75% for LID, 100% for OPD) meant that such strategies gained a tacit approval if they could be reflected in environmental footprint analysis.

### **5.3.2 Material culture 1: firewood**

Although I have outlined differing and varied approaches, the participants in this research shared a definite material culture. Exploring the significance of firewood as a resource and activity is a useful way to illustrate shared principles. At the most basic analytical level, without fail, the people I represent here all burned wood for fuel. In fact a youngster I interviewed even told me that “the definition of a “hippie”<sup>67</sup> is someone who steals wood” (under the euphemism *wooding*). Admittedly, noting that this research is about people who burn wood seems a little flimsy, although it is politically quite a pertinent definition given that Wales is strongly associated with fossil fuel in the form of coal. Perhaps less so now, but certainly in the 1970s and 1980s, the shunning of coal and the coal industry might have been seen as a significant act of cultural resistance. In context it becomes significant to say that this research is about people who burn wood for fuel as a *principle*. On the whole, that wood is either dead, coppiced or biomass<sup>68</sup>, and given what I observed at Y Mynydd it tended to be gathered by *wooding* or as part of undertaking tree work for someone. Very occasionally I would come across participants who bought wood, but they tended to be regular buyers of wood: you either

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<sup>67</sup> Again, “hippie” is an ambiguous term. Some participants self-identified as hippies, or identified other people as hippies, but it was generally felt to be a clichéd term, and often used deprecatingly.

<sup>68</sup> Fast-growing species of tree grown specifically to be cut for fuel, such as willow.

bought or didn't; people rarely seemed to do both. Wood and stoves were of great interest to most participants, and they are a striking theme in my early field notes.

In order to keep a stove going I had to learn quickly about the differing properties of wood and how to identify dry from wet and seasoned from green, and usually to know the significance of its state for each type of wood. For example, green ash would burn almost as happily as seasoned ash. Wet willow was useless except perhaps in conjunction with lots of extremely dry pine, which burned very quickly. The most coveted wood of all was heart oak, the core of dense wood left after the tree or limb had died and the outer portion had rotted away. Bloch (1995) notes that the Zafimaniry say that such wood is *teza*; it is likened to the bones of humans and used for building homes. The quality of heart oak for firewood, however, was perhaps only surpassed by the rare holly. At Y Mynydd the type of *wooding* I engaged in was mitigated by having no wood storage facilities save for a tarpaulin. Sometimes I gathered wood for use that day, sometimes I was able to build up a wood pile. Like others, my experience differed seasonally; I entered the autumn with a good-sized woodpile consisting of dry pine, heart oak and blackthorn.

Initially I asked open questions about where people got their wood, but received cagey responses such as “the hedge”. I later learned from Mervyn that “most of the Mynydd hippies go *wooding* up here”. Very few people went *wooding* on the Mynydd land any more, preferring instead to fill vans or cars with wood whilst out. I certainly got used to pulling over to load my small van with wood if I spotted fallen branches at the road side. Other people at Y Mynydd practiced “coppicing” at times with genuine

attention, but I noticed sometimes that coppicing was a euphemism for just cutting down trees, such as ash, to burn that day, with no attempt to encourage regrowth of the coppiced tree. At Y Mynydd since cutting down trees was a taboo activity, terms like “coppicing” therefore emerged as euphemisms.

The reliance on wood was not necessarily part of the anarcho-primitivist agenda, even at Y Mynydd, where some people still lived in tipis. Several research participants had expensive high-tech wood-burning stoves which could run radiators or heat water, and many householders had rigged up such systems with DIY plumbing. At the time of writing the Welsh Assembly Government was running a grant scheme to install wood-fired heating and hot water systems in conventional houses for those with low incomes ([www.nestwales.org.uk/](http://www.nestwales.org.uk/)). This is an indication as to how prominent wood has become as a viable fuel source in Wales. Wood is considered by some to be “solar powered heating”, but of course this is only effective if the supply is maintained, although with coppicing this can be straightforward. I spoke to one member of a farming family who said they coppiced their hedges every eight years to supply all of their wood needs. Therefore burning wood for fuel is a carbon neutral practice. During fieldwork I heard about a practice called biochar, which I did not see, however it consists of turning biomass wood into charcoal, which is added to garden soil. The carbon sequestered in the growing plant is deposited into the soil and released slowly, but nourishes the next plants for greater growth and greater carbon sequestering potential. The process is thus considered carbon *negative*. As noted I only heard various discussions about biochar—I did not meet anyone who was doing it, but the example

illustrates the vast ideological difference between burning wood as opposed to burning fossil fuels.

#### ***5.2.4 Material culture 2: the roundhouse***

Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) discuss Levi-Strauss's notion of "house societies", and note that as a social institution the house is particularly significant as a space which can unify and transcend opposing principles (ibid: 8). By extension, the low-impact dwelling, of whatever style or design, represents the intention to bring together nature and culture without domination or subordination. By being low impact, it is thought that human activity could be a part of nature. In the research field, low-impact dwelling styles varied from simple tipis, which could be moved in less than a day and left a very light footprint, to large and extensive family homes built using recycled or carbon-neutral materials (such as straw and natural plasters). The turf-roofed, reciprocal-framed roundhouse (hereafter, the roundhouse) and its variants was a ubiquitous choice of dwelling style amongst research participants. This section explores elements of roundhouse design and construction, but following Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) I "consider architectural features of houses as an aspect of their importance as social units in both life and thought", and not just as a "mere item of material culture" (ibid: 20; 31). Below I will show ways in which the roundhouse takes on more than functional meaning. In this section, I place the roundhouse in its appropriate context, as a design which borrows from traditional ideas and simultaneously addresses future-oriented concerns. The roundhouse is technically simple, and versions of roundhouses have been built for thousands of years, but modern roundhouses exemplify what are currently regarded as some of the best low-carbon domestic technologies. In particular I explore one aspect of round dwellings, the reciprocal roof, and suggest that

its self-supporting structure can be seen as an analogy for the idealised notion of an autonomous community.

#### **5.2.4a Shaping the dwelling**

Round dwellings were commonplace across the sites I visited during fieldwork, but especially so at Y Mynydd, where participants lived almost exclusively either in tipis, yurts or *huts* (roundhouses)—all structures based upon the circle. A circle has a superior structural integrity not easily mimicked by rectilinear structures. This accounts for the prevalence in nature of circular shapes, for instance a seed or a bubble, whereas there are no naturally occurring squares. Participants' preference for circles suggests the implicit idea of virtue in mimicking nature. Participants often acknowledged a certain morality inherent the circle, with statements such as “there are no corners at Y Mynydd”, and describing dwelling designs based on circles as “sacred geometry”. Two neighbours at Y Mynydd were discussing the merits of roundhouses, one a builder of many such structures over the years, and the other attempting his first project. The inexperienced builder had been toying with the idea of other shapes, but decided against it:

—“No, I think I'm gonna stick to a roundhouse. It's gonna be easier to build. And, a circle is a *good shape*.”

—“Yes,” said the other, “and it is our religion” [laughs].

The most common roundhouse design is based on a wooden henge topped with a reciprocal roof. This sort of a frame theoretically requires no foundations or posts to be dug in. In practice, most *hut* dwellers had sunk their posts somewhat—painted the ends

with bitumen and buried them into holes lined with shale—but it was not actually necessary. Many of the dwellings in Tir y Gafel had posts which has been placed on slabs and held in place by pressure exerted downwards by rafters and beams. The advantage of this method is quick construction, possibly without recourse to any digging tools. Also, bitumen is unlikely to be considered low impact. Placing the post above the damp course, preferably on a *pitch* or even on large stone slabs purposely sourced for the task, meant that rot wouldn't be a problem for many years. Typically, softwood was used to furnish upright posts, the henge lintels, and beams. Soft woods such as the pines were ideal: douglas fir, larch or even spruce—the stuff of forestry plantations. One *hut* frame at Y Mynydd had been built with heart oak. This extremely hard wood is equivalent to the *teza* wood that Bloch (1995) describes the Zafimaniry using (ibid: 78–79). *Teza* wood is likened to bones, and as houses are improved with *teza* wood, they are said to harden, or acquire bones, a process which is used as an analogy to marriage. While this choice of heart oak certainly meant that the *hut* would last, this was anathema to the general principle of impermanence at Y Mynydd, and most *hut* builders were content with using less durable materials.



Figure 5 Photograph showing a reciprocal roof frame (c) Forde

#### **5.2.4b Assembling the hut**

After a suitable *pitch* is made, which might include landscaping and drainage, hut building proceeds with the building of a circular henge. A reciprocal roof is then constructed using an upright post to support the first beam, which extends from the henge lintels to the centre of the *pitch*. Beams are added at a set distance from one another on the henge, and reach the mid-point of the circle enclosed by the henge where they lay one on top of another, effectively twisting around a central hole. This hole would eventually be covered over either by the turf roof or some clear PVC. Once every beam is in place, the prop is removed. The reciprocal roof frame is then complete and appears to float above its henge, each beam reciprocating the force it exerts on its neighbour by supporting another neighbour's force (Figure 5). The reciprocal roof provides an analogy for an idealised community; it gives form to the idea of neighbours

supporting each other and in turn being supported. The prevalence of reciprocal roofs in ecovillages seems to encapsulate the ethos behind the deliberate creation of villages of neighbours as opposed to isolated and individual projects.

The type of roundhouse I describe is typically finished with a living turf roof. After—typically—hazel battens are secured across the reciprocal beams, layers of fabric, cardboard, waterproof membrane, insulation (usually straw), further waterproofing and carpet are laid down, before being topped with turf. The carpet is ideally wool, and as it decays it helps the turf to create a strong and secure mat. The roof absorbs rainwater and therefore does not require guttering, however it is usual to see planks of slab wood<sup>69</sup> around the edges of roofs to help keep the turf in place before it has taken to the carpet. When framed with a henge, roundhouse walls are not load-bearing, so are typically in-filled with straw which is then plastered over. Plasters vary but mixtures usually include hydrated lime and some organic matter. Cob is a particular plaster which uses slaked lime<sup>70</sup>, subsoil and horse manure. These materials provide a thermal mass, which retains the day's heat and makes the dwelling warmer. Roundhouses may have secondary walls around the outside. Glass walls (made from reclaimed windows or greenhouses) oriented to the south help to trap heat which, when combined with thermal mass, comprise an effective passive solar heating system. Solid secondary walls, for instance those infilled with straw bales or another insulating material, when oriented to the north side, will create a cold area between the roundhouse wall and the secondary wall, which may be used as a cold store.

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<sup>69</sup> Offcuts from timber mills, irregular shaped planks usually still with bark attached.

<sup>70</sup> Slaking lime means to mix it into a putty and leave it to cure.

The modern British roundhouse represents a specific type of vernacular architecture. The sort of wood typically used for ecobuilding is fairly young, plentiful and affordable in the round<sup>71</sup>. Straw may also be sourced locally anywhere in the UK where a roundhouse is likely to be built<sup>72</sup>. Roundhouses can be built on any sort of site, but those built in fields—which was typical in this research context—could harvest turf during the building of the *pitch* or from nearby and eventual garden beds. Only the waterproof membrane for the roof should be commercially produced and should ideally be new. Figure 6 shows a roof being repaired, the waterproof membrane used in the initial build was second-hand and began to leak after some ten years or so. The roundhouse, as a low-impact dwelling design for the UK today, is achievable and affordable and potentially very low impact.

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<sup>71</sup> Not processed by a sawmill.

<sup>72</sup> Straw is not produced in West Wales but is available from farms that import it to sell on as an animal bedding, feed or building material.



Figure 6: Repairing a roof. image (c) Forde

### **5.2.5 Borrowing 1: appropriation and synthesising**

Whilst working on Sam's plot as a volunteer he raised an interesting point about “eco” being an emerging rubric for many different types of commodification. While we were working, Sam and I were talking about New Age ideas and permaculture in particular as I discussed in Chapter Four. To illustrate some of the points he was making Sam fetched some books to show me. Sam and Cathy had built a big roundhouse, myself and another volunteer were working on a small extension to house a bath tub and they had been consulting different books about earth plastering. As Sam was flicking through an American book about earth plasters he was muttering about how unsuitable many of the techniques were for a damp Welsh climate. “But look,” he exclaimed suddenly, “this book is written for an American audience by a Welsh man, Ianto Evans! We're just re-packaging traditional knowledge for a New Age market.” Sam then recounted a story

about an elderly Pembrokeshire farmer who had come on an open day tour of the Lammas site at Tir y Gafel. Looking around the “ecobuilding” which had been finished with liberal helpings of lime plaster, the old boy exclaimed, incredulous: “But this is lime plaster?! We used to use this all the time on the farm, *before* they had gypsum... This isn't new, *bois bach*<sup>73</sup>!”.

If “eco” is emerging as a rubric under which many other technologies are consolidating, then it is part of a more general trend in the world of low-impact dwelling which sees ideas borrowed, synthesised and appropriated from many different sources but in particular “traditional” tribal or nomadic cultures. In New Age culture this is standard practice and cultural appropriation is performed unproblematically (Muir 2004). My research participants, though they could not be fully described as New Age, did borrow many styles of dwelling structure, in particular the tipi or the yurt. The extent to which this practice may be considered appropriation, however, is questionable. It was quite usual for participants at Y Mynydd to be able to make their own tipi or yurt. Although not everyone had made the dwelling they lived in, people tended to buy either a yurt or a tipi from someone else at Y Mynydd. Some people at Lammas had bought yurts from Y Mynydd, and some had made their own such structures. Because people made these structures for themselves, they were able to adapt the style to suit their own purposes. Welsh tipi adaptations have included a hat to stop rain entering the crown, and heavy-weight canvas is used which is waterproofed. It might be more useful to consider that a new tradition of tipi culture has developed to meet the demands of the UK context, rather than this being straightforward cultural appropriation.

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<sup>73</sup> Literally, “little boys”, but a common exclamation with no direct translation, like “for goodness sake!” or “oh boy!”.

For example, there is a Tipi field at Glastonbury festival, and many residents of Y Mynydd maintain an annual presence at the event. It became clear that research participants liked to differentiate themselves and their lived-in lodges from the growing number of “hire lodges”, all perfectly white and set out in neat rows. Agnes told me:

“it's like a housing estate now; neat and tidy rows; not what tipis are about at all. Right up until the nineties we just had a circle, that was really happening. There was always shared food; people would make tea for everyone; we were really part of things. Then it changed, it *sold out*”

I found it remarkable that Y Mynydd people clearly felt a sense of cultural appropriation when they saw their everyday life adopted, at high cost<sup>74</sup>, by revellers, but did not reflect on their appropriation of the tipi. Equally, I heard some festival-goers describe the worn-looking tipis in the tipi field: “Look! These are the *real* crusties!” The question about what counts as appropriation was complicated by two issues; firstly people that hired lodges could not light a fire inside so their experience of a tipi was very different, and secondly many of the hire lodges were supplied by a business based at Y Mynydd—further, these hire lodges were felt by some to be the “real” hire lodges. Space doesn't allow for a more thorough exploration of the issue of authenticity, however it is worth noting that notions about appropriation were only ever openly expressed one-way: certain people observed feigning in others, but not themselves.

The roundhouse is a slightly different matter. While the concept of the reciprocal roof are ambiguous in exact origin, Popovic Larsen (2008) notes that there is

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<sup>74</sup> A tipi to sleep eight might cost over £1,000 for the weekend.

documentary evidence that reciprocal frames were in use in Japan by the twelfth century (ibid: 7). The materials to build roundhouses and particularly the manner of in-filling can be said to be of very localised tradition. In other words, non-load-bearing walls ought to be in-filled with whatever insulating material is available, from sheep's wool to empty beer cans, a technique exemplified by the Earthship. Earthships were devised around experiments to address post-consumer waste as well as a housing shortage. The recipes for earth plaster vary, but the components must be able to dry or “cure” in the local climate and do need some sort of fibrous matter to structure the plaster. Straw bales are particularly handy to fill and insulate a larger area, and later I will discuss experiments with sacks of rubble and barbed wire. Such materials are usually plastered straight over, or occasionally wattle-and-daubed. This consists of a hurdle, a panel woven from split hazel, which is used to keep (usually) bundles of straw together, and then the lot is plastered. This has the advantage of requiring less plaster overall, reducing curing time, and will allow poorer quality plaster to hold firm. Some extravagant plasters included builders' lime, sand and horsehair (bought rather than harvested direct), whilst some very low-budget plasters consisted of clay subsoil sifted to remove even the smallest stones, straw, and fresh horse muck—known colloquially as *cob*. This qualifies my point earlier about localism: simple clay bricks or adobe wouldn't cure in the damp Welsh climate, whereas textured, fibrous mixes tended to do much better.

#### **5.2.6 Borrowing 2: To buy or not to buy?**

Audit was, not surprisingly, a big part of the low-impact development model. Referring back to Craig's comment, above, the perceived need for audit must be seen to emerge from a lack of understanding of how low-impact dwelling operates in practice. The act of translating everyday practice into figures meant that planners and inspectors external to everyday life in an ecovillage could get some interpretation of what was happening. I am not aware that auditing to the extent the EFA exercise requires is part of any other aspect of planning procedure, in spite of other practices to curb or control even permitted developments (such as affordable housing policies, or the need to demonstrate how new developments might support the Welsh language). One interesting criticism of the environmental footprinting model was to do with the rigidity of how “needs” were assessed. Something that surprised me very much was that the EFA form included categories for items bought second-hand, from charity shops and even miles travelled in a car running on “reclaimed vegetable oil” (see Appendix I). What was even more surprising is that within OPDs, which demand that new applicants run a business from the land as part of the application, only domestic spending—i.e. no business spending—was subject to audit in this manner<sup>75</sup>.

Specifically discussing environmental footprinting, one applicant to OPD told me:

“They don't understand us or anything we do really; they don't understand simple things like sharing. They don't understand *sharing* at all. Look, if Archie needs a rucksack for a school trip I'm not going to go out and buy him a brand new rucksack, if you've got a rucksack

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<sup>75</sup> Something I was incredulous to discover very late on in the research process over a public internet discussion board about One Planet Development!

spare you might lend it to him, *someone's* bound to lend him a rucksack.

But they don't understand that at all”.

This is certainly an issue for those low-impact dwellers who are under the planning regime and live in a village. I noticed many times how certain items, in particular kids toys, clothes, seedlings and plants and vegetables (and much more when people departed a place such as Y Mynydd) would circulate between people in ecovillages. It is not my intention to fully develop a discussion about what sort of goods or items might circulate, and I discuss exchange theory in the next chapter in the context of voluntary labour. I do wish to highlight that sharing, borrowing and appropriating (or its euphemisms, *wooding* and *skipping*) could not be accounted for through EFA audit, and likewise gifts, and so the model comes up short as a way to reflect the complexity of everyday life and low-impact techne.

Mitch discussed this theme with me, and remarked that since they had the youngest child at Tir y Gafel they would quite often receive kids toys from other families. Speaking in broader terms, Mitch directed his criticism at using money, or cost, above all as a way to measure more abstract concepts such as needs or even consumption. I was not in a position to take a direct quote, since Mitch and I were sitting round a fire discussing the EFA, rather this material comes from retrospective field notes. In the course of explaining his strategy to meet his needs by lowering his needs Mitch told me that he was not much of a shopper, but that he did have certain ideals. Citing cheaply made tools, Mitch said that in particular he did not like “throwaway” items, this was, he said a big problem. He extended his observations to the EFA exercise and clothing. Mitch said that he felt uncomfortable about EFA because he

might on occasion buy a pair of trousers which cost well over £100. I am not sure now what sort of trousers they were, but having got to know Mitch I can say with some certainty that they would be some hard-wearing animal skin. According to Mitch, these would “last a lifetime”, so the exercise of writing £100 in one's EFA one year was arbitrary. We joked about having to account for depreciation in the value of the trousers, but by then the point was made.

Of course, to some people £100 is an acceptable price tag for a pair of trousers, or other clothing, that they would not expect to last a lifetime, and they might not be so self conscious about describing their spending on such items. In the OPD context however, where domestic spending is considered to be a person's “needs”, and must be balanced by earning the equivalent amount, it is clear that the decision to spend £100 on anything cannot be taken lightly. The same young man who told me that the definition of a “hippy” is someone who steals wood, also told me that “hippies don't buy clothes”. I am not sure that this is exactly true but there is a point to be made here. Rather than saying that low-impact dwellers acquired items like clothing from one or other source, commensurate with Narotzky's (2005) provisioning approach, it is more useful to imagine a range of sources for things, including but by no means limited to buying. During fieldwork I found out about a lot of ways that people acquired things like clothing; hand-me-downs from friends; clothes swaps were common; things were found, or left behind at festivals—Glastonbury was known as a place to find wheelbarrows and wellies in particular.

Attitudes to what clothes did were clearly shaped by the requirements of the places people lived. At Y Mynydd, where there was long grass but no pavements and people needed to be outdoors in all weathers, people wore wellies the majority of the time, along with waterproofs some of the time and warm heavy jumpers. In the warmer months it was no surprise then that a lot of people wore almost nothing. Clothes were primarily functional within Y Mynydd, it was only when people went out somewhere that they thought about other aspects of their clothing. For example, at one *big lodge* meal I noticed that some of the older teenage girls had some colourful and pretty clothes on *underneath* the tracksuits they had worn to the big lodge; they were going somewhere else afterwards and knew that the big lodge was no place for their nice clothing. Likewise, Mary told me one day that she had taken all of their old clothes to be weighed in by a rag merchant and laughed when she told me that she had made almost £5, saying they could only have gone for rags because “there's not a lot left when we've finished with them!”.

I have used the example of clothing to illustrate that some of the ideas that formal low-impact development models rely on to assess planned low-impact developments are out of touch with the way that low-impact dwellers think about the items that they need. Sharing, borrowing buying and appropriating are all common and legitimate ways to get the things that people need, and sometimes even things like clothes circulate onward by giving, swapping or even selling. It is the act of accounting for domestic consumption by EFA that tries to capture this process statically, whereas for low-impact dwellers a fluid and mixed approach to the acquiring and ridding of items is unquestioned. Narotzky's (2005) provisioning approach would be a more useful

starting point for capturing the fluidity of low-impact dwelling, not only are items acquired from a greater variety of sources than the EFA model suggests, but as producers and consumers, low-impact dwellers' economy cannot be assessed very accurately in terms of input and output. As a model, EFA reduces complexity to easily-read figures and makes different examples comparable. Equally, a thorough ethnographic account of provisioning at a low-impact dwelling can augment the EFA with useful qualitative data.

### **5.2.7 Materials and value(s)**

This section explores how different materials are regarded by low-impact dwellers as suitable or unsuitable for their eco-building projects. Aside from the structural components, which were always wood, in terms of in-filling, the maxim “use what you've got” seemed sensible, however I was consistently surprised when it appeared that matters of style and taste seemed to intervene and overrule otherwise rational choices. Considering the Earthship—a type of autonomous dwelling largely constructed from salvaged, recycled or found materials, such as old tyres or empty cans (Harkness, 2009)—some self-builders seemed hesitantly conservative.

For example, reservations were voiced about the amount of stone pulled out of a river to construct one roundhouse at Y Mynydd:

EF—What do you think of Ben's hut?

RJ—It certainly has come along. It's very *solid* isn't it? I'm not sure about the stone walls though, I mean they looked nice but they're plastered over now anyway. I know they're only half way up but is it *really* necessary? It's a shame so much was taken out of the river bed. When you take those big rocks out it changes the shape quite dramatically.

EF—You know what they're doing at Lammas? I helped someone do a wall and the bottom layers we just filled old ton sacks with rubble and stacked them up. Actually he had tidied up a load of old barbed wire from the plot so we used short lengths of that and that really worked well to hold the layers together. It just gives it a solid base and I think it stops the damp pretty well.

RJ—Oh *no!* That's terrible, what are you supposed to do with that afterwards? (meaning when the hut falls down or is pulled down). No. Why would you want to do that?

Another conversation between two different people:

SG—Do you know what you could have, to stop the mice? You could crush up glass. It would stop them burrowing in through the straw.

RM—Ummm. I suppose that would work, but why would you deliberately leave glass everywhere?

SG—No. Inside the wall when you're building it.

RM—Yes but in the future....

Large stones were considered “nice” whereas sacks of rubble, gravel or shale were regarded dubiously to say the least. Similarly, infilling with straw was considered an ideal technique, whereas using empty cans, glass or other “rubbish” was not approved of; and even though approval was not really necessary, using these sorts of materials was flatly in opposition to the ethos of Y Mynydd. In both cases the question of what would be left when the dwelling fell down was raised.

As explained in Chapter Four, the idea that people live with nature as part of nature usually requires residents to live a low impact life of voluntary simplicity, somewhere approaching an arcadian existence. Reality and the passing of around 35–40 years has called for many changes and developments. So what one finds is not so much a community of people living low-tech than a group where an affluent and convenient lifestyle is sought within certain consensual boundaries. Therefore, while a tipi can be *pitched* and dropped at a moment's notice (*a priori*), a *hut*, which is far more substantial, ought to be able to decay and leave no trace, which approximates the impermanence upon which Y Mynydd's existence is wrought. This favours the use of local, natural materials as opposed to imported, recycled ones such as the tyres or cans that comprise Earthship building materials. It would have been absurd to bring empty cans to Y Mynydd for that purpose and their use as a building material would be questionable. Whether the cans are taken away in a bin bag or incorporated into a wall, one day they will have to be removed—in theory. While in practice the onus on residents is to remove

legacies of *tat*<sup>76</sup>, there is no way to enforce this. When *tat* is left behind and becomes considered an eyesore, other residents will remove it, or sometimes more drastic measures are taken, in the past abandoned dwellings have been burned down. There is also plenty of *tat* to be found in less populated areas of Y Mynydd, but being hard to reach (or not exactly on the communal land), plus out of daily or even occasional view, it tends to be left for future residents to raid or just to decay or become buried beneath ever-encroaching vegetation.

No other low-impact dwellers had this sense of concern about what might happen in the future, only at Y Mynydd was there a concern with impermanence, At Tir y Gafel a completely different set of values is brought to bear on the use of materials because other constraints exist to make recycled materials highly favourable. Under the various planning regimes and tools that might apply to low-impact dwellers, recycled materials carry no perceived environmental impact. Therefore, residents may use plywood, corrugated tin, bricks, tiles, asbestos and breeze blocks with impunity *if* they are second-hand. A new bag of lime, however, carries a penalty in terms of environmental footprinting; even the imported bunches of horsehair needed to be factored into the environmental impact equation. The wall I helped to construct used rubble generated as a by-product of creating a road-access network throughout the Tir y Gafel site. By employing the by-product in his building project, Sam saved potential credits in terms of his environmental footprint, and the official view of using resources. Presumably, this cancels out the burden that imported straw carries. Sam is not worried about what will be left when his roundhouse rots away. He has leased his plot for 1,000

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<sup>76</sup> In ordinary usage *tat* means things that are not of particularly good quality, but in this context *tat* was the general word given to all things. I imagined this was a subtle critique on materialism.

years and would in fact prefer it if his roundhouse *didn't* rot away. Sam doesn't exactly own his plot, but his lease arrangement surpasses the lifespan of any foreseeable future generation, so the entire arrangement is infused with a sense of permanence, which allows for the emergence of a different set of overriding principles<sup>77</sup>.

### **5.2.7 low impact material culture**

I have outlined elements of the sort of material culture found throughout the research field, and by extension I have explored how consensual agreements about the meaning of environment have shaped approaches to low-impact dwelling—what I have termed here an ecology. Clearly there is a tension between the idea of living lightly and making a low impact, and the examples indicate that environmentalism as a category is prone to a sort of pluralism. Y Mynydd represents an approach in which the immediate environment and the tangible legacy that its occupation leaves are not only observable, but are major factors in the development of a consensual approach to consumption—whether or not a brick is recycled, salvaged or bought new is irrelevant at Y Mynydd, simply, it is not considered appropriate for a group extolling the virtues of impermanence. At Tir y Gafel, however, due mainly to the official interaction with planning authorities, “the environment” is also taken to be a global system. So long as residents aren't stretching their share of planetary capacity—which is narrowly defined by the bespoke use of resources, materials, services and things—then anything goes. I discuss some of the contradictions inherent in this system more thoroughly in Chapter Eight. Whereas development models incentivise the use of reclaimed materials, by

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<sup>77</sup> In spite of this, one of the planning requirements for an ecobuild is that the dwelling must be “reversible”—applicants must demonstrate how they would demolish the building if necessary!

applying models such as the Environmental Footprint, this sort of provisioning is a regular part of economy for low-impact dwellers, by choice.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter began by defining what is meant by a low-impact *techne* and how this idea fits in to the broader anthropology of knowledge. I discussed the importance of distinguishing between formal and informal ways of knowing. I went on to explore some of the material culture which comprise this low-impact *techne*. While theoretically we would not wish to divorce *techne* and *episteme* as if they formed a classical dualism, in practice there is an observable difference between epistemological knowledge and technical knowledge, in place of mutual understanding models such as EFA emerge to bridge the discrepancy in knowledge.

Before the planning models for low-impact development, low-impact dwellings have been constructed constructed without permanence in mind, and sometimes with the express wish *not* to leave a physical legacy. Dwelling is premised on subtlety and impermanence and is dynamic. Not only is the concept of *techne* instructive for explaining and understanding these differences, but with a rigorous exploration of its components, a truly reflexive way of knowing can emerge which will both critique and contrast extant expert-ism which has been so central to the bureaucratic and political discourses which comprise state hegemony.

According to Barth, knowledge is more than a substantive corpus and communicative medium, it also has its own form of social organisation. A notable form of social organisation emerging from low-impact dwelling that has become crucial to low-impact development is the role of eco-village volunteers. As such, the following chapter will examine ecovillage volunteering.

## **CHAPTER SIX: VOLUNTEERS AND VOLUNTEERING**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the role of volunteers and volunteering on ecobuilding projects. My examples come from Tir y Gafel, since no other research participants recruited volunteers. I describe how labour is mobilised through volunteering as a form of social relationship, and through the promise of enskilment. Volunteers and volunteering can be typified in differing ways, and the latter part of this chapter deals with some of these approaches and gives a contextual overview of the practice.

The previous chapter discussed a low-impact *techne*, which consists of predominantly “by hand” techniques that are labour intensive. At Y Mynydd, the exclusive development and particular interpretation of a low-impact *techne* was arrived at by consensus, and conformed to the ideas about people living as part of nature discussed in Chapter Four. Amongst the independent householder-participants, low-impact *techne* and ecobuilding were matters of personal choice, a rule of thumb not strictly applied, and mitigated by all sorts of factors, such as cost, skill, availability of materials, and taste. For instance, Mervyn and Rachel's home was made from materials from their land as much as possible, including wood, stones from a derelict building, and turf. At Tir y Gafel, however, the commitment to low impact was formalised as a prerequisite for qualifying for a plot and gaining planning permission; the only overt restrictions that Lammas place on plot development is the requirement to be low impact. Because low impact referred to an environmental impact it was imagined, primarily, as a way to reduce material resource usage and to generate less waste. In practice this

usually meant the use of the sort of *techne* discussed in the previous chapter, which could be done by hand and self-built. In all cases, however, knowledge about low-impact *techne* flowed through a network of people and places, where it was co-produced and modified. As such, the mobilising of volunteer labour was key to the flow of low-impact *techne*, and also one of the methods used to make sure that activity at Tir y Gafel was low impact. Volunteer labour meant that “by hand” work would be quicker. This is more practical because building can take place much quicker. Because of certain requirements attached to their planning permission, Tir y Gafel residents were expected to build dwellings to a certain standard, requiring individual rooms with specific dimensions among other requirements. If a plot-holder didn't get volunteer help, building such extensive dwellings (by the usual low impact standard) by hand may not be practicable. Volunteer labour was, in that case, absolutely critical to the successful execution of building projects, within the planning timeframe.

This chapter explores how people are recruited to volunteering in the ecovillage context, what motivates volunteering and what volunteering might typically consist of. Volunteer recruitment tends to happen indirectly, through existing volunteer networks, or formally through websites. At least in the case of Tir y Gafel, very few volunteers seemed to have any prior connection to the residents (though this will certainly have changed by now, some years after my initial fieldwork). People volunteered for various reasons, seeing it as primarily an exchange of labour for skill and experience. People acquire specific practical skills that cannot be gained elsewhere (or at least, outside of such ecovillage locations); they also acquire the experience of what it might be like to live in an ecovillage. Greenberg (2013) suggests that because of the educational focus,

ecovillages may be regarded as “campuses where students can learn about sustainability while actually living it” (ibid: 271). In the case of volunteers, rather than passively learning “about”, they are able to actively learn by doing. This chapter therefore elaborates on the discussion of knowledge to examine how *techne* is co-produced. I will elaborate on the different routes that volunteers took later in this chapter, suffice it to note that some volunteers were mainly interested in having a look, whereas others treated volunteering as a sort of apprenticeship, spending years accumulating skills and experience at different locations.

Though it would be possible to regard volunteer labour as a form of gift exchange, the material I gathered suggested an alternative approach could be useful. Drawing on examples of the differing types of volunteer approaches which I encountered, I suggest that two complementary processes work to define the volunteer experience, and to produce the specific social relationship expressed by the volunteer—host relationship. The first is a process of becoming involved with and “one of” the host community, when through shared practice, hosts and volunteers come to be considered part of the same household. Once a volunteer is not strictly an outsider, the relationship between production and consumption is redefined. Volunteering, then, is a form of “consumptive labour” (Joseph, 1998: 35), and as such it is organised differently to productive labour—payment, for instance, is rendered inappropriate. In line with the idea of ecovillages as campuses, where it would be usual to charge tuition fees, even volunteers in some cases pay for what is effectively a work placement. Analyses which focus only on the perceived value of the labour which is done might miss crucial information: in the ecovillage context volunteer labour does not so much produce

surplus value for the householder, but can be regarded as a value itself which people are willing to pay for. Additionally, the process of becoming one of (or like) their hosts is compelling for volunteers. Lave and Wenger (1991) call this a position of legitimate peripherality, wherein the volunteer learner has the opportunity “to make the culture of practice theirs” (ibid: 95). In doing so, volunteers have the chance to emulate a lifestyle to which they are attracted, something that is interesting and valuable in itself. I will illustrate that this sort of volunteering is typical of ecovillages, land-based communities and volunteer organisations serving organic smallholders and their networks.

The second is a process of enskilment, and it is bound up with low-impact *techne* itself, and the sort of skills that such volunteers require and acquire. Such skills may be traditional or specialist, and are characterised as labour-intensive techniques, or historic ones that have been revived or reclaimed. They are exchanged in a non-hierarchical, dialectic relationship between volunteer and host, without a predetermined knowledge-hierarchy—sometimes the volunteer has skills to teach the host. Enskilment in this manner either creates further opportunities for volunteers, equips them for their own low-impact building project, or satisfies their interest in low-impact lifestyles. I do not suggest that the new physical and conceptual forms of modern ecovillages reproduce the relationships which characterise more traditional forms of labour or apprenticeship. Instead, what is being produced is a volunteer-host relationship which is defined by inclusiveness and egalitarianism.

As it transpired, volunteering at Tir y Gafel was one of my routes of access to the group. This worked in the immediate sense of allowing me physical access to the

site, but becoming a volunteer was part of a longer process in which I became aware of a much wider network of locations that offer volunteers the chance to live and work as part of different groups and households practising some degree of low-impact living, from ecovillages to organic farms producing food for their locality, or sometimes just households striving for self-sufficiency. In order to facilitate these sorts of volunteer experiences, to connect volunteer to host, there exist a number of formal networks, such as WWOOF (willing workers on organic farms/worldwide opportunities on organic farms<sup>78</sup>), Diggers and Dreamers<sup>79</sup>, and Reclaim the Fields' WWOLF network<sup>80</sup>. This network, of people and places, has to a large extent enabled the development and dissemination of a low-impact *techne*, including ecobuilding and food production using systems such as permaculture (as per Chapter Four).

## 6.1 Mobilising labour

This section discusses how volunteering mobilises labour on ecobuilding projects, and in this case also in an ecovillage. I explore how volunteering creates and maintains a volunteer-host relationship which has a historical precedent in Dyfed, but in some cases also emulates the master-apprentice relationship. My material suggests that though the volunteer-host relationship is comparable, the sort of learning which takes place happens in an egalitarian manner. I suggest that in the case of Tir y Gafel at least, planning requirements to build homes and businesses within five years have made volunteer labour a key part of the low impact strategy.

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<sup>78</sup> <http://www.woofinternational.org>

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk>

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.reclaimthefields.org.uk/wwolf>

### **6.1.1 What is volunteering?**

Rochester et al. (2010) have identified three volunteering paradigms (ibid: 10–14). The dominant paradigm considers volunteering in terms of the delivery of social welfare to the needy by the fortunate. This is also known as the non-profit paradigm. The non-profit paradigm neglects activism, which defines what the authors call the civil society paradigm. This second paradigm, the “civil-society paradigm”, is based on self-help and mutual aid and extends a remit to policy issues such as planning and environment. The Lammas organisation itself is an example of a voluntary organisation that may be considered against this paradigm. The third paradigm, which will be the most pertinent here, is the idea of volunteering as leisure (Rochester et al., 2010; Stebbins and Graham, 2004; Bishop and Hoggett, 1989: 151). According to Stebbins (2004), “[s]erious leisure is the systematic pursuit of a... volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting in its nature for the participants to find a (non-work) career therein acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience” (ibid: 5). I certainly tend towards the idea that for the ecovillage volunteers, volunteering was a form of leisure, and could be considered the sort of serious leisure that Stebbins outlines. This manner of volunteering is characteristic of, but not exclusive to, ecovillages like Tir y Gafel (for instance, ecovillages emphasising large projects such as communal building, food production, and especially permaculture). I aim here to show that the sort of volunteering encountered at the Tir y Gafel ecovillage centred on a key relationship based on the volunteer-host relationship: an egalitarian form of instruction. In the case of long-term volunteering, this practice has parallels with apprenticeship—it is a relationship primarily geared towards the acquisition of skill and experience, but in contrast to apprentices, volunteers retain and practice a high degree of mobility. Chapter Five discussed the idea that knowledge based on *techne* is situated in

action, the active pursuit of skill and expertise, or, knowing-through-doing. Where the volunteer-host relationship really diverges from the master-apprentice format is in the way that skills are acquired. Rather than instruction, the host provides the volunteer with the space and material, both physical and conceptual, for experiencing and learning. Because the cycle of reproduction of a low-impact dwelling is typically not only long but greatly dispersed throughout a lifetime, the host is often engaging in the same process of learning as the volunteer. The two actors engage in what may be regarded as a learning conversation, as my own experience of volunteering that I present later in this chapter indicates. The examples I will discuss come from ecobuilding projects at Tir y Gafel, but this sort of volunteering also includes other more mundane activities such as animal husbandry, gardening and everyday household activities associated with low-impact dwelling. At the core of this practice is the idea that the volunteer can emulate their host's lifestyle. In some way, hosts are seen to be living something authentic, something which the volunteer wishes to experience, and the route to this experience is through the offer of volunteer labour.

Rochester et al. (2010) outline a volunteer typology with examples as diverse as professionals who work *pro bono*, to offenders on community service programmes (which is controversial given that unpaid work of this nature is rarely voluntary) (ibid: 32–35). They do not, however, account for the sort of volunteering which I describe, which is above all intensive and residential. ecovillage volunteers (or even volunteers at smaller, independent households or smallholdings, or larger organic farms) typically live as part of the village (or even household) where they are working—or at least that is the experience which is offered. The closest approximation that Rochester et al. (2010)

demonstrate is the pursuit of gap-year volunteering experiences (ibid; 110). By housing and feeding volunteers, sometimes within their homes, hosts begin a process of inclusive patronage, and volunteers embark upon a process of becoming “one of” their hosts.

The practice of taking on long-term volunteers resembles the early nineteenth-century working relationship in Dyfed, where labourers were employed in hereditary positions at larger farms throughout Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire, and would be considered, along with their families, as “heirlooms or appendages to their farms” (Owen, 1993: 90). This approach, based on a patron-client relationship, is suggestive of a feudal past, and was quite localised. For instance, this practice was in marked contrast to the capitalistic system of “cross wages” which operated tenaciously throughout more northern areas of Wales, and especially in the Vale of Clwyd. Under this system, labourers assembled at the village centre, or cross, and were hired by the day at a price agreed according to the daily market. Offering no long-term security for labourers or their families, the cross wages system effectively defined different classes of agricultural workers—secured farm servants, small holders and farmers enjoyed more security and prosperity than the labourers, who were seasonally crucial but lacked any commitment to the work (Owen, 1993: 86–88, 90), or, perhaps lacked any opportunity to commit under the cross wages system.

I was discussing this custom with Rhys at Y Mynydd, who used to be a dairy farmer in the area and always took an interest in local history and agricultural matters.

Rhys recalled an anecdote from the 1970s, when a fellow farmer had mistaken his lodger/farmhand for a servant:

“He said, 'Is that your servant, boy?!' about this fellow who was my lodger and sort of a farm-hand. I didn't know what to say! Of course, they all had them, even old Jenkins (a neighbour) had a servant, and that wasn't that long ago.”

Rhys was from Monmouth and had not had a farming background. He entered dairy farming in his early 20s. I imagine that he associated the idea of a servant with the domestic servants of the gentry. In Rhys' view, his lodger helped out to earn his keep, an informal working arrangement, but the idea of servitude was something from which I suspected Rhys was keen to distance himself. Rhys told me that his grandparents on his mother's side were aristocratic, and would have certainly had household servants.

Lammas, as a voluntary association, relied extensively on volunteers at all levels, from organising to labouring on plots at Tir y Gafel. As part of the process of negotiating access, I approached the group as a volunteer on a week-long intensive programme. I was initially surprised to discover that Lammas would be charging around £150 for the week, which didn't resemble what I had previously understood “volunteering” to mean. Because there is an emphasis on experience and education in these sorts of volunteer networks—and in a field where experience often replaces actual qualifications, I was not entirely surprised at the fee. Having spent time volunteering, networking with other volunteers and attending conferences and events on the subject of ecovillages, I began to understand that “volunteering” in such contexts quite often involved a fee, and this in fact was expected. This fact in itself is analytically important

as it illustrates that eco-village volunteering is an alternative economic practice where typical analyses cannot be applied.

### **6.1.2 Criticisms of ecovillage volunteer programmes**

I was discussing the fact of having to pay for volunteering jobs with a young woman that I met at an “off-grid” ecovillage conference during 2010. She explained that she wanted to learn skills which she felt could only be learnt “hands-on” from practitioners at places such as Tir y Gafel. In her view the only way to gain the skills for low-impact *techne* was to go to the places where people practiced them on an everyday basis. As such, this sort of learning is entirely situated. This woman, however, explained that the only opportunities she had found so far required volunteers to pay for experience “courses”, and the cost, to her, was prohibitive. When I told her about Y Mynydd, however, she sounded interested initially but was put off by the fact that if she did turn up there, there wouldn't be anything organised for her to do. Y Mynydd operated no formal volunteering scheme. There were certain political reasons for not doing so based on insecurities about “land grabbing”, which seemed to emerge from the fact of sharing land without official boundaries, although it was never offered as an explicit reasoning. Instead, I heard the practice of volunteering being derided in various ways during fieldwork:

“After Jenny planted her orchard all across that hillside, we were all asking whether that *pitch* [which the orchard had encroached upon] was for her wwooffers.”

“In the 1970s we used to take in refugees... exhausted volunteers from John Seymour's place.” [John Seymour was an author of guides to self-sufficiency who had a smallholding in Pembrokeshire.]

Y Mynydd residents associated volunteering with having such an extensive *trip* that it was unmanageable without help. It was assumed, then, that the volunteer's labour was exploited. Other places may have offered the experience of authentic living to volunteers, but at Y Mynydd in theory anybody could occupy a *space* there—volunteering wasn't a necessary approach (as I found with Lammas). Secondly, extra free labour could mobilise a household to exploit more of the shared resource, that is, the land, at Y Mynydd. In general it was not problematic for a household to occupy as much space as they could if they were able to maintain it themselves by hand—the onus on doing everything by hand was its own check and balance on land grabbing at Y Mynydd. As a result, and in sharp contrast to other ecovillages, Y Mynydd was not part of the volunteer circuit, and despite being open to visitors without restriction or obligation, such openness seemed off-putting to some potential volunteers, who apparently preferred the idea of having some activity organised for them.

### ***6.1.3 Self-building and dwelling: negotiating planning***

Harkness (2009) notes the value placed on self-building by her Earthshippers. Some of her participants in Taos took years to slowly build their home, meticulously contributing every detail, whereas by contrast the Fife Earthship was not a residential dwelling, it was a community centre and so was built by volunteers. At Tir y Gafel, planning requirements meant that volunteer labour became an integral part of residents' low impact strategies and self-build approach. It is somewhat paradoxical that in some cases it is strangers who contribute their manual labour to build Tir y Gafel residents' domestic spaces; as I will show, a process of becoming part of the host household

tended to efface any boundary between public and private space which might exist ordinarily.

The self-builders I met exemplified Ingold's (2011) suggestion that building was part of the ongoing process of dwelling, and not vice versa. As such, the use or reliance on volunteer labour—the goodwill of outsiders—was a reflection on the idea of creating ecovillages as a common hub, or as Greenberg (2013: 271) would have it, a campus, for the acquisition, practice and enskilment in low-impact *techne*. The process of forming a dwelling of one's own was a crucial part of personhood at Y Mynydd, as Ross' story in Chapter Three demonstrated. This process was protracted at Y Mynydd: dwellings weren't usually built in a finite manner, they seemed to always require modifying, improvement and repairing, and in the case of mobile dwellings, they were moved regularly too. In this case dwelling did not take a static form. In the case of Tir y Gafel, however, other issues at play changed the scope for self-building dwelling spaces, despite residents' insistence that the process of dwelling was more important than the form of a dwelling. The planning requirements for Tir y Gafel demanded that each plot provide 75% of the plot-holders' needs within five years, and that all planned dwellings be completed by this time, and up to building regulation standards. This requirement put a certain constraint on how people at Tir y Gafel were able to operate. As will be seen below, volunteer work became a crucial part of peoples' dwelling strategies.

It was not surprising to find volunteers attached to Tir y Gafel from the outset. Amongst activists with a high degree of mobility, volunteering at ecovillages, organic farms or similar projects is quite usual according to Graeber (2009: 251), and is

evidenced by certain networks that exist to facilitate volunteering (listed above). What was interesting about the example of volunteering at Tir y Gafel is that volunteers became integral to the ecobuilding *techne* and the residents' ability to demonstrate to planners that activity at the site ought to be considered low impact. The most ecologically low impact *techne* tended to be labour-intensive, and even the unskilled labour of volunteers allows the reclaiming of skills such as wattle-and-daub, or cob wall plasters. Such “by hand” techniques are a revival of a quite ancient *techne*, which was surpassed by industrial techniques or materials that reduced labour-intensiveness—always the most costly factor in any such process. In a context where labour costs are negligible because work is done by self or gifted, then such a utilitarian reckoning becomes irrelevant. Without volunteer labour, plot-holders may not complete their work to schedule and thus jeopardise their planning permission, and it is not clear whether plot-holders could afford to pay for help under the planning scheme to which they must adhere. Under this particular planning regime, any proposed low-impact dwelling must demonstrate the requirement to live on the piece of land in question—usually through demonstrating that a viable smallholding business can be made, which would require the smallholder to be there every day. In this way, life (everyday activity centred around the home) and livelihood (which in this context is defined as the ability to meet 75% of household needs) are intrinsically linked to the land being developed.

The development may be considered low impact if it demonstrates that such a manner of dwelling has positive environmental consequences, or at least doesn't infringe on the environment by, for example, generating pollution or excessive consumption. “By hand” work is absolutely crucial to this type of planning application,

where labour intensiveness is not a factor, but ecological footprint is. As discussed in Chapter Four, during my time volunteering with Lammas a team of about 10 volunteers spent a day making plasterboards by hand out of locally-sourced materials. The exercise was extremely labour intensive, but considered preferable to using mass-produced plasterboards, which would carry a heavy ecological footprint. I suggest that only self or voluntary labour would allow for the pursuit of such techniques, and given the timeframe in which residents of Tir y Gafel were required to act, volunteers are a crucial (if impermanent) part of the fabric at Tir y Gafel.

#### **6.1.4 Understanding ecovillage volunteering**

Under the rubric of volunteering, what is being discussed here can better be described as an intensive educational experience, with an important element of “being there” and living like the hosts, in the pursuit of an authentic space in which to acquire skills. The pursuit of a genuine experience is evidently at the core of many activities typically aimed at young, mobile people in the UK, such as gap year pursuits or ecotourism. According to Maines (2009), “any technology that privileges the pleasures of production over the value and/or significance of the product can be a hedonizing technology”, and dismisses the suggestion that such activities are a result of the alienation of modern work (ibid: 3; 122, but cf. Black, 1986). Hedonising technologies are characteristically labour-intensive and “archaising” (ibid: 5), and while Maines exemplifies this point with camping and outdoor cooking, from the volunteer perspective ecobuilding is another appropriate example. I suggest that it is the way that low-impact *techne* can be hedonised which makes it an attractive prospect for volunteers. This is evidenced not only by the standard format of such enterprises (where volunteers are able to choose activities to try within reason), but by the types of people

who volunteer on such schemes. The ideology and rhetoric of ecovillage volunteering means the exchange is described as a learning experience, or a skill-sharing exercise, or as a way to build viable alternative economic practices, even an alternative to university education; it takes place within households and the boundaries between volunteer and host are effaced. This is very different to other examples of volunteer work, for instance in Caplan's (1986) ethnography of Indian women's voluntary organisations, class seems to be a major motivating factor and issue which divides recipient of charity from the donor (ibid: 206–207).

Of course, this is not the only possible interpretation of voluntary work on ecobuilding projects. Harkness (2009), for example, identifies what she calls the “gift principle” and suggests using the literature on gift exchange to understand such volunteering work (2009: 196). Since Mauss' essay (1954 [2002]), the notion of the gift has come to prominence as a way to account for economic transactions which fall outside of utilitarian economic paradigms. For Harkness, providing refreshments, throwing “thank you” parties and the striving for good practice in volunteer work and recruitment are “certain subtle social mechanisms helping to regulate the reciprocal nature of gift work” (2009: 196). However, in terms of reciprocity the exchange is not like-for-like—material production for abstract production—which complicates analysis. Perhaps also the analogy is somewhat idealised: not answering the question of how or why this gift relationship is initiated. Following Parry, (1986), I acknowledge that this interpretation is somewhat circular:

“So it is that anthropology often seems to be endlessly rediscovering the moral of Mandeville's Fable of the bees. Publick Benefit derives from

Private Vice. Society is created by, and its cohesion results from, an endless sequence of exchanges in which all pursues their own advantage (however conceived).”

(1986: 455).

Following Parry's line of reasoning, Graeber (2001) also notes that to claim that one value stands in for another sort of value demands the reification of abstract notions into a set of values which can be compared in an economic model. Caplan (1986) describes the role of public gift-giving by members of women's voluntary organisations in Madras in the mid-1970s. Typically goods such as sweets and clothes are presented to the beneficiary in front of an audience of the donor's peers (ibid: 173). In this case, the gift is not reciprocated: “the unreciprocated gift still makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it” (Mauss 2002 [1954]: 83). As such, Caplan highlights that it is intended that the asymmetrical relationship between donor and recipient is maintained, along the lines of the normative Western model of volunteering (Rochester et. al. 2010). In the Indian context, however, Caplan notes that the matter is complicated by the Hindu philosophy which maintains that religious merit is derived from acts of charitable giving, noting that Gandhi adopted elements of this philosophy into his “trusteeship theory” (ibid: 174). As per Parry (1986) and Graeber (2001), Caplan does not argue for some sort of equivalence in the exchange, and notes that the reciprocation comes not from the recipient of the gift, but from the donor's own network (ibid: 175). The evidence Caplan provides instead suggests that gift-giving should be viewed as part of a process of reproducing “the culture and lifestyle appropriate to their class level” (ibid: 184). This is very similar to

the way that the labour of ecovillage volunteers reproduces the volunteer *role* throughout the ecovillage volunteering network.

The new ethnographic material on the practice of ecovillage volunteering that I have provided suggests that applying the notion of the gift to this context is not sufficient to examine this practice, not least because it reproduces inequalities contained in the dominant western volunteering paradigm, itself an extension of the notion that self-interest (eventually) reproduces a just society. This is exemplified by the notion of the “haves” bestowing gifts upon the “have nots” (Rochester et. al. 2010). Such inequalities were not evident in the field, and in this case I feel would overlook the positioning of ecovillage volunteers vis-à-vis their hosts. In his discussion of capitalist production Carrier (1992) argues for a distinction between impersonal economic institutions and the morality of the family. According to Mollona (2005), however, Carrier's account is a static and historical interpretation of what may in fact be an ongoing and permutable set of ideologies (ibid: 178–179). My material supports this contention. Ecovillage volunteers bridge between the impersonal institution and the household economy, as outsiders who can join families temporarily in order to help them to meet the requirements of, in this case, planning. As will be seen, reconfiguring the household to include volunteer labour is a crucial step in the provision of that labour.

## **6.2 Volunteer recruitment**

The material I present here is based on volunteers met at Tir Y Gafel where volunteering was an integral, not peripheral, part of household economy. I have to admit to spending a summer some years previously working as a wwooffer, therefore I had some prior insight. For instance, I knew that volunteering would be taking place, that it would be a viable way to access Tir y Gafel, and I had some idea of what to expect in terms of researching with volunteers. As such, interviewing while taking notes would not be possible, unless there was somewhere light and dry to spend time, and this was often not the case. As such, most of the material comes from participant-observation and unstructured interviewing whilst “on the job”. I would not say that ecovillage volunteering is particularly gruelling, (though some aspects certainly are, especially if the volunteer wishes to do heavy work), but it is busy, so the opportunity to distract volunteers from their work was minimal. The stories I present here provide a composite picture of the volunteering that typically occurs in ecovillages and other land-based communities.

It has been useful to differentiate between types of volunteer. This list is not exhaustive of every type of volunteer one may encounter, but represents a general sample of those that I met during the course of fieldwork, and accounts for volunteering patterns not covered by existing volunteer typologies offered by social scientists (e.g. Rochester et al., 2010). In addition to developing a close relationship with several host families at Tir y Gafel, I met over thirty different volunteers over the course of fieldwork. Of these, twelve were asked to participate more formally in the research so details about them are included here. As well as semi structured discussions about volunteering and observations made on the job, I managed to conduct more formal

interviews with five volunteers. Additionally, I was able to follow one of the volunteers to destinations beyond Tir y Gafel. I am therefore able to provide a more detailed narrative account of their practice (see for example Section 3.5).

Volunteers included young volunteers for whom their time at an ecovillage is a time-out, and probably largely unrelated to other parts of their lives. Some volunteers may spend years volunteering at different locations in order to build a repertoire of skills. For other volunteers, the experience alone is something to attain, they don't necessarily stay long or learn much at any one place. A final category of volunteer consisted of skilled individuals gifting their services as though donating to a good cause, what Rochester et al. (2010) describe as professional volunteers, or knowledge volunteers (ibid; 106). While literature on the gift might be useful to explain the motivation for volunteering (Harkness, 2009), in other cases literature on apprenticeship might orient understandings of what these people think about their practice as volunteers. Yet again, in other cases a process which redefines the relationships of work so as to negate the question of remuneration can be seen to be relevant, and thus an understanding of volunteering as an aspect of leisure or a hedonising technology (Maines, 2009) is equally relevant. What is clear from this typology is that volunteering is not formulaic, it takes place under a variety of conditions and circumstances. The aim here is to account for some of these differences and to paint an overall picture of ecovillage volunteering.

### ***3.5.1 The gap year volunteer***

Gap year volunteering is common in many sectors, and opportunities are often dependent on skills. In the ecovillage context, prospective volunteers would contact potential hosts in advance to register interest and to offer their skills. Clearly, skilled volunteers were more useful to hosts, and at Tir y Gafel there tended to be a plentiful supply of volunteers so a range of skills or a particular specialism was an advantage to the volunteer in respect of securing a volunteer position. Brian was one such volunteer. Having a qualification in vegetarian catering, he has been useful to Lammas in catering for other volunteers and for one-off events or conferences. As such, Brian has negotiated a longer-term residency at one of the Lammas households, where he helps with certain projects, and does catering work, but not continually so. Brian's skill in the kitchen also takes him to other locations, such as festivals, especially over the summers, but he parks his camper van at Tir y Gafel where he returns after stints catering around the country. Summer tends to be a time of relative immobility for smallholders, especially food growers who need to harvest, water and maintain a busy garden. Whereas for someone like Brian summer represents a time of increased mobility as he works away and attends outdoor festivals and events.

According to Brian:

“I could definitely see myself starting up my own smallholding one day, or even just growing a big garden. This is the thing though, I'm away too much, and I'm not really sure what's next. It's like, this is great, for now yeah, but I want to do other things. I'm thinking of uni at some point too. Even though I've learnt a lot being here and I know I can

always come back to it, I don't actually want to commit to one place right now.”

The perceived commitment to a smallholding or living on the land seemed to be a key reason which kept some volunteers from settling down permanently at their own project. In spite of places such as Y Mynydd, and land-based co-ops which afforded space for people to set up their own low-impact dwelling, volunteering was a viable alternative, a way to sample the lifestyle, (even for prolonged amounts of time as we shall see below) without making a long-term commitment. The responsibility of a low-impact dwelling was certainly a factor in Brian's annual rhythm. Indeed, shortly after our conversation, I heard that Brian had moved to Manchester where he had got a place at Uni to study music.

### **6.2.2 *The experience volunteer***

Another approach to volunteering was taken by people, couples and families of all ages interested in emulating the lifestyle of their hosts. They were seeking affirmation by simply getting to meet and spend time with people already living in an ecovillage. Rochester et al. (2010) do not take this sort of volunteer into account in their typology, so an exploration is warranted here. Such volunteers valued the experience itself, not so much to learn skills but to evaluate whether it is “for them”, and hopefully to make contacts and get advice about their own plans. As such, they tended to make only brief trips to Tir y Gafel for specific events, or to participate in short volunteer placements.

An example of this sort of volunteer are Phil and Eve, who I volunteered with on a Lammas Experience Week. Meant as an introduction to the ecovillage at Tir y Gafel.

Phil and Eve are a couple from the Sheffield area, they are in their 40s with a grown-up daughter, looking to sell their house and live in a more rural spot in an ecohome. Admittedly, the plan was Phil's idea, and he told me that he had persuaded Eve to come to Lammas in order to convince her that it would be a civilised lifestyle. Eve and I got on really well, and she told me that before they came, her mother had warned her in no uncertain terms: “don't smoke *anything*”, and voiced concerns that Phil was trying to join a cult. The couple were pleasantly surprised, Eve by her aptitude and impressions of the place, and Phil by Eve's enthusiasm.

Before volunteering, Eve had not expected to fit in with either the hosts, or the other volunteers, she made it pretty clear that going on the Experience Week had been Phil's idea. Eve explained some of her fears to me, which primarily included worrying about the sort of food that she might encounter and whether she would be judged harshly if she couldn't enjoy brown rice and lentils (though Brian's catering was superb, so she needn't have worried). Although it might seem trivial, since it was only for a week, it was as if worries about food stood for Eve's worries that she was not an alternative-type and would not fit in with even the most basic norms. The volunteer experience clearly changed things for Phil and Eve. After the initial volunteering week Phil and, crucially, Eve were both resolved to make their own low-impact dwelling. As such they went on to become leading influences in a second group wishing to emulate the Lammas ecohamlet model at another site, as yet not found. I caught up with them at this later point, as they were part of a meeting to organise a group to form the next ecohamlet. Phil had taken on the role of secretary, and Eve was now a central part of the group, discussing her aspirations for the new site. It was significant that this group was

meeting was held at Tir y Gafel, as if the association to this site was part of the process of creating a new, similar group.

### **3.5.3 *The skilled volunteer***

Occasionally, and especially at Tir y Gafel because being part of the Lammas network meant it was widely publicised, there would be highly skilled volunteers who had come simply to help out with the project. Unlike the professional volunteers which Rochester et al. describe (2010: 32), these volunteers would have a key skill required by the group, and thus equate more fully to the idea of a “knowledge volunteer” (Rochester et al. 2010: 106). This sort of volunteer might include tree surgeons, carpenters, blacksmiths or similarly skilled people, sometimes aiming to eventually gain paid employment or to trade skills, but I met and heard about several skilled people who were helping for free due to enthusiasm about the project. I spoke to one, a tree surgeon, who described his time at Tir y Gafel as “a busman's holiday”. Siencyn was in a similar position, he was also a tree surgeon, but he had volunteered on The Plot (the same plot described in Chapter Three) some time prior to us meeting. Siencyn said he was happy to be part of the research project although as discussed in Chapter Three, The Plot declined to be involved and so I will not be able to reproduce many details here. What is notable about Siencyn, like Rita and Huw, is his commitment to the one volunteering role at The Plot. Last time I saw Siencyn he was about to set off for work in Lancashire, where he would live on-site in his van; after that, he said he planned to come back to The Plot, to help with the work there. Due to his regular involvement with one plot, Siencyn had acquired the skills relevant to that role, therefore ensuring that he could return, and be useful, whenever he wanted to, much like Brian.

### **3.5.4 Career volunteers**

Though it can be argued that hosts benefitted from volunteer labour, the main premise behind volunteering as articulated in the low impact/ecovillage context was to allow people to try something out, in this case the way of life and technical skills required in an ecovillage, to equip them to either join the group, or emulate the lifestyle at another space. This was the point of the Experience Week, and it was the process which Phil and Eve's story exemplified. Amongst people I met during fieldwork it was not unusual for some to spend many years volunteering in order to build and develop a range of skills in design, construction, land management and permaculture. Stebbins (2004) refers to this sort of volunteering as serious leisure, where the idea of learning and progression is intertwined with the pursuit of the task or sport, what Stebbins calls a “non-work career” (ibid: 5). This period of learning could equally be considered as an apprenticeship of sorts, a necessary step for some before they are fully ready to “give it all up” and go back-to-the-land. This was certainly the route that Alex who I discussed above had taken. Unlike the many other hundreds of volunteers who passed through Tir y Gafel, only Alex was able to make the transition to being a permanent resident at the site, but I noticed that Alex's volunteers seemed to be people who were volunteering for similar reasons to Alex.

Rory was a volunteer aged twenty who arrived at Alex's plot to spend a few weeks volunteering when I was also staying at Tir y Gafel and visiting Alex. Rory had recently arrived back in the UK from Thailand, he explained that ecovillage volunteering and wwoofing was part of his travelling plans, and saw it as a way to link up with like-minded people to facilitate his travel. Rory told me that his background had been very “suburban”:

“It's so restrictive, you know? Everyone's got their house, their car, all on little plots where they argue about the size of so-and-so's hedge. It's all so, suburban and petty. I like coming to places like this, it's so much more.... it's *freer*”.

Though many young people that I met were volunteering on gap years, this wasn't quite accurate in Rory's case. For example, Rory hadn't been to university, and he had no plans to, he told me:

R—“I don't want to study anything academically, I mean, this is a much better way to learn. I can learn skills that just aren't available anywhere else. Learning permaculture, and ecobuilding will basically set me up for how *I* want to live, much better than a degree. I mean, that's what I said to my Dad, I said I was volunteering to *learn*—he's a builder, so he can relate to some of what I've told him about—but for me, this is an alternative to university... not that they *expected* me to go or anything, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. I think he was relieved, you know? It's so expensive and it's kind of a *waste*”.

EF—“hey!”

R—(laughs)...no, I mean you knew what you wanted to do so it's different! I'm interested in ecobuilding so what could I learn about that at uni?

EF—“well.... I expect you'd have to study anthropology”

R—“yeah, yeah!”(laughs)

Like the gap year volunteers, Rory was interested in learning skills which would help him to secure further volunteer positions at other locations, but it was clear that he saw himself one day emulating Alex's transition to ecovillage life.

### ***6.2.5 Towards a new typology of volunteering***

This section has outlined different approaches to volunteering, contributing a further category to existing volunteer typologies—that of the “experience volunteer”. It was my aim to demonstrate that, while for some the volunteer experience may be fleeting and hedonistic, for others it can represent something akin to apprenticeship. Given the variety of volunteer approaches, it was difficult to discern a shared motivation which would lead to analysis of what volunteering meant for all volunteers. Rochester et al. (2010) note a lack of consensus about what volunteering is, and that as such, there are methodological implications when using surveying methodologies to elicit data about volunteering (ibid: 38). My ethnographic material supports the idea that volunteering is a diverse practice, even in a single context. What I have called skilled, gap-year and career volunteers are accounted for in the typology which Rochester et al. offer, though with some qualification, “career volunteers” for example might also be regarded as “learning volunteers”. I add the experience volunteer category, which was not outlined by Rochester et al. but which is implicit in many practices, not limited to ecovillage volunteering. Harkness (2009) follows her participants' lead in calling volunteer labour gift-work, however my participants clearly identified a process of exchange. As a result, I proceed with caution. To consider volunteering in terms of gift is part of the Western construct of volunteering, which reproduces the Victorian notion of the “haves” giving to the “have-nots”. This view effectively excludes minority volunteering groups, such as

the working class, from identifying with the practice (Lukka and Ellis Paine, 2007: 31, in Rochester et al., 2010: 180). This theme emerges from my data, too: though I had not judged Rory to be working-class, and he described his background as “suburban”, Rory had chosen to explain his volunteering practice in terms that would resonate with his builder father's experience, such as emphasising the building techne that he was learning about, rather than making moral-economic claims about gifting. Certainly giving was part of ecovillage volunteering, but whether participants were giving time in order to get a taste of ecovillage life, or whether they were exchanging labour for the acquisition of new skills, in all cases new social relationships were being formed that centred on the low-impact dwelling. The section below looks in more detail at the latter sort of volunteer, “career volunteers” whose experience of long-term volunteering approximated an apprenticeship of sorts.

### **6.3 Volunteers and hosts: countering normative models**

A hereditary familial connection between agricultural labourers and particular farms is a traditional form of labour relationship in West Wales. I likened this tradition in some ways to the sort of position in which volunteers at low impact or ecovillage projects found themselves. Both relationships redefine the boundaries between production and consumption and hinge on the worker becoming incorporated into the social structure of the workplace to a large extent. Key elements of these relationships are very different, however, because volunteering does not reproduce the hierarchy of a patron-client relationship: it is more egalitarian and volunteers retain a degree of mobility. In order to understand how ecovillage volunteering takes place socially, in a wider community of technological tradition, we must take a decentred view of the volunteer-host relationship and accept that the host is as much a part of that community of practice as the volunteer

(Lave and Wenger, 1991: 94). Pálsson's (1994) explanation of how enskilment happens within Swedish fishermen's social world is also at odds with normative models, which imagine a hierarchy from master to apprentice. Indeed, according to Pálsson, this perspective is typical of the Western tradition's preoccupation “with analytic and theoretical ways of knowing, *episteme*, devaluing and misrepresenting contextual knowledge, *techne*” (Pálsson, 1994: 903). In the context of ecovillage volunteering, hands-on learning was sometimes characterised by a lack of instruction. The hosts simply provided the space and materials, and volunteer and host were both able to engage with tasks, learning-through-doing in a dialectic manner. Quite often, it seemed that volunteers with their range of skills and experience had a greater depth of expertise than their hosts. I will present two stories, Marina's and Sam's, volunteer and host, which intertwine, and will illustrate how the interplay between volunteers and hosts counters normative labour/learning models.

### **6.3.1 Case study: Marina and Sam**

Marina was an experienced volunteer and had recently volunteered on an unusual ecobuild project, rebuilding a terraced house in town in Pembroke Dock. Marina had learned and refined many skills pertaining to straw bale construction and ecoplasters. Marina was Czech and explained that she was spending time volunteering now because one day she wished to make her own home using ecobuilding techniques in the Czech Republic. Marina's experience meant that she brought a certain expertise to the project she was working on at Tir y Gafel, to the extent that the householders she was helping deferred certain decisions to do with the components of plaster, amount of coats and materials used to refine the finish to Marina, because she clearly had the most experience. I volunteered with Marina at Sam's plot during my time at Tir y Gafel, and

while Marina was concocting plasters, Sam and I did the labouring—although we spent as much time ranting about politics as building. In any case, our task was straightforward: to build a wall based on ton-sacks (large open-topped woven polythene bags that come from builders' merchants when one buys a ton of something) half-filled with shale and rubble (a by-product when Lammas built tracks through Tir y Gafel), the layers to be held together with rusty barbed wire collected from old piles left in fields re-fenced years previously. As we worked, our task evolved, both of us making judgements and suggestions as we faced new challenges. Or, in other words, we improvised “imitative and experimental responses to the surrounding tasks and activities” (Hallam and Ingold, 2007 in Marchand, 2010: 9). For instance, with a limited supply of ton bags we came up with halving the sacks to start with, to double our quantity—so instead of using half-full ton sacks we were using full halved-ton sacks. We would add the odd big rock to our wall at strategic points, and so our wall developed, ready for Marina's expert plastering skills at some future point.

When Sam's partner Cathy had returned from running errands, we sat down to lunch. My food had been provided by Lammas, since I had come on an intensive volunteering week run by Lammas in its capacity as a co-operative organisation. Because Lammas volunteers were not really attached to the households they worked with, here I was just a day-labourer. The others, I noticed, ate the leftovers of a meal that Marina had prepared the previous evening from a pumpkin grown by Cathy. Marina was quite at home in the household kitchen and her “hosts” were clearly not having to lay on meals for her; she had been accepted as a part of things—at least for the time that she spent with Sam and Cathy's family.

Was it symbolic that I wasn't offered food? Certainly I didn't need any—the Lammas lunch was plentiful and my hosts could see that. However as a Lammas volunteer (not Sam and Cathy's volunteer), I wasn't part of the hosts' group. In Chapter Three I discussed the significance of the kitchen to the household unit at Y Mynydd, and by extension suggested that the shared meal is an articulation of idealised village relations: for the duration of one meal, the entire village share a kitchen and become, momentarily, one household. The sharing of food is clearly one way to express a relationship with others, and is common to ecovillages, alternative communities, communes and co-ops (Sargisson, 2000: 35, 42). It was the case, however, that at Tir y Gafel volunteers like Marina became attached to their households, like the farm servants of nineteenth-century Dyfed, whereas volunteers like me (who, to extend the analogy, were more like the day labourers under cross wages) were part of the way the Lammas Project operated, as an overarching organisational structure. As such, Lammas fed its own volunteers to take this burden away from the hosts, and to gently reinforce the experience-volunteer's temporary status.

The sense in which a volunteer could be considered a “burden” to a host is subtle, and wasn't exactly articulated as such. Lave and Wenger (1991) note, however, that apprenticeship is not “work driven”, that “the ordering of learning and of everyday practice do not coincide” (ibid: 96). As such, if a volunteer was to learn, then a host couldn't simply get on with everyday tasks; something out of the ordinary would have to happen. When I asked Sam and Cathy more about what it meant to take on volunteers, they affirmed this idea, drawing a distinction between volunteers like Marina, who had

come for several months, and myself, who had come for a day. Sam noted that sometimes it was hard to come up with tasks for volunteers to do, especially if they were not adept at much. Cathy said that it was sometimes difficult to catch up on personal business or “family stuff” (like the washing) when long-term volunteers were around, since there was a limit to what volunteers would put up with. She also noted that volunteers were certainly a motivation to get work done. The family considered itself lucky, since it had to date only had useful and capable volunteers who didn't need much looking after. Marina was a highly motivated person, and really focussed on getting her tasks completed. She told me she knew what to do and just got on with it, and she enjoyed the independence and wanted to see the job finished. In fact, the exasperated looks and rolled eyes she shared with me at times while Sam was getting stuck into a polemic rather than some plaster made me wonder whose project this was.

### ***6.3.2 Volunteer positioning***

Bishop and Hoggett (1989) usefully define volunteering as “a mutual aid model for production and self-consumption”, something which resonates with Joseph's (1998) idea about productive consumption. This places the volunteer and, in my examples, hosts, on the same conceptual plane. For instance when Marina cooked the vegetables Cathy had grown, both women were producing to consume, without distinction. I suggest that in my examples, the process of becoming part of the host group or household redefines the volunteer's place so as to negate the relevance of work-for-pay. Through this process of belonging, volunteers consume what they produce, alongside their hosts. For instance, Marina wasn't exactly part of the family or a permanent part of Tir y Gafel (she had definite plans to leave the following week), nor was she separate from it in terms of her everyday actions and use of the family space. Long-term volunteering seemed to

collapse the dichotomy between insider and outsider, so I suggest it is not a useful way to conceive of the volunteer-host relationship in this context. During fieldwork I witnessed volunteers, whom we might think of as transient and impermanent, make a significant mark on the projects to which they contributed. I have already described Marina taking the reins of “her” project, at another dwelling one volunteer who was a skilled carpenter made a beautiful and significant contribution to the interior of the dwelling. This example shows that volunteer labour is highly prized. Just because a volunteer is in some ways outside of the Tir y Gafel village, this does not stop their labour becoming important and integral to the low-impact dwelling process, or even incorporated into a family's domestic space. Although primarily a working relationship, this sort of volunteering seemed to be highly inclusive.

### **6.3.3 *Volunteers belonging***

Ever since work began at Tir y Gafel, volunteers have always been there, initially in large hordes and paid-for experiences, and latterly more in the manner of the farm servants of nineteenth-century Dyfed (i.e. an ongoing resident on one plot). In the Lamma case, clear processes take place that promote a sense of belonging and efface any insider-outsider dichotomy. Processes include inhabiting the same place, eating together, events such as film showings or a *twmpath*<sup>81</sup>, which are open to residents, visitors and volunteers alike (as well as neighbours) and which are often very well attended. One year on from the initial volunteering week I received a couple of emails from people with whom I had volunteered, which turned into a whole round of updates to the group about how peoples' projects were materialising. It is clear, then, that what volunteers took from the experience was not only experience, but a sense of belonging

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<sup>81</sup> An evening of circle dancing and folk songs. *Twmpath* literally means “hump”, which refers to the practice by which folk musicians would play from a raised piece of ground to amplify the sound. Interestingly, the same term in the plural (*twmpathau*) is used on road signs to warn of speed-bumps.

and empowerment, which many have now applied to practical projects. It is my contention that the intensity of the volunteer experience, which is always residential, accelerates this sense of belonging. This is not to say that such processes are not genuine: this is simply how it happens.

Harkness (2009) describes a very similar set of “subtle social mechanisms” which shape the Earthship volunteer experience (ibid: 196). Whereas Harkness suggests that this amounts to reciprocity in a gift-relationship, it is my contention that such mechanisms instead efface the boundary between volunteer and host and thus reconfigure the relationship between production and consumption. In line with Narotzky's (2005) provisioning approach, there is a clear advantage to examining how eco-village volunteers access, produce, consume and perform labour. Narotzky notes that more often than not, any one person's experience of the entire path of provisioning that concerns them is only partial (ibid: 91), yet in the case of ecovillage volunteers—in particular long-term volunteers—their immersion in the system of low-impact dwelling is almost total, in many cases, even more so than their hosts. Eco-village volunteering is therefore a potentially rich subject to examine the interplay of formal and informal paths of provisioning. Seen as an alternative economic practice, underpinned by motivations other than gifting, we can interpret ecovillage volunteering in a way that does not reproduce the dominant paradigm of volunteering, in which notions of benevolent gift-work in fact conceal many inequalities (Rochester et al. 2010: 179–180) or reproduce divisions premised on class (Caplan, 1986: 231) or status.

#### **6.4 Conclusion: how volunteering works**

A prevalent idea in the UK is that “work” is synonymous with employment, and thus hierarchy, strict schedules and wages (Thompson, 1967). This is a particular rendering of the concept which is culturally specific. Examples such as volunteering challenge the hegemonic discourse wherein wage-labour is the basis for “work”. According to Raymond Williams (1985), the

“basic sense of the word, to indicate activity and effort or achievement, has thus been modified, though unevenly and incompletely, by a definition of its imposed conditions, such as 'steady' or timed work, or working for a wage or salary: being hired”.

(ibid: 335)

The ethnographic material presented here about volunteering does not use work in the normative sense that Williams outlines, as ecovillage volunteer work discussed here entails the rejection of many formal structures associated with wage labour. According to Purkis (2000), the rejection of “work” in this sense is connected to the rejection of normative modes of consumerism: “In this respect the identification of fulfilling and ‘self-actualising’ work processes deconstruct the work-leisure dualism” (ibid: 109). I also hesitate in implying a strict dualism between work and leisure, since both states exist as a continuum of activity. Black's (1986) well-known polemic calls for work to be abolished in favour of ludic activity (REF), akin to the hedonising technologies that Maines refers to as leisure. Black on the other hand considers leisure to be structured as a response to alienating work (REF), whereas Maines clearly disagrees, and I concur given the ethnographic material gathered from ecovillage volunteers. I follow Maines' definition of leisure: “the principal defining elements of a leisure activity are that one does not have to do it and that one enjoys the process” (Maines, 2009: 20). Volunteers at

Tir y Gafel were learning, though informally, and some volunteers were teaching. They were provisioning, and “gifting”, though this too was informal, but above all, they, and hosts, were *practising*, and enjoying themselves.

The process of travelling through different sites and gaining skills before settling into one's own project is a familiar pattern among many of the people I encountered. In some cases, such as Alex's, this process can take many years and represents significant training for the volunteer involved. In this sense, it has an affinity with apprenticeship. The way volunteer learning is structured differs somewhat from the sort of processes entailed by apprenticeship. Marchand (2010) notes that in San'a, a place of apprenticeship for minaret builders in Yemen, the master-apprentice relationship is one of strictly ordered hierarchy: “[A] rigid patriarchal order curtails easy interaction between junior and senior members of the work team, and questioning is interpreted as a challenge to authority” (ibid: S1). For volunteers, and in other similar examples (e.g. Harkness, 2009), the relationship between volunteer and host is expressed in egalitarian terms. Volunteers retain, and exercise, a high degree of mobility. In fact, if there exists an uneven balance of power between volunteers and their hosts, one could imagine it tilted in favour of the volunteer, as often hosts are dependent upon their help.

I have called the egalitarian mode in which this sort of volunteering takes place a “learning conversation”, where tasks are flexible—adaptable processes, not rigid tasks to be carried out in a precise and duplicating manner—and in a situation which effaces any hierarchy based on ownership or expertise. I contrasted the idea of apprenticeship with the role of some of the longer-term volunteers, and noted that while there are many

similarities, such as the protracted period as a “novice” (at least, structurally so), volunteers are characterised by a degree of mobility, and the volunteer-host relationship is characteristically more egalitarian. The fact that often volunteers were teaching their acquired skills to hosts at Tir y Gafel shows that neither role seems to, or claims to, hold specialist knowledge *per se*. Typically, the volunteer-host encounter is idealised as one which leaves both parties enriched. I was able to pick up on genuine interest in completing the tasks at hand from volunteers who knew they would eventually leave, and in fact wanted to, in order to use their skills and experience at the next location.

Importantly, volunteering is regarded by some as an educational experience. In a sector where accredited qualifications are scarce, experience leads to expertise. This, combined with the rather intensive style of such a volunteering programme (in that volunteers live at their workplace), often justifies any fees charged. Or, at least, that is the idea. Some of Harkness' research participants in the Greater World community in Taos, New Mexico, frowned upon the practice of charging volunteers to work on commercial Earthship projects (2009: 197), but with Lammas, as with other organisations in the UK, fees were considered usual for short volunteering stints. Rory's plan to treat ecovillage volunteering as an alternative to university education is a compelling argument for seeing ecovillages as campuses (Greenberg, 2013). Through the reinterpretation of personhood, volunteer practice redefines the meaning of production and consumption, so as to render wage-labour inappropriate—in fact the performance of labour itself becomes a value which may be commodified.

Given the sort of work that comprises ecovillage volunteering, it can be considered a hedonising technology, enjoyed for its own sake. People are also drawn to this activity for enskilment. The acquisition of such skills enables travel, or equips volunteers with the skills needed to apply to their own low-impact dwelling or smallholding. Through shared practice, volunteers become the same as their hosts, as far as possible. The system of ecovillage volunteering rejects productivist notions of labour; performing labour, rather than producing value, is a value in itself that one pays for. As such, the practice evades normative analytical approaches. Ecovillage volunteering plays an important part in the consolidation of low-impact *techne*. The flow of volunteers and their knowledge through the low-impact dwelling network spreads know-how, and as we saw in the previous chapter hones and co-produces new *techne*. Ecovillage volunteers are not simply an integral part of the economy of households who are under planning regimes and must act accordingly, they are also crucial to the reproduction of low-impact dwelling in the wider sense of being off-grid; ecovillage volunteers connect otherwise unconnected people, projects and ideas.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: PLANNING AND LOW-IMPACT DWELLING**

### **Introduction**

Readers of this thesis may be puzzled to find that there is no attempt being made to present planning from a planner's perspective—even at this point, a chapter focussing on planning and the work of planners. As discussed in the introduction, this was one of the choices made early on during the research design process. Once planning emerged as a theme in the research data it did seem problematic that planners were not a focus. There is a sense, however, that bureaucrats are somehow out of reach for research purposes. Both Abrams (1988) and Abram (2011) note that this is a feature of UK political life, as state institutions control knowledge-production about their own practice. Abram (2011) contrasts the rather closed and secretive workings of UK bureaucracy with the “open” style of Norwegian administration, where even journalists are invited to read council correspondence should they wish—certainly as a visiting anthropologist Abram was welcomed and supported (ibid: 60–61).

In the early stages of research planning I had decided to situate myself very definitely within an ecovillage, and the question of maintaining allegiance was raised. In relation to ethnographic fieldwork in Australia, Porter (2010) notes that as she became more involved with particular Indigenous people over time, her status as a planning insider (from the point of view of other planners) became more problematic (ibid: 6). Porter's research focussed on the experience of non-conforming users of the planning system—Australian aborigines whose claims to space were qualitatively different to the

options given to them under the planning system. While this and subsequent work (e.g. Porter, 2014) examine the issue of displacement, the overarching theme is relevant here: access to rights within the planning system depend entirely on performing a certain role within that system—failure or refusal to comply with planning policy leaves such people voiceless and without status. If low-impact dwellers' interactions with planning have this much at stake, then it would have been foolish for me to presume that my status as a researcher would somehow be completely unproblematic if I tried to move in both worlds.

Having immersed myself in the world of low-impact dwelling, I could not for the most part have retained that positioning if I was also seen to be personally engaging with planners. Some of my research participants were planning applicants, therefore confidentiality may have seemed to be at stake if I was not careful. Even more crucially, many of my participants were hiding from planning, whether in plain sight, or more literally; in any case, I would not have wanted them to feel that the details they were concealing could be at risk of discovery. Winther (2011) notes a similar situation which arose during her fieldwork to assess the impact of the delivery of electricity to a village in Zanzibar. Winther's apparently neutral enquiries after quantitative data may have inadvertently put research participants at risk; the electric company official Winther spoke to claimed such data was not available, but at Winther's request it could be gathered in an exercise that would also detect illegal customers (*ibid*: 10-11). This scenario could have easily been mirrored in my research field had I approached Local Authority planning departments directly.

### **7.1.2 Regularising the present?**

My aim here is not to represent the culture of planning in West Wales, Wales or the UK, although other scholars have argued persuasively that this is exactly what ought to be done (cf. Abram, 2011, cf. Porter, 2010). I take it for granted that planning for rural Wales has erred towards a “preservationist” rationality (e.g. Murdoch and Abram, 2002), but I frame the emergence of OPD as an example of Murdoch and Abram's (ibid) prediction that “sustainable development” is an emergent rationality of planning. This sort of a gloss is not intended to reify planning or suggest that it is a homogeneous category; I acknowledge that specificities of space, place, time and culture—not least the continued process of devolution of governance to the Welsh Assembly Government—have shaped a particular planning strategy and practice for Wales, and its constituent local authorities. This deliberate simplification has rather been a necessary tool of the process of constructing this ethnography. My aim is to illustrate how an alternative model of land use—low-impact dwelling—has filtered in to official planning practice in an approximate form, under the remit of sustainable development, and is now being adopted as low-impact *development*. Exploring such slippages will, it is hoped, counter the tendency to represent planning as a universal expression of spatial ordering, something which is common to normative planning discourse *and* “left critiques that give alternative or radical practices of planning a newly rendered universality” (Porter, 2010: 2).

The trajectory that I suggest “low impact” has taken also shows that, quite apart from planning being an activity which is always oriented towards future conceptions of space and resource (e.g. Abram and Weszkalnys, 2011), planning also has to incorporate

social and spatial assemblages that are already finding expression. Abram (2011) notes that retrospective planning decisions are regularly made in Britain, and that this is even a strategy of large companies with the resources to handle enforcement action, but perhaps not the time to wait for permission (ibid, 2011: 126). To illustrate this process in another context which is very different, my focus here is on planning enforcement, generally an under-resourced aspect of planning activity (Abram, 2011: 20) and, I would add, an area which has not received sustained scholarly attention. This chapter, then, focusses on how participants in this research interacted with the state and the planning system, and in particular how they took strategies which avoided, rejected or concealed their dwellings from planners and building inspectors. My focus on this encounter has yielded multiple ethnographically-rich contexts to explore. When planners address dwelling and development *retrospectively*, and low-impact dwellers adopt the logic of formal planning, a picture emerges whereby notions about planning's hegemony are tried and tested by such encounters.

### **7.1.3 Structure of the chapter**

This chapter begins with an exploration of the relevant and anthropological literature on policy to situate ethnographic studies of planning in its broader context. Planning can be viewed on one hand as the act of shaping the built environment, but equally as policy it is a discursive construction. Viewing planning as a combination of action and discourse is a useful approach which helps to reveal how and when the cultural construction of an environment might be at odds with the immanence of dwelling within an environment.

This chapter explores three key themes in critical planning studies—co-production, rights and temporalities—which I integrate with ethnographic material, both to illustrate research participants' differing approaches to the question of planning, and complicate the normative assumption that there are absolute positions on either side of the debate.

I explore the notion of co-production in the planning process, which I juxtapose with my contention that even in the absence of formal planning, a certain moral consensus on the legitimate use of space emerges. Essentially low-impact dwellers adopt their own techniques to regularise space. Crucially, the absence of formal planning does not equate to an absence of regulation: key values such as visual impact, a neighbours' right to object and the potential impact on shared resources are evident in both the formal and informal models that I present.

I explore emerging work in planning studies about what constitutes rights under the planning system (Porter, 2014). Porter focuses on displacement, but it is my contention that the idea of rights has a specific relevance in the context of two interacting models of low-impact development. As informal practice filters into policy rights are deployed: an assertion of the right to dwell somewhere becomes in policy the right to a certain standard of dwelling. This interpretation conceals a range of normative assumptions which lock low-impact developments to a modernist version of development. The problematic discourse of rights underlies a key research question—what motivates those that accept planning, try to work within it and try to change it, as opposed to those that do not accept planning, reject its authority and work hard to resist

it? It is with this in mind that I present ethnographic material that explores why and how research participants reject planned status. Apart from the ideological question of conforming to the role expected as a subject of the planning system, there are practical reasons, chiefly that planned status necessitates interaction with a proliferation of other regulatory bodies and policies, such as building regs, health and safety, insurance and other markets.

Finally I explore temporalities in planning. I focus on the temporal inconsistencies between future-oriented planning strategies and the everyday work of planning enforcement, albeit from research participants' points-of-view. Research participants share a notion that rights consolidate with the passage of time. This idea plays out at Y Mynydd as more long-standing ecovillagers embark on more ambitious dwelling projects. In the broader context, low-impact dwellers believed that their dwellings would be safe from planners' scrutiny if they could demonstrate they had dwelt somewhere for a number of years without complaint. Equally time is a crucial element of formal planning regimes. Time must be seen as a crucial factor in the production of landscapes and the built, or dwelt-in, environment.

The chapter then moves in to a more detailed ethnography of how low-impact dwellers imagine the state and the planning system. I introduce this material more fully in section 7.3.1, but overall I aim to show that while planners are sometimes imagined to be rational human rule-books, in practice they can act in unexpected ways. The final ethnographic section explores the two key approaches to low-impact dwelling: working inside the planning system, and working outside of the planning system. It will be shown that the control of knowledge production is at stake from both sides, whether it is

access to the process of planning decision making, or the ability for planners to generate data about planning applicants. Examining the two approaches side-by-side brings clarity to the problematic issue of rights: by entering into an exchange of rights, users of the planning system automatically submit to other forms of monitoring and reporting that are unacceptable to those who try to step outside of the planning system (and which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight). Contrary to some interpretations, planning permission can only be seen as a low-impact dwellers' first step in “officialising” (Bourdieu 1990: 108).

## **7.2 Planning and the anthropology of policy**

Alexander and Buchli (2007) note that the extensive anthropological literature on Soviet cities has taken a focus on planning primarily as a pragmatic response to ideological restrictions that meant that only discursively produced material was generally accessible (ibid: 12). Though access to UK planners and government institutions more generally is not straightforward either (Abrams, 1988, Abram, 2011), there is, however, a growing interest in what Abram and Wieszkalnys (2013) describe as “the institutionalized forms of planning found primarily in (nominally) democratic capitalist states” (ibid: 2). This should be seen as part of an ongoing attempt to reposition an anthropology of domestic planning as part of the anthropology of development in broader terms and a legitimate, and important, subject of study in its own right.

It is important to locate an anthropology of planning as part of the anthropology of policy more generally; according to Shore and Wright (1997) though anthropological work on policy has been done, it has not always been presented as policy-work—policy

therefore appears as a marginal subfield of anthropology, despite its growing significance as an instrument of governance (ibid: 5). As well as anthropological interest in planning, ethnography has been embraced for a long time by scholars of planning working within other disciplinary traditions (e.g. Healey 1992). This, I shall argue, is part of the communicative turn in planning studies, which attempted to reconsider the notion of an ontological hierarchy in the work of planners and the formulation of planning policy beyond the discursive analysis of policy taken at face-value. I then discuss further ethnographic work which, albeit from scholars of planning and not anthropology, has explored the “dark side” of planning (Yiftachel 1998), and raised important questions about how the normative discourse of rights might be coercive (Porter, 2014). Porter's work in particular is useful to make sense of why some participants rejected planning altogether despite the new OPD policy. Finally, I explore how the current anthropological focus on the temporalities of planning might apply to this particular research context. My research illustrates that there is a disjuncture between forward-planning, oriented as it is towards imagined futures, and the way that research participants encounter planners in rather more everyday scenarios, in particular through enforcement action. In the interest of ethnographic research into planning practice more generally, enforcement would be an ideal context to explore from the planners' own perspective. If we accept that planning for rural Wales has erred towards a preservationist rationality, then planning's temporal frame becomes muddled in this context: future plans project values which are rooted in heritage and the past, which present-day transgressions confront. In response, low-impact development policy incorporates a new tradition of knowledge about low impact into future plans. If these

assertions seem paradoxical it is no surprise given that OPD's over-arching planning rationale is “sustainable development”.

In Chapter Two I suggested that in the research field planning was experienced as a bureaucratic exercise, but argued (*pace* Graeber, 2012) that rather than seeing a reduction of complexity, in this context planning for low impact deliberately complicated what was to most research participants a self-evident way of living. That is not to say that policy does not objectify, in fact Shore and Wright (1997) note that the “objectification of policy”, that is, the culmination of a process of legitimising political, legal, fiscal and/ or social power, proceeds concomitantly with the objectification of the very subjects of policy (ibid: 4). This idea resonates with Porter's (2014) argument that those that enter the planning system must adapt to a particular way of being if they are to gain recognition and agency (Porter, 2010) within that system.

This can be seen quite clearly in the case of OPD which hinges on the environmental footprinting exercise (EFA). This will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter Eight but is relevant to this chapter. As a tool of OPD policy, EFA makes domestic consumption visible, it effectively yields information for planners about the process, the particulars and the nuts and bolts of low-impact dwelling; it demands detailed reflection, and is represented in a way that low-impact dwellers would not usually engage with. EFA's objectification of low-impact dwelling is made clear because the comparative unit of assessment is money. As detailed in section 5.2.6, low-impact dwellers found the EFA model and their opportunity to reflect their actual provisioning practice inadequate. Though quoted by Shore and Wright, I reproduce this

here as it is simply so germane to the point I wish to make: “the objectified person 'is seen but he [sic] does not see; he[sic] is the object of information, never a subject in communication” (Foucault 1977: 200, in Shore and Wright, 1997: 4). I have suggested that ethnographic research can provide much needed qualitative data to augment audits like EFA, which are on one hand a major part of the policy-makers toolkit (e.g. Strathern, 2000), but also a symptom of the spread of neoliberal values in what Vike (2013) has called the temporal horizon of “utopia now” (ibid).

The implications of legibility as a regulatory tool have of course been thoroughly expounded (Foucault, 1979; Scott, 1998; Trouillot, 2001, Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Porter, 2014), yet there is an alternative to the instrumentalist narrative, perhaps one which does not attribute quite so much power to policy. An observation worth making is that exercises such as EFA may be viewed as a policy-led way to understand something as elusive as low-impact dwelling, which it seems is not understood by policy-makers. The process of objectification used in OPD is specific and is by no means a universal approach. For example Planning Policy Framework for England relies on offsetting, a very different sort of objectification and not without its problems (Hannis and Sullivan, 2012). EFA must be scrutinised with this in mind. If other models are available, why has EFA been chosen, with its focus on revealing domestic consumption? I explore these issues more thoroughly in the following chapter which focuses on the discursive aspects of OPD policy, here it is my concern to examine how research participants encountered and imagined planning and the work of planners.

## **7.3 Exploring themes in the literature on Planning**

### ***7.3.1 The coproduction of planning***

As Shore and Wright (1997) point out, instrumentalist views of government cannot fully account for the way that state effects, and governance lead people to construct themselves as subjects (ibid: 5). The communicative turn in planning, which originated in the 1990s has sought to address that very question, and redefine planning as a not purely instrumental practice. In practical terms, this also aligned planning with the contemporary socio-political values associated with New Labour, such as community empowerment and collaborative policy-making. In planning literature, the communicative turn can trace a theoretical lineage through Habermas (1984) to Hegel (2001 [1822]), it acknowledges the idiosyncrasy that sometimes comprises bureaucratic functioning: bureaucrats such as planners exercise a degree of autonomy within the system in order to deliver more or less similar bureaucratic functions. This section explores the premise that policy coproduction is possible with specific reference to the way research participants themselves adopt techniques which we might regard as a form of planning.

#### ***7.3.1a Planning and the “communicative turn”.***

Tracing the trajectory of the communicative turn in planning, although presenting “it” rather more as a series of repositionings rather than a single coherent turn, Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones (2002) note that in early formulations, such as Healey’s (1992), it was regarded as a way to assess “the personal dilemmas of the individual in day-to-day

urban planning contexts” (ibid: 6). Happily, such a focus bodes well for ethnographies of planning which seek to uncover the multifaceted subjectivities through which planning is performed (e.g. Abram, 2004, 2011), and fits with my focus (to be examined below) on the present-moment work of planning enforcement, rather than future-oriented strategic planning. In that article, Healey (1992), employs Habermas' (1984) framework of three ways of knowing—rational-technical reasoning, moral reasoning, and aesthetic-expressive reasoning—in her description of how a senior planner deploys different types of knowledge concomitantly when dealing with a range of actors who have a stake in planning. These others might include planning applicants, other planning department staff, architects, councillors and “the public”, among others. Healey demonstrates how moral reasoning deployed more frequently throughout the planner's day than rational-technical reasoning is. This is notable, and indicates the personal dimension of planners' practice, something which later theorists of planning have emphasised (Abram 2004, 2011, Murdoch and Abram, 2002, Weszkalnys, 2013).

Healey's account shows how the planner is able to mobilise multiple forms of knowledge in order to achieve pragmatic solutions, however two issues must qualify her observations. Firstly, the planner in question is very senior in his organisation (Assistant Chief Planning Officer, ACPO), described as holding a doctorate in planning as well as nine years service, it is impressed upon the reader that the ACPO is knowledgeable in the role, and somewhat of an expert. When dealing with a planning applicant whose case has been delayed, the ACPO is able to offer assurances (process application as fast as possible, offer to try to cut that timescale even further) that undoubtedly a more junior planner would not be entitled to make within the procedures of the job. This first

issue indicates furthermore that, contrary to Healey's contention that the planner *as a person* influences the context in which planning operates (1992: 10), it is necessary to add the caveat that it is the person, *within the confines of the job role*, who shapes the context of planning work. After all, planning *is* a job; even as part of the public sector it remains subject to neo-liberal logic and the promise of lean and efficient local government. Thus the planner's workscape is a hierarchy, governed by internal workplace policy as much as it is shaped by public policy. This much is evident in Healey's article, and although it is not the point she wishes to make, by considering how capital is embedded in worksapes and thus shapes labour processes, we can understand more thoroughly what the implications are when differing forms of knowledge are mobilised. With that in mind, it appears notable that even in a context such as Y Mynydd, where formal planning is largely absent, a self-imposed planning regime emerges by consensus. I shall show that examples such as this can successfully complicate the universalist voice in planning—planning knowledge is not purely rational, and other actors can claim this form of reasoning.

### **7.3.1a Self-imposed planning**

Before further exploration of how and why low-impact dwellers might reject planning, it is important to make it clear that the rejection of planning did not necessarily amount to a rejection of planning's knowledge and frameworks. For example, whether or not a development will make a visual impact is a key concern for planners in rural areas and it is also a concept which influenced many participants' strategies for peaceful occupation of their land. Invisibility and impermanence—keeping out of sight and moving around—are two of the key strategies that participants discussed whilst recounting stories

about circumventing the planning system. The visual impact of a dwelling or development is therefore a crucial matter for planners and low-impact dwellers alike. Keeping out of sight is in the interest of low-impact dwellers who do not have planning permission, conversely it might also be said to please planners. Since most off-grid dwellings receive no external infrastructure or services, the only immediately tangible impact a low-impact dwelling can be seen to make is a visual one<sup>82</sup>. This matter exemplifies how principles from planning become strategies for low-impact dwellers, slippages such as these can complicate normative accounts which polarise planners from the subjects of planning, and thus undermine claims to institutional hegemony.

Though I have noted above that barely anybody at Y Mynydd had attempted to engage with planners, in spite of the absence of state-based planning in the village, other forms of spatial ordering emerged. During my stay the village *seemed* fairly stable, but in fact one couple split up and the wife left, two single women left, a single woman and mother-of-three arrived at around the same time as me, and a young single man arrived from another ecovillage a bit later on. This influx caused some disquiet for at least one older resident, who rather enjoyed being contrary, and referred to an area where several “newcomers” had *pitched* close together as “desolation row”, in contrast to their name, “Sesame Street”. Residents of Sesame Street referred to being part of “the summer field”, by virtue of the *big lodge* summer *pitch* occupying the centre of the field. This was much to the dismay of existing residents, in particular *hut* dwellers whose permanent *scenes* neighboured the field in question, and looked upon the summer as the

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<sup>82</sup> Other impacts, for example on social services are harder to account for and thus intangible.

time when people moved away from the close quarters occupied during the winter. In response, the area was quickly termed “the festival field”—usually spoken in a disparaging tone. One resident explained to me that the problem was down to “newcomers”: “newcomers who've just left a council house have no idea what space means”.

These differing perceptions of space and, by extension, internal boundaries, complicate the commonly held view that Y Mynydd was “open”. Everyday norms—such as the norm not to *pitch* closely near others in the summer—are hidden to outsiders and must be discovered, usually through transgression. Knowledge as to how and where newcomers should live is expressed through reference to spatial boundaries and form. Terms such as “desolation row” and “festival *field*” indicate the way the unknown other (newcomer) is considered dangerously unpredictable, (desolation, festival) but also inhibited and ordered (row, field). The underlying assumption that inhabiting a council house leads to social/spatial conditioning is reinforced by the newcomers' use of the term *Sesame Street*: on one hand a humorous appropriation of the name of a children's TV show, but equally self-deprecating with its reference to an urban spatial configuration which has no relevance to the spatial organisation at Y Mynydd. Clearly, then, there are some generally accepted approaches to spatial ordering which operate in such a way so as to claim authority over the way space is used at Y Mynydd, I argue this might be viewed as a sort of planning.

### **7.3.1b Visualising informal planning**

At Y Mynydd it is generally unproblematic for anyone to pitch a tipi anywhere at all, as long as it is a fair distance from neighbours; the next least problematic structure is a yurt. Any permanent or semi-permanent built structures can be problematic, though their controversy is generally related to their position, and their builders' position, in both social and spatial terms. Figure 7 shows a visual representation of how certain building projects caused controversy. In each case the “building” in question was a structure which might, in context, be considered permanent and was certainly not portable, such as a *hut* or a polytunnel.

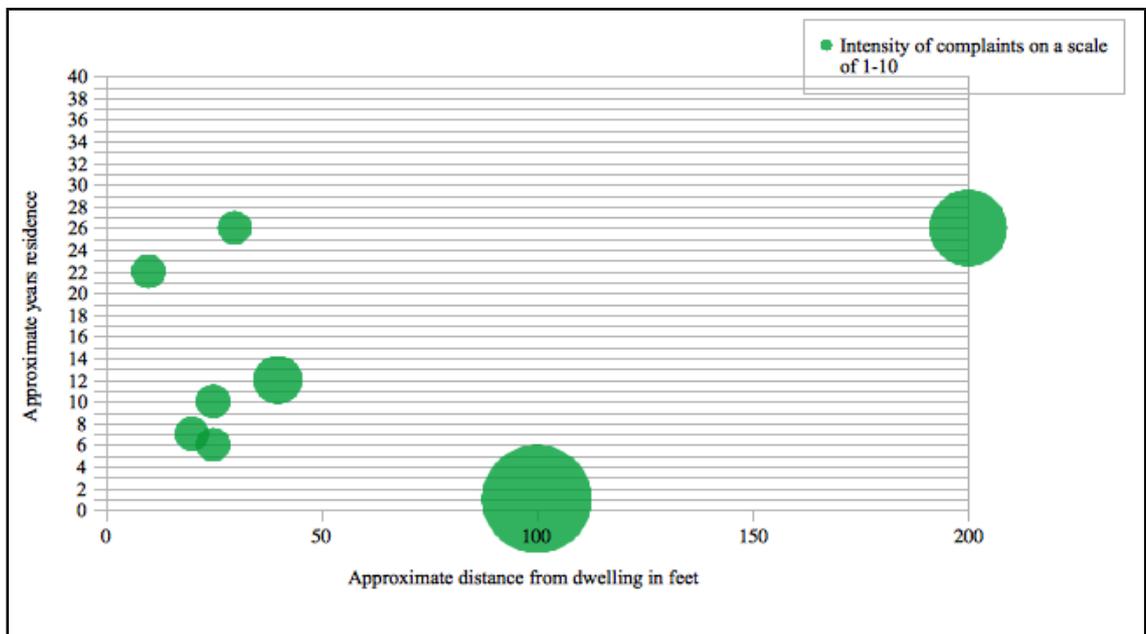


Figure 7: Building controversies.

The smallest bubbles indicate no complaints, whereas larger bubbles indicate a greater controversy. Clearly most building projects weren't particularly contentious (the larger of the small bubbles was due to the builder in question already having built many structures around Y Mynydd). What did cause controversy were developments that were

far away from the developer's dwelling, regardless of status in the village, and almost any building project undertaken by a newcomer.

Complaining about building projects at best only seemed to modify the approach, rather than stop building outright. The key factor wasn't to do with length of residence or proximity to others at all, but rather “visual impact”. Ultimately, it was the fact that Kylie's polytunnel (the largest bubble) would have directly blocked the view from Hywel's tipi which made her rearrange her plan, and Cherith's development (the mid-sized bubble), though extensive and situated well away from his current residence, was not actually in anybody's way—or view—on an everyday basis. I can't of course account for anything that was discussed privately between others, I am just reflecting the tone of the general gossip about these new developments. In spite of the overt rejection of planning at Y Mynydd, in general terms the sort of approaches to regulating space and aesthetic appearance taken by Mynydd residents follow a similar logic to formal planning processes.

It is unlikely that planners roam the countryside looking for illicit developments, and planning enforcement occurs as a response to complaints or enquiries. Equally complaints about development at Y Mynydd also drives the consensus about *trips*, which it seems fits well with the bureaucratic policy of restricting development in rural areas. In both cases, the view, and “the countryside” as arcadian relic, take precedence. This example demonstrates that in the effective absence of planning authority, locals enforce their own ideas about how their space should appear. This exemplifies Ward's

argument that “involvement (in a participatory society) begins with local issues” (1976: 127) of course, but also points to the utility of ethnographic research into planning. If planners' knowledge is not unassailably rational-technical (Healey, 1992), then it can hardly be said to be out of the reach of non-planners. Equally, it stands to reason that planning decisions affect locals much more than peripheral actors. Planning's grip on the legitimate use of space cannot be said to derive from esoteric knowledge or occupying a more moral stance. Planning's discursive construction in policy and its status as a professionalising activity not accessible to lay persons (Ward 1976, Yiftachel 2001) must account for the notion that planning and planners are better-equipped to make meaningful decisions about the use of space.

### ***7.3.2 What's wrong with rights?***

Porter (2014) notes that rights are a central part of planning discourse but critiques the rights framework—which is almost universally portrayed as a “good thing”—arguing that rights won under the conditions of dispossession cannot be regarded as equitable rights at all. Porter's examination of displacement by planning regimes employs a fourfold argument, but two aspects are particularly relevant here. Porter argues that challenging dispossession from within a framework of property rights modelled on possessive individualism (MacPherson, 1962) perpetuates the injustices wrought by displacement. This is a powerful idea which can help orient understandings of why low-impact dwellers rejected planning. Though not obviously a case of displacement, if a low-impact dweller loses the right to their dwelling they are expected to move into rented accommodation or may be offered social housing, as Porter (2014) also observes, one home is not equal to another under conditions of displacement (ibid: 396).

Secondly, the right to participate in planning procedures is only constituted when “social subjects ... perform a certain kind of recognisable being, and then make claims that are recognisably “planning” type claims to resolve” (Porter, 2014: 394). Ironically, Abram (2004) notes that this is an issue for planners, too, illustrating that they too must meet certain normative standards in order to perform as the right kind of person (ibid: 23). In Weszkalnys' (2013) ethnography, a planner highlights this dilemma when he states that he asks his wife to write in objection to plans that he disapproves of as a person but must work on as a planner (ibid: 93). Such material extends the notion that only certain “classes”—in the broadest sense (Abram, 2004: 23)—of people, can access or influence planning.

Porter (2014) makes a comparison between two particularly extreme sorts of displacement, that of the Australian Aborigines during British colonial settlement, and the forced clearance of a Glasgow neighbourhood to build a sports stadium. Rather than suggesting that these examples are similar, Porter instead looks for commonalities in the way rights emerge as an answer by advocating possession. Though Porter (2014) is cautious about holding compulsory purchase in Glasgow next to settler colonising in Melbourne, since the scale and extent of the issues vary greatly, Abram (1998) argues that local planning practices ought to be placed in the same analytical framework as development. Abram notes that although the Western liberal discourses of progress which inform international development have been critiqued, the same discourses are institutionalised within states' planning regimes, and have not received the same level of academic attention (ibid: 1, 3), though this has changed more recently with some notable examples contributing to a body of work which repositions the user of

state-based policy as an important aspect of understanding the state's behaviour (e.g. Scott, 1998; Corbridge et al. 2005).

Clearly some participants were able to perform a planning way of being, whereas others were not. To Reject planning means to reject the duty to perform a recognisably planning way of being. What of conforming users, such as those that have tried to get planning for a low-impact dwelling? By seeking recognition in the planning system, citing Tully (2004: 89), Porter (2010) argues that “recognition becomes a transformative possibility, where there is a certain ‘freedom of those subject to a norm to have a say over it: to be agents as well as subjects’” (ibid: 154). This suggests that the desire to change planning lies at the core of low-impact dwellers’ interactions with planning. Those that do not wish to challenge it do not need it to change or recognise them. The ethnographic material presented in the following section explores why so many of my research participants have rejected formal planning, even as they encounter planners, and in some cases, engage in forms of spatial planning not mediated through the state-based planning institution.

Thankfully, the material presented here does not include stories about dispossession—though this is a threat to illicit low-impact dwellers— however the overarching narrative resonates with what Porter presents: unless willing or able to perform a way of being that is acceptable within the planning system, users are unlikely to get recognition, whether permission for a dwelling in this case, or the right to remain in their home. Additionally, gaining permission can mean that planning applicants are

locked in to a way of being that satisfies planners but might not hold meaning for them (as we saw with regard to environmental footprinting), in other words, rights won under compromise cannot be said to be meaningful rights at all (Porter, 2014).

### ***7.3.2a Rejection of planned status***

Lammas was the only group of research participants that had sought to openly engage planning, this was exceptional in the field. One person at Y Mynydd had in the past successfully applied for planning permission, but it had taken over ten years and several court cases. For those at Y Mynydd now, the precedent had already been set that the group didn't deal with planning. This rejection of planning was part of the general consensus that the group simply rejected authority, which also included not applying for grants for woodland creation or other similar schemes. During the period of my research, attention from the local planning department seemed to have petered out completely<sup>83</sup>. No other research participant had tried to gain planning permission either. In general, low-impact dwellers deliberately obscure the existence of their dwelling, either until a retrospective planning application can be made, or indefinitely. This is perhaps easier than applying for permission, as low-impact dwellers tend to agree that the risk of being discovered—and a subsequent (and likely) enforcement notice—is mitigated by the sheer complexity of the planning process, and the raft of other bodies that developers must contend with.

I had originally assumed that planning permission might have been desirable, at least for those participants that weren't part of a village and owned their own land, and I

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<sup>83</sup> I learned that some enforcement activity had resumed some time after I had left; I later found out that this had been challenged successfully.

also assumed that such participants would be more inclined to apply for planning once OPD had emerged. Mervyn explained otherwise:

“Planning permission? No, I don't want planning permission, once you have that you have to deal with all the rest of it... you know, building regs, and so on. I'd prefer it if they just let us get on with it”.

Mervyn's stance illustrates Porter's (2014) assertion that the promise of rights in the planning system must be subjected to critique. Gaining the right to build a dwelling will also bring a mandatory encounter with building regs, inspections and standards to meet. This did not mean that all low-impact dwellings were built using *techne* that was inaccessible to buildings inspectors, for instance Philippe could have traced all the materials used in his barn conversion to show that it was zero-carbon, but he chose not to do this. The problematic of rights emerges almost continuously in low-impact planning cases. In a recent appeal, the refusal to grant permission for an OPD hinged on the Inspector's view of what an acceptable standard of dwelling might be. The Inspector states that the dwelling cannot be approved because the inhabitants have the right to a more appropriate standard of living than the one they actually choose (Poulter, 2012: 3). In planning, therefore, not all rights are equal.

It was a commonly-held belief that planners did not carry out the ultimate sanction, which is to demolish somebody's home. Philippe told me about this very process happening to him when he lived in a different region. His low-impact dwelling in Scotland was demolished after his presence there was discovered. Even so, Philippe

is now involved with a group that facilitates a network for actual and proposed low-impact dwellers who don't wish to engage with the planning process. Instead, the group wishes to rely on word-of-mouth networks, examples of successful strategies, and the idea of precedent to inform its approach to interactions with the state or, rather, disengagement from state processes. The situation is not entirely bleak for low-impact dwellers who wish to avoid such interactions: there have been many successful challenges to decisions to demolish dwellings. In one high-profile case, a low-impact dweller in Pembrokeshire successfully won an appeal to keep his home, although court fees of around £7,000 cost far in excess of the dwelling itself. A picture of that same dwelling is now on the cover of the WAG's OPD Practice Guidance (WAG: 2012). Abram's (2011) observation that it is a business strategy of some large organisations to only apply for retrospective planning permission for certain developments involving a change of use<sup>84</sup> (ibid: 126) is relevant here. This begs the question as to why low-impact dwellers and large businesses might adopt the same practice, despite a clear disparity in scale and therefore an unequal ability to create possibilities within the planning system? Planning's romance with the future might explain its inability to re-purpose the past to fit its idealistic narratives.

While activists in the field, such as Lammas (who encourage transparency and engagement with the planning process) point out that the better way to approach planning is with a plan, and not a retrospective application, most of the low-impact dwellers that I met took the other route. Their lifestyles were characterised by obscurity and impermanence, and their dwellings were modest and often moveable. This

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<sup>84</sup> “change of use” might apply equally to building a dwelling on an agricultural field or opening a shop in one's front room (agricultural to residential, residential to commercial respectively).

dichotomy is by no means standard practice elsewhere. Lund (2013), for instance, notes that the Peruvian local state bureaucracy sometimes took a permissive approach to land “invasions” (ibid: 82). In this case, the settlements that sprung up took care of their own infrastructure and subsequent development, but this was often tolerated, even condoned by the state, and in some cases became the paradigm for urban expansion (ibid: 84). Holston (2007) outlines a very similar process in Brazil, “auto-construction” on what was essentially illegally-occupied land was openly encouraged by the government. In that case, occupation was regarded as a means to development and modernisation which had been hindered by the relatively low financial value given to land by banking and financial institutions (ibid: 145).

#### ***7.2.4 Not according to plan?: temporal inconsistencies in policy and practice***

Among other things, planning regimes articulate concerns about time (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2011: 3), and a focus of the recent anthropological literature on planning is to explore the time-politics that operate in the context of planning. Scholars of planning practice share a concern for time, but primarily in the context of how time affects space, and how the time that elapses between when plans are designed and implemented is problematic (Klaasen, 2005: 194). In broader terms, much grandiose strategic planning is explicitly focused on the future, and it would seem that planners' work ought to consist primarily of ensuring that these plans come to be<sup>85</sup>. There is, however, an element of disjuncture between the ideal type, in a Weberian sense, of planning practice,

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<sup>85</sup> Though Abram (2011) explains that the fulfilment of plans is rarely reviewed, rather new plans emerge (ibid: 19).

and what inevitably must happen in real-life contexts: pragmatism, in the Hegelian sense (Shaw, 1992).

As Healey notes, it is rational not to expect planners to act in formulaic and consistent ways in whatever context emerges, but to acknowledge that while planners' thinking and thought processes should occur in a consistent manner this will have widely varying outcomes which are very much contextual. Equally, Porter (2010) points out that because there is “no view from nowhere” is precisely why we must pay attention to how spatial cultures are learned, and when/ how they should be “unlearned” (2010: 156). The examples I will discuss below are for the most part concerned with how planning's gaze comes to focus retrospectively on illicit dwellings that have been discovered. I argue that focussing on the stories behind illicit developments can be a key part of unsettling planning's hegemony over the use of space. By taking this focus I hope to add an important counterexample to the current anthropological interest in planned futures<sup>86</sup>. Time politics of course remain a central issue in the anthropology of planning, but what I am arguing for is that a small but significant aspect of planning work is wrapped up with contemporaneous action, that is dealing with infringements to the plan.

Vike (2013) explores the divergent temporalities that concern planning by making a distinction between utopian time and contemporary time. Utopian time is “the horizon of the possible”, it is motivating and goal-oriented, relying on trust and patience and of course can be regarded as the temporal framework in which strategic plans are

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<sup>86</sup> For example, a panel on development planning at ASA 2015 in Exeter, was entitled “Towards an anthropology of the 'not-yet': development planning, temporality and the future”.

conceptually located (ibid: 36). In contrast, Vike describes contemporary time as “utopia now” (ibid: 37), based on the logic of immediate return. In practical terms this mode of thought means that idealistic situations are demanded in an unrealistic timeframe, leading to an erosion of both the patience and trust associated with utopian time. The clash Vike identifies is between the possibility of improvement in the future vis-à-vis the binding promises associated with individual rights (ibid: 53–54). Applied to this context we see the working of a very similar dilemma, the idealism of sustainable development, manifested now in OPD, contains much of the knowledge and *techne* of low-impact dwelling. Any syncretism that OPD may purport to facilitate is undermined by the continued enforcement against unauthorised low-impact dwelling. What appears to be at stake is not so much that the broad *principles* of OPD are met for a general benefit, but that the OPD *policy* is adhered to. Framing this notion in terms of competing temporal horizons reveals the vital difference between dwelling and development which addresses the core concern of this thesis—dwelling is immediate; it resists planning. Research participants shared a preoccupation with temporality and rights, as such several folk-models have emerged which organise low-impact dwellers' approach to planning and I will explore these below.

### **7.3.5 Planning temporalities**

According to Abram and Weszkalnys (2013), planning is a form of conceptualising space and time, and the possibilities that time offers space (ibid: 2). Elsewhere, Abram (2011) also notes that planning enforcement regularises the past by ensuring (or trying to, at least) that illicit development can fit within existing policy (ibid: 126). It is also the case in preservationist planning regimes, that ideas about heritage and tradition are

carried in to forward-plans. Planning, therefore mediates these competing temporal horizons (Vike, 2013), and as I will show, time also mediates peoples' attitudes to the planning system.

It was a commonly held assumption that strict timeframes governed some forms of extra-legal dwelling, an idea with some historical antecedents. According to Ward (2002) it is a long-standing and near universal squatters' notion that building a modest dwelling quickly and discretely—ideally overnight—will mean that it cannot be ordered to be demolished. Films such as *Il Tetto* (1956) and *La strategia del coracol* (1993) show that this idea was very widespread and not archaic. The practice was called *Ty Un Nos* in Wales; it is popularly thought of as a law laid down by Medieval Welsh king Hywel Dda and never repealed. Autonomous development is governed by time elsewhere, too: Lund (2013) shows that in Peru though rudimentary buildings may spring up quickly, their presence only initiates a process of formalising which may take years to complete as further layers of bureaucratic recognition are gradually accrued. In Bloch's (1995) account the Zafimaniry houses “harden” through time, in a process analagous to marriage, while the Zafimaniry house Bloch describes does not require a bureaucratic interface, it is clear that the dwelling accrues status with time.

During the course of my research I would often hear folk models about planning and the passage of time. Low-impact dwellers often cited a number of years that had to pass (e.g. four, seven, ten or twelve) by which time one may be granted retrospective planning permission, or at least feel secure to continue occupying one's dwelling without threat of eviction. Y Mynydd's five-year rule was one example of a

self-imposed temporality which closely mirror state-based planning systems which acknowledge the passage of time when deciding how impactful an unpermitted development has been.

The five-year rule was a particularly contentious idea held by some factions that Y Mynydd residents of longer than five years had greater entitlement to stay on one *pitch* and not move seasonally, build a *hut*, erect a polytunnel and generally establish a permanent *scene*. Many people rejected the imposition of a five-year rule, and even those who espoused it deployed it only very politically, it did, however, effect the way newcomers occupied space on the shared land. The chart in Figure 7 suggests that in practice there was a sort of five-year rule, even if it was overtly rejected. Even amongst those who rejected the overtly political five-year rule, it was easy to observe long-standing residents expressing a spatial permanence which newcomers did not, and newcomers who established themselves slowly seemed to fit in better with the existing group. In an upturning of the Lockean thesis, what was very apparent is that rights, such as they were, were accumulated with the passage of time, whether this was openly acknowledged or not.

Aside from the more fluid aims of each householder, the general temporal ordering at Tir y Gafel is primarily based on the requirements of the planning permission, which initially gave householders five years to attain a minimum level of subsistence from the development. It is clear, however, that not all Tir y Gafel residents will have both the dwelling they had planned and a viable way to meet minimum subsistence needs by the end of that period, though certainly most, if not all, will have

one or the other. In addition, planning permission under OPD relies on an environmental footprinting exercise (EFA). EFA is a tool that articulates a certain picture of domestic consumption and projects how that might be reduced by OPD practice. I explore EFA more thoroughly in Chapter Eight, but here it is useful to note that it helps to create a future-oriented focus in the planning process for OPD; in other words, applicants need to demonstrate the *potential* that their development might have for lowering environmental footprint.

### **7.3 Encountering planning and building regs**

#### ***7.3.1 Introduction and structure of this section***

In this section, I present a selection of vignettes taken from ethnographic field notes made retrospectively to the encounter with each participant or group of participants. My intention here is to interweave stories gleaned at different times, throughout the research engagement, first disentangling, then bringing different strands of research and participants together to construct a composite picture of how research participants interacted with planning and building regulations. By presenting a selection of stories that participants told about their encounters with planning, rather than, for example taking an in-depth focus on one case as it played out, I intend to illustrate how planning is not experienced as a coherent entity, with a single voice (Porter, 2010), and avoid a normative account which polarises planners and developers.

Apart from Lamma, none of my research participants had actively sought planning permission for their homes. As will be seen, however, the desire to reject planning did not necessarily mean that one could completely *avoid* planning. Considering that I refer here to around five or six different low-impact dwellers, or groups of low-impact dwellers, that rejected planning, it is telling that not one example had managed to completely avoid any encounter with planning<sup>87</sup>. Some research participants encountered planning enforcement, whereas others had to deal with other aspects of planning procedure. As we shall see, planning regimes have the potential to take a repressive approach to unpermitted development in the landscape (Yiftachel, 1998), something which marginalises non-conforming users (Porter, 2014, Ward, 1976). It will become clear that successful interaction with planning requires applicants to perform a certain way of being and thinking about their built environment—a “planning way of being”; in some cases this has simply not been possible for research participants to do, which suggests that it is the desire to change the planning system that motivates those low-impact dwellers who do engage it. Finally, I explore how building regulations add a further matrix of complexity to low-impact dwelling for those who have opted to go through the planning process. “Regs” are distinct from planning, and on some issues they do not act unilaterally. Obtaining planning permission necessitates an encounter with building regulations, another arena in which it seems common aims are approached very differently.

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<sup>87</sup> I must add that this is not supposed to illustrate a typical scenario for low-impact dwellers, I focus here only on low-impact dwellers that have dealt with planning. There are many more low-impact dwellings that have not been discovered by planners.

### 7.3.6 *Encountering planning*

The notion of encountering planning was portrayed in an extremely negative fashion by those who had attempted to reject it—it was viewed as a threat rather than an opportunity. Research participants have alluded to the pervasive violence inherent in the planning system, one, who wished to remain anonymous remarked:

“they don't just knock it [a dwelling or other development against which enforcement action is taken] down, no, that would *look* too bad. Instead, they just slap fine after fine on you, until you're broke, then you're forced to sell it off cheap to cover your losses. They take it off you that way”.

Although participants acknowledged that the extent of the planner's powers did include the promise of this sort of violence, more typically I would hear remarks about the bureaucratic aspects of planning. Complaints about paperwork, for example, were commonplace. Paperwork was cited as a reason not to engage planning and as a burden by those who had sought planning permission. Consider the images below (Figure 8), which show the paperwork for different planning applications. What is remarkable is not so much the volume of paperwork in each case (one for a nine-plot “ecohamlet”, the other for a two-plot co-operative), rather the fact that this was noteworthy amongst the participants. For instance, my work on this research has generated far more paperwork than shown in the second image, and it is not nearly so well organised as the paperwork

in the first image. Additionally I have several gigabytes of files saved to my computer and a raft of books. I do not find this particularly remarkable because as a scholar, and something of a bureaucrat myself, I expect this; low-impact dwellers do not tend to deal with much paperwork, it was a significant barrier for some participants, and was something that they suggested did not belong to the practical world of low-impact dwelling.



Figure 8: Low-impact dwellers' own pictures depicting planning paperwork. Left hand image (c) Lammas; Right hand image (c) Styles

### 7.3.6a Planning symbols

Sandy told me that she had received a visit from a planner who said he was there just to respond to an enquiry that was being made. Sandy assured the planner that her dwelling was a retreat and somewhere that she only stayed occasionally. When she relayed this story to me she said emphatically, “I just couldn't bear the thought of planners all over the place with *clipboards*”. When we discussed it at a later point she confirmed that the clipboard was a symbol of the planner's alien presence ‘on a field visit’, somewhere they didn't belong; the clipboard was a mobile desk to facilitate the filling-in of the

ubiquitous paperwork. Sandy's partner added: "it's a bit like white-collar workers out in the field with a suit on and a pair of wellies". By bringing the material culture of the office or bureaucracy out 'to the field' the planner comes to embody that very bureaucracy. For Sandy the juxtaposing of the planner's tools with her way of dwelling was a source of amusement.

### **7.3.6b Planning authority**

Mervyn described a planning hearing, where it was decided that the family's dwelling could not be permitted:

M—"The thing was, the planners, and the inspector all came through the same door, they sat together. Then I knew they're all on the same side"

EF—"But the planning inspector isn't part of the planning department...?"

M—"No, but they *are* all on the same side, *the side of authority*"

Although Mervyn's planning hearing was to be presided over by an impartial inspector, the spatial ordering of the hearing itself indicated to Mervyn that his participation in the hearing would have little influence on the outcome. What was at stake in this context was not necessarily the question of whether Mervyn's dwelling could be permitted, rather whether the planning system could survive its encounter with this illicit

development. In this way the inspector and planners share a common interest. This common interest is performed by the local planners and planning inspector when they emerge together from a private space as one group into the public space where they are supposed to be discrete. At once, Mervyn experienced the feeling of his polarisation from authority, and his subordinated place in the ontological hierarchy that would eventually play out.

While participants have described ways that planners come to embody authority, through the deployment of certain aspects of material culture or uses of space which reflect bureaucratic practice or hierarchy, at other times the notion of a planning hegemony has not been so apparent. For example, Mervyn explained that he had written to the local planning office to challenge the decision to refuse planning permission for his home, made after the hearing discussed above. Mervyn had cited Y Mynydd as a precedent, since part of the village was in the same parish as Mervyn and Rachel's place. Mervyn showed me a letter that he had received in response which said that the council could not be certain where the boundaries of Y Mynydd lay and did not wish to pursue the matter. One might imagine that it would be a fairly straightforward technical exercise for representatives of the local council to obtain such information. In contrast to the way planners were portrayed by Sandy, as sticklers for paperwork and able to perform bureaucratic tasks wherever they go, the uncertainty conveyed in the letter indicates that such technical knowledge (Habermas, 1984) is not possible to obtain.

### ***7.3.6c Planning expectations***

Alex recounted her experiences with a planning officer who was making a site visit to Tir y Gafel. Describing him as a “young guy”, it was clear that Alex had found him inexperienced, and perhaps even a bit silly:

“I walked around the site with him, and it was like, he was just wide-eyed, just couldn't believe some of the stuff he was seeing. I thought he'd be looking at the buildings, their design, structural integrity or the infrastructure, you know? But he was... it was like he was *obsessed* with compost toilets! “You do what?” he said, “ooh, just wait 'til I tell the girls back at the office! They'll be *horrified*”. I thought he was just so judgemental, you know? It felt like he was looking at us and thinking *what a bunch of freaks*. So many of our visitors are just so *positive* about what we are doing that you sometimes forget... I mean, he kept asking me about television! It was as if he had never met someone who didn't watch telly... When I said that none of the homes had telly he asked me what on earth the kids do?—but you could see some of them going round on their bikes and that—he just couldn't get beyond the TV issue.”

(Original emphasis)

In this case, the approach that this particular planner exercised was significantly removed from the sort of technical or rational knowledge that others like Sandy imagined that planners employed; certainly there was no mention of clipboards or other such symbols of bureaucratic authority in Alex's account. Alex was in fact surprised at

the planner's seeming lack of interest in the technical aspects of the site. Alex's expectations, though, were that this visitor, by virtue of being a planner would experience the site differently to the other sorts of visitor that the group were used to meeting. Alex expected the planner to receive the site differently, what she did not expect was that this difference would entail judgements based on aesthetic-expressive reasoning, rather than technical-rational reasoning (Habermas, 1984).

### ***7.3.7 Approaches to planning.***

In this section I compare how research participants approached planning from within the planning system, and from outside of the planning system. Two ways of interacting with planners are discussed. This is not an attempt to judge which one is better or not, rather the examples illustrate how the framework of rights imposes governance and conformation, yet gives little satisfaction to the applicant as an agent in dialogue, *pace* Porter, (2010). Conforming as a planning applicant means perhaps unknowingly perpetuating the apparent institutional hegemony of planning and exemplifies how governance perpetuates this hierarchy. Refusing to conform as a planning applicant by contrast reveals that there is a divide between the sort of conduct that planners consider standard practice, and what is acceptable for the subjects of planning.

#### ***7.3.7a Operating within the planning system***

Those participants who operated within the planning system found it at times to be a frustrating experience. Lammas members have outlined a very difficult process during the early stages of their planning application, marked by dismissal, evasiveness and a

lack of communication. The flavour of reports and reflections is of a planning department which did not want to engage with the group. This rather long, but illustrative, excerpt from the reports of one of the Lammas directors about the planning process illustrates a certain evasiveness on the part of the local planning department:

*“Wednesday 2 April*

*Having had no confirmation of PCC attendance at the Design Commission meeting.*

*2.30pm. I Phoned PCC and spoke to CW (Clerk, Planning Dept). I was told that DP was on holiday till Monday. CW said he would chase it up and get back to me today.*

*4pm. CW called to say they don't have a home telephone number for DP, though the head of department (SH) is happy for him to attend the Design Commission meeting in principal. He assured me that DP would ring first thing Monday morning. I e-mailed DP explaining that we have reserved him a place and could he confirm asap.*

*Monday 7 April*

*Having had no response from DP,*

*10 am. I phoned DP He hadn't heard from CW. He said he would look into it the situation today and if okay with (his boss), will confirm. Either way he would get in touch with the Design Commission today and ring me back today. I suggested meeting before the Design Commission for Wales Review to discuss the application (suggested 9<sup>th</sup> April)—DP declined.*

*4pm. DP phoned me and confirms that he will attend the Design Commission for Wales meeting.*

*16 Apr.*

*Design Commission Review attended by various Lammas representatives and DP. I talked with DP, requesting a meeting about the application. He said that he would be ready for a meeting to discuss our application in 2 –3 weeks, and that I should contact him then.*

*30 April*

*I phoned DP. He said he was still not ready to meet and that he would contact me within 2 weeks to arrange a meeting.*

*12 May*

*Lammas sent DP a letter about updated planning information regarding the application.*

*14 May*

*Having had no contact from DP about the promised meeting,*

*4.30pm. I Phoned DP—not there, he had left the office early*

*5.15pm. I then Sent DP an e-mail expressing frustration at lack of dialogue.*

*15 May*

*2.30pm. I Phoned DP—not there—I then left a message for him to call me asap (with home and mob numbers)*

*16 May*

*4.40pm. I Phoned DP. Not there. Left another message for him to call me asap (with home number)*

*20 May*

*Still having had no response from DP about the agreed meeting,*

*9.20am I Phoned DP. He was not at his desk. I left a message for him to ring back asap*

*10.10 am. I Phoned DP. We talked. DP said he wanted more time so that he could send the planning application to ADAS for consultation and that there were ‘other issues’, though he was not in a position to divulge what these other issues were. He repeatedly stated that he would write to Lammas by 27<sup>th</sup> May. He suggested that dialogue (and thus a meeting) at this stage was inappropriate. I e-mailed DP requesting clarification on a point of discussion.*

*2 June*

*Having had no communications from DP, I e-mailed DP explaining we have received no letter and asked what for an update on what was happening.*

*6 June*

*Lammas received letter from DP requesting a time extension.*

*8<sup>th</sup> June*

*I received e-mail from DP confirming letter requesting time extension.*

(Wimbush, 2009: 8–9)

Here we can see that the planner in question is slow to confirm attendance at meetings and slow to enter into a dialogue as promised. Weszkalnys (2013) points out that in Berlin planning department meetings are the main source of action. If there is any similarity in both systems we might assume that the reluctance to meet the applicant in this case indicates simply that there has been no decision to convey. From within the planning system however the applicant can do little to force the issue to be addressed any sooner. A certain power is held by planners wherein withholding information—even the information that there is no information just yet—can undermine the planning applicant's desire to be an agent in, rather than a subject of planning policy. In this case, the desire for agency is evident; for example, Lammas had instigated meetings with the Design Commission for best architectural practice. Withholding dialogue and evading communication can be seen as undermining any sense of agency the applicant can have. In contrast, I present an alternative approach to planners in the following section, from outside of the planning system.

### **7.3.7b Operating outside of the planning system.**

For Philippe, being under the scrutiny of local planners was an uncomfortable experience. In particular, he objected to his home being photographed without his consent. Philippe responded to this by photographing planners' houses and confronting them at chance encounters such as at the village shop. Though the idea of Philippe confronting planners in this way was amusing at first, it raises an important issue. I believed that it showed that Philippe felt that the planners were just ordinary people who

did ordinary things at the end of their working day; in other words, they were not somehow out of bounds. It seemed that Philippe's photographing planners was a way of reminding them that they were essentially no different to each other, thus appealing to their good will. When I asked Philippe whether this was the case he commented:

“Well, it's crazy! You write a letter or ask to speak to someone but, *no*, they're not available. Then you see them walking around the village shop!... And they sit outside the gate taking pictures without permission, well, I can do that, too”.

It was too much for Philippe to see planners in everyday situations, yet get no response to his enquiries. To highlight the lack of dialogue in his planning case, Philippe took action. He towed a derelict caravan to the local planning office car park which he occupied all day, eventually getting a response promising dialogue on his case.

If he performed the role expected of him as a planning applicant, Philippe had to accept that dialogue would not be forthcoming, as in the example above. Instead, Philippe's choice of actions mirrored those of the planners; photographing without consent, and sitting outside the “home”. When Philippe acted in the way that planners do, his antics made visible a structural imbalance; suddenly the “ordinary” actions that planners used every day became outrageous spectacles. In this example, the impression of an institutional hegemony is undermined by the fact that as regular people planners will of course live somewhere and use shops. Secondly, the importance of role is highlighted. When people do not perform the role that is expected of them in a dispute,

the usual balance of power is disrupted somewhat. This scenario exemplifies Vike's (2013) observation that values such as trust and patience are not a part of the “utopia now” timeframe which characterises planning activity under neo-liberalism.

Given that Philippe had used standardised zero-carbon building materials for his barn conversion, in contrast to most low-impact dwellers, I had initially been sceptical of his decision not to apply for planning under OPD. If Philippe had asserted his rights from within the planning system, he most certainly would have had to acknowledge planners' rights to infringe beyond what he was comfortable with. Philippe would have had to perform the role expected of him as a planning applicant, and we may assume his request for dialogue would meet the same fate as the example above. A theme of Abram's work on planning is the assertion that planners are simply people at the end of the day, an idea which raises important questions the strict moralistic expectations about planners' conduct (Abram, 2004, 2011; Murdoch and Abram, 2002), and has been picked up by other scholars (e.g. Weszkalnys, 2013). When Philippe adopted planners tactics he caused a spectacle; this example shows that there is still a perceptual distance between what people do, what planners do, and what the people that are planners do in the course of planning work.

## **7.4 Conclusion**

Many of the examples explored in this chapter have shown that resisting planning does not necessarily mean that one won't encounter it. Equally, there are some ideas which are common to both low-impact dwellers and planners alike, and although the

motivation for staying out of sight might be different, the net effect is the same. Advocating for low-impact dwelling is clearly problematic, as many low-impact dwellers are necessarily cautious about taking the official route. Even though rights may be won, it is only on the understanding that subjects perform, and sustain themselves, in recognisably “planning” ways. As I have shown, this can lead to awkward silences and a lack of action.

An ethnographic focus on low-impact dwelling has illustrated that there have been slippages between the worlds of formal and informal spatial ordering and that some ideas are permeable. Such an exploration unsettles planning's hegemony as the primary narrative by which space can be legitimately ordered. Low-impact dwellers attempt to restrict (their own, and others') potential uses of the space around them in a manner similar to planning. If planning knowledge cannot be said to be entirely rational-technical (Habermas, 1984, in Healey, 1992), then neither can it be held to be an exclusive rationale. Research data shows that it is not the content of planning knowledge or the way that knowledge is brought to bear on users of the planning system that gives planning legitimacy over land use, rather planning's legitimacy is derived from the discursive construction of planning as policy. The following chapter explores how the planning policy brought to bear on low-impact dwellers in fact has its roots in the much wider political economy of global environmental politics, and problematises the application of this global discourse to everyday domestic practice.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

### **Introduction**

Throughout this thesis, I have focused on a specific environmental reasoning shared by research participants, one that exemplifies a critical ecology that prioritises the perception of nature and the idea of living with nature, and rejects the separation between person and nature even if in some cases it means breaking the law. I explored the significance of living in communities, how ecologies are formed, the idea of a low-impact *techne*, and the ways that such knowledge is shared. The previous chapter explored research participants interactions with planning practice. This chapter focuses on planning as policy by exploring low-impact dwelling in the context of Wales' sustainability strategy. In order to understand the discrepancies between low-impact dwelling and low-impact development it is necessary to review how notions about environmental preservation and sustainable development in particular have been embedded within the discourse of planning. This chapter demonstrates how the Welsh Assembly Government has approached the question of rural sustainable dwelling, and how this represents a new planning rationality that rejects the polarisation of environmental concerns and the development agenda.

In Murdoch and Abram's (2002) view, planning rationalities are discursive assemblages which are situated within and beyond state networks (ibid: 14). This chapter presents the political and technical components of Wales' new planning rationality; it exemplifies how these are formed and actioned through global and

national governance; how they affect domestic practice, and explores how OPDs might operate in practice. I explore how One Planet Developments relate to a global environmental politics that I have cast as the construction of the environment at its most abstract level. I show how the notion of sustainability, and methods used to demonstrate what is or is not sustainable, impact on the everyday lives and strategies of low-impact dwellers.

Although most research participants didn't show an overt concern with the idea of sustainability, or express their practices in such terms, it remains part of the context for this research. As an economic paradigm, sustainability represents neoliberal discourse and a reframing of the environmental critique of the development agenda (Abram, 1998: 6, Doyle, 1998: 772). Sustainable development has begun to inform the practices of states at global and local levels, although critics have dubbed it a “potent but empty rallying cry” (Alexander, 2005: 456). Considering the key role that the state played in shaping participants' own practices and politics, the sustainability concept becomes a useful lens through which to view much of this interplay. This approach reveals a tension between forms of activism which exemplify low-impact lifestyles, and the rather unsustainable bureaucracies which in various ways impede them. This tension is played out at Tir y Gafel in particular because it is a permitted low-impact development, and I will use examples from that ecovillage to demonstrate participants' views on the complexities of demonstrating sustainability.

Since the mid-twentieth century restrictions on rural land use, there has been no permitted space for small-scale<sup>88</sup> back-to-the-land projects, forcing many to pursue their ideal lifestyle illicitly. Only recently has a space emerged for such projects to become mainstream, through the Welsh Assembly Government's new policy on sustainable development for Wales (OPD). By focussing on the significance of domestic consumption on the use of resources, OPD is an example of global environmental politics being scaled down to the level of domestic consumption. The sustainability rubric is retained in the way that ideas such as “low impact” or “zero carbon” are brought to bear on low-impact dwellers and their projects. Official and bureaucratic routes to low-impact dwelling have focused on legitimising the lifestyle by making it quantifiable, and its practitioners accountable. In this chapter I introduce elements of my research findings which illustrate the tension between participants' everyday practice in which an ideal low-impact lifestyle is imagined, and the bureaucratic processes they must undertake in order to demonstrate sustainability. In doing so, I hope to reveal an inherent contradiction, that even though low-impact is now a part of policy, other policy-led institutions that accompany planning are not equipped to evaluate low-impact *techne* to the extent which the law itself demands.

In order to understand the political context for OPD, it is important to account for how environmentalism is used at the level of global politics. The tying of the environment to globalisation has made economic arguments into environmental arguments through the device of ‘sustainability’. This chapter explores OPD as just one example of the way that the sort of global environmental politics that are conceptually

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<sup>88</sup> Or, low-budget.

linked through ‘sustainability’ are brought to bear at the level of domestic consumption, via the nation state—in this case the devolved National Assembly for Wales—and by local authorities. The following section will demonstrate that the trajectory of sustainable development can be traced from processes of international brokering (Rio Summit and WCED) through separate nation states to local authorities (Agenda 21 and Local Agenda 21); as a result, the logic of neoliberalism and the bureaucracy of the state are reproduced through the discourse of localism.

### **8.1 Environment at local and global scales**

This section outlines the conditions that make the idea of a global environment feasible at the domestic level. This relies on a process of abstraction, through which the globe becomes knowable, whereas the everyday realm of action, the environment in the literal sense, becomes a subordinated knowledge (Ingold, 2011: 211). The idea of a global environment has informed senses of a global commons, which, due to environmentalist critique is commonly perceived as in a state of crisis to some degree. Agreements at the level of international politics, which are perceived solutions to global environmental crisis, have become part of everyday experience through policies designed to work at a local level. This section therefore argues that while globalisation has meant that states are typically found to be nuanced and diffuse (Sharma and Gupta, 2006), on some issues, such as the environment, there is still widespread uniformity between different agencies of governance. This implies that the models which work to foster a shared international understanding of environment in the political and economic spheres must also work at the household level.

### ***8.1.1 Discussion of a global environment***

Environmental policies decided at a global scale are filtered down to the domestic sphere in a process which relies on a common understanding of what a global environment is. As discussed in Chapter Four, the environmentalist movement and critiques such as deep ecology have helped to construct a biocentric version of the global environment, one which may be understood equally by very disparate people. In order for this to work, it must necessarily be a generalising view. The key idea is that the globe is an object that is entirely knowable, whereas it is widely acknowledged that local spaces—those realms of lived experience—can only provide a partial knowledge of the world (Ingold, 2011: 211). This indicates that the notion of a globe must be an objectification.

The concept of a global environment is a far-reaching aspect of international politics and business, and decisions about the global environment are made amongst elite representatives of the business and political worlds. Just because there is common knowledge about the global environment, there is nothing to suggest that that knowledge is held in common. Doyle, (1998), although he acknowledges certain inadequacies in the terms “North” and “South” to differentiate between economically prosperous and economically weak countries, uses North/ South as a convenient shorthand way to express differences in the way so-called global environmental problems are perceived. Whereas the North tends to consider the South's increasing population, species extinction, desertification and water shortage as major problems, Doyle suggests that for the majority of people living in the South “issues of more

immediate survival dominate” (ibid: 776). What are widely purported to be “global” environmental issues are therefore not held universally.

Since the consolidation of the environmentalist critique of globalisation in the latter half of the twentieth century, a sense has prevailed about the interconnectedness of the earth's systems. According to Lowe, and Paavola (2005), the first dynamic world models showed the interconnectedness of resource extraction, food production, manufacturing and water use, at the global level (ibid: 5). The idea of a global commons in crisis is a powerful rhetoric that is used to apply market logic to the idea of environmental preservation (Pearce et al., 1989; Pearce, 1991; 1993). “Greening” economies is considered primarily a case of removing existing incentives which lead to loss of biodiversity, (Pearce, 1991: 27). Models that commensurate wildly disparate categories have emerged in order to address the discrepancy between what anthropologists have considered different spheres of economic activity (Bohannan 1959; Dalsgaard, 2013). Money is seen as a levelling tool, and one that can express not only environmental concern, but the *degree* of concern (Pearce et al., 1989: 55), as well as making the perceived value of a habitat comparable to the value of produce from a similar amount of developed land (ibid: 56). The danger is that it is a *reduced*<sup>89</sup> sense of the environment which is at play in the market system. The sense of cultural landscapes as assets of the global environment now dictates who has access them and for what purpose (Bloch, 2007).

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<sup>89</sup> Reduced in the sense of having undergone a process of reductionism

### **8.1.2 Senses of a global commons**

Environmental ecology became a highly politicised field in the latter part of the twentieth century, as high-profile environmental disasters became more commonplace. Publications such as Carson's *Silent Spring* (1965), Hardin's paper *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) and philosopher Arne Naess, who coined his concept of “deep ecology” in 1973, mobilised diverse Euro-American environmental movements, often merged with a burgeoning counterculture (Curran and de Sherbinin, 2004: 108). Environmentalism is characteristically a critique on high consumption, exploitative industrial practices and unethical resource extraction. In the political arena, influential publications included the think-tank Club of Rome's 1972 report, *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972), defining the environmental issue as one of finite resources and openly questioning the growth agenda of globalisation (Lowe and Paavola, 2005: 5). According to Doyle (1998), although such discourses were “neo-Malthusian”; the idea that growth could and should be limited was something of an attack on the principle of a free market (ibid: 772).

Hardin's *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) was particularly highly influential with neoconservative policy makers, and the phrase “the tragedy of the commons” is an oft-used but perhaps little understood shorthand way to rationalise centralised governance of what are perceived as common resources (Ostrom et al., 1999: 278). Effectively this logic extends the values of the Western liberal paradigm and its core tenet of possessive individualism (Hann, 1998). Hardin's rationale is that certain problematic situations have no technical solution; his subject matter is “the population problem” (Hardin, 1968: 1243). Hardin's thesis—that to solve the population problem

we must abandon the freedom to breed or else ruin the commons—relies on the theory that rational actors are locked into a system of exploiting common resources. Hardin's paper has been extended to argue for the regulation of access to (or the effective enclosure of) many of the world's resources. Hardin's paper is widely criticised, not least for its inaccurate portrayal of systems of common grazing devoid of any existing property relations (1968: 1244).

Hardin anchors his rather general argument to an ahistorical narrative of traditional common grazing. According to Fairlie (2009), at least in the UK case there is documented evidence that common pasture was managed collectively by rotation of pasture; in contemporary accounts of the Victorian-era Parliamentary Inclosures by their opponents it was well documented that only the rich (who stood to gain from widespread enclosure) could afford to overstock winter grazing (ibid: 24). In this case, private property in cattle is shown to be the problem (see also Harvey, 2011: 101). In Neeson's (1996) history of enclosures in England between 1700 and 1820, she notes that the decline of common-field agricultural systems led to separate agricultures and the decline in mutual aid and collective management (ibid: 255), not the other way round as Hardin would have it. Hardin's model of exponential growth in the number of cows a peasant family would keep is flawed in many common-sense ways, not least the simple conclusion that 50% of the offspring would likely be male and would therefore be despatched before grazing became scarce:

“Adding together the component partial utilities, the rational herdsman concludes that the only sensible course for him to pursue is to add

another animal to his herd. And another; and another... But this is the conclusion reached by each and every rational herdsman sharing a commons. Therein is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit—in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all.”

(Hardin, 1968: 1244)

According to Ostrom (1990), Hardin's theory is part of a set of models, all used to the same end. In each case, the conclusion is that those using common resources will not co-operate for mutual benefit, and are compelled to act in certain ways without the power to seek alternatives (Ostrom, 1990: 182)<sup>90</sup>. When applied to ecological questions, the resonance of such conclusions with neo-liberal economic models is a happy coincidence for those organisations which advocate modern enclosure policies for things as diverse as fish forests and genetic material (Fairlie et. al., 1995; Harvey, 2011: 103).

### ***8.1.3 Environment as global politics***

The issue of the environment entered global politics definitively with the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). WCED, also termed the Brundtland Commission, was formed during the early 1980s in a climate of ultra-conservative global politics influenced by the USA and UK, whose governments—

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<sup>90</sup> The other models are the Prisoner's Dilemma game, and Olson's (1971) *The Logic of Collective Action* (Ostrom, 1990: 182).

led by Reagan and Thatcher—pursued free market economics and neoliberalism. Unlike the “limits to growth” arguments typical of the environmental politics which had preceded WCED, the formative idea was to balance ecology with the perceived economic prosperity that the free market would bring. Of course, environment was becoming part of the UN agenda even prior to Brundtland. Several summits and resolutions had brought environment and ecology into the heart of global politics. The WCED, however, represented an overt attempt to discuss environment and development as interlinked, presenting development as inevitable.

One of the outputs of WCED, the Brundtland Report or *Our Common Future* (1987), stated: “The commission's overall assessment is that the international economy must speed up world growth while respecting the environmental constraints” (1987: 89). Focussing on the theme of a global commons, and outlining a vision of global sustainable development, *Our Common Future* describes sustainable development as the ability to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of future generations (ibid: 40). Throughout the report, the imperative of economic growth is made clear:

“If large parts of the developing world are to avert economic, social and environmental catastrophes, it is essential that global economic growth be revitalised. In practical terms, this means more rapid economic growth in both industrial and developing countries, freer market access for the products of developing countries, lower interest rates, greater

technology transfer, and significantly larger capital flows, both concessional and commercial.”

(ibid: 89)

Without question, it is assumed that growth can be sustainable given the right technology and social organisation (ibid: 8).

While the Brundtland report has emerged from global politics, and speaks to those institutions, much of the guidance suggests changes must be enacted at the domestic level. *Our Common Future* advocates strategies such as the reduction of over-consumption amongst the wealthy (ibid: 9) and the reduction of fertility rates, particularly in developing countries (ibid: 106). Sustainability is therefore part of a global discourse on ecology, which claims to be applicable at even the most personal level of reproduction (see also Hardin, 1968; 1998). It is clear that the priority of the Brundtland report is economic growth, not environmental viability.

If WCED set the stage for growth, the 1992 Rio Earth Summit was the key moment for sustainability. As a result of the summit, Agenda 21 (1992)—an action plan for sustainable development—was adopted by summit participants. Although it is not a legally binding contract—rather a content-free agreement according to Strong (1995), Secretary General of the Rio Summit—Agenda 21 has a unique degree of political authority because it was agreed by almost every nation (ibid: 234). As will be discussed below, Agenda 21 is interesting as a product of global politics, concerned with the functioning of a global commons (the environment) but designed to be implemented at

the level of local government through Local Agenda 21, or LA21 (Lucas et al., 2001: 11). This has direct relevance for this research, because *One Wales: One Planet*, OPD and Policy 52 must all be viewed as the result of the influence of Agenda 21, and these policies have direct relevance for my research participants. Even on the other side, as it were, land activists have rallied round ideas contained in Agenda 21. Chapter 7, the name of a land-activist network, is a direct reference to Chapter 7 of Agenda 21, in which:

“The objective is to provide for the land requirements of human settlement development through environmentally sound physical planning and land use so as to ensure access to land to all households and, where appropriate, the encouragement of communally and collectively owned and managed land.”

(1992: 51)

Because it has been devolved so effectively, Agenda 21, or LA21, and therefore sustainable development, is interpreted differently by different parties. The UK's interpretation of sustainable development hinges on maintaining high and stable levels of economic growth, and in that respect it is very similar to the WCED's interpretation. Reconciling the growth agenda with the environment is considered a contentious point (Lucas et al., 2001: 11). Critics of global-scale environmental interventions focus on the growth imperative, arguing that sustainable development really equates to sustained growth and that any green pretensions are questionable, amounting more to a co-option or weakening of environmentalist critique (Hannis and Sullivan, 2012; Doyle, 1998: 772; Abram, 1998: 6).

Alexander (2005) notes that the premise of global sustainable development is to act in relation to inter-generational timescales: “[I]t is not enough to think about allocating resources fairly between North and South (intratemporal equity), one must also consider the needs of future generations alongside the present (intertemporal equity)” (ibid: 455). The political understanding of sustainability is therefore complicated by the need to act in synch with several temporalities—if this is even possible. With *One Wales: One Planet*, Wales overarching planning rationality is sustainable development, which represents the political component in a wider discursive assemblage (Murdoch and Abram, 2002: 14). The amalgamation of sustainability and planning, both of which are future-oriented, demonstrates a particularly extreme disjuncture: planning's focus on the future means that sustainable planning implies the postponement of action until some future point, sustainable development is simply an aim. Such a disjuncture leaves room for the sort of activism exemplified by my participants, which is about producing immediate alternative practices, which may be used “as building blocks to construct a hoped-for future in the present” (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 476; Lee, 2013: 9). In this way, autonomous low-impact dwelling based on action in the immediate term on one's immediate environment can therefore be seen as a critique of the disjunct temporalities of global environmental politics as well as a loss of confidence in governance as a medium to achieve environmental protection.

## **8.2 Models for commensurability**

One Planet Development policy relies on several ideas that are derived from the interplay of the economic and environmental models that comprise the notion of

sustainable development. This section discusses two key tools in the sustainability discourse, offsetting and environmental footprinting analyses, and my aim is to show how theoretically opposed these different strands are. Environmental footprinting represents the technical component of Wales' new planning rationality. It is a model to account for the extent of personal and domestic consumption expressed in global hectares—a unit that corresponds to the Earth's “biocapacity”. By contrast, offsetting requires positive action in one place that will ameliorate negative action somewhere else. Determining what a negative action is, how negative it is, and what sort and amount of positive action will be required to offset the negativity is, however, inherently complex; it requires some mechanism to make both positive and negative commensurable. Dalsgaard (2013) notes that offsetting is one of the main forms of exchange organised around carbon; it problematises the value of carbon-emitting actions by commensurating the disparate settings in which carbon—as a value—circulates (ibid: 84). The idea of offsetting has become a major part of strategies to protect the global environment, and versions of offsetting have been factored into UK spatial planning in the form of biodiversity offsetting. As Alexander (2005) points out, the neoliberal policies which have shaped international environmental politics mean that economic models are retained in spite of their apparent incompatibility: “conventional, profit-based transactions are driven by a ten-to fifteen-year span. But, typically, accounting for the environment highlights the need to recognise 'inter- and intratemporal equity'” (Alexander, 2005: 456). One method used to correct such disparate values is commensuration. By reducing complex worlds to one or two comparable values, neoliberal logic can operate where previously it would have been more obviously misplaced. Eventually, such values may become commodified

themselves through offset market trading. The rest of this section discusses two key offset markets, carbon and biodiversity, before discussing the idea of an environmental footprint.

### ***8.2.1 Carbon offsetting***

Carbon offsetting is linked to the Kyoto Protocol, which was an agreement reached in 1997 to tackle climate change by freezing carbon emissions at 1996 levels. Kyoto emerged as a product of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was again a product of the Rio Earth Summit. As a result of Kyoto, many industrialised nations pledged to reduce carbon emissions gradually with a set of target dates. To facilitate this change in the nature of production and consumption of (mainly) fossil fuels, several financial mechanisms accompanied the Kyoto Protocol, in particular a carbon trading market. As Dalsgaard (2013) notes, carbon trading is particularly controversial because of the potential for objectified carbon to become “a universal yardstick for value”, and thus a way to commensurate otherwise disparate spheres, such as environment, economy and development. Dalsgaard's article is interesting in that he proposes to use actor-network theory as a method to examine carbon accounting. ANT as method would treat the research field as flat, in a similar way to how the reduction of complex phenomena to values such as carbon credits treats complex and multi-faceted social, economic and environmental problems.

Welsh OPDs must be “zero carbon” in their construction and everyday use. What applicants have found difficult, however is that to be considered “zero carbon”, materials must be certified as such; most typical low-impact dwellings use materials

which have not been industrially produced, and therefore aren't certified zero carbon. This illustrates the incompatibility of development models with dwelling practices. In respect of OPDs, Fairlie (2011a) outlines how carbon models can be excruciatingly counter-intuitive, as he compares burning gas for fuel rather than wood. Wood's status as a carbon sequester complicates any over-simplified view of the processes of consolidation and consumption of carbon. Gas is a more efficient fuel source in terms of heat produced per unit of carbon released, whereas wood releases double the amount of carbon while providing the same amount of heat that gas would. As Fairlie points out, though, this reductionist model does not account for how either gas or wood are sourced, and clearly, for those living in OPDs that are near a source of wood, or even those growing their own renewable biomass like many plots at Tir y Gafel, wood is clearly a “better” fuel option, despite the models indicating that it is more efficient to burn gas and sequester wood (ibid: 58).

Although Fairlie's example suggests that people, and low-impact dwellers in particular, are better placed than model examples to decide what constitutes low impact, models like offsetting are particularly pervasive. Offsetting is becoming an increasingly common practice, and an accepted part of personal expressions of environmentalism—what Dalsgaard (2013) calls “voluntary offsets” (ibid: 88). For example, the town of Lampeter in West Wales began a tree-planting partnership in a deforested region in East Kenya. Eventually the Lampeter organisation bought a 10-acre site in Kenya to re-forest. While it appears that local Kenyans are pleased to see their landscape reforested with useful cash crops (cashew nuts), what is of note is the way that the

scheme is portrayed in Lampeter. Publicity is clear that the scheme is designed to cover Lampeter's carbon footprint, and the logistics of offsetting are not in question:

“With this 'Community Carbon Forest Reserve', Lampeter is now the first town in Wales and possibly in the world to be taking responsibility as a community for its share in creating climate change and slowing tropical deforestation.”

(BBC, 2009)

Research participants exemplified an environmentalism that was quite opposite to regimes such as carbon offsetting. By recognising that actions took effect in the immediate environment, and acting accordingly to lower this effect, participants exemplified what Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) have called everyday activism—constructing a hoped-for future in the present (ibid: 476). By contrast, offsetting displaces many of the tangible effects of consumption and does little to address or change behaviours.

### **8.2.2 Habitat offsetting**

Bamford (2002) has noted the ubiquity of the term “biodiversity” in recent years, suggesting that it is a “key symbol of late twentieth century techno-scientific thought” (ibid: 36). Escobar's (1998) observation that biodiversity campaigns do not challenge the premise of capital accumulation, but actually deepen capitalist interests in the developing world (ibid: 56), can be extended to developed countries or anywhere in the global environment. For instance, biodiversity offsetting is the key paradigm in the new English National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF hereafter), which has a “presumption in favour of sustainable development” (NPPF, 2012). By outlining some

of the assumptions that the English planning policy for sustainable development hinges on, I hope to exemplify what is so unusual about the Welsh policy.

Under the NPPF, developers will be able to either invest in a biodiverse habitat or buy credits generated elsewhere in order to offset the habitat lost as a result of new development. In either case, the idea that environmental degradation can be happily offset elsewhere is implicit. Critics note that this heralds the beginning of a global biodiversity market on a par with the carbon-trading market, but comparisons with existing carbon offsetting schemes suggest that an international market in biodiversity credits does not bode well: “as with forest carbon, there are very few global intermediaries with the financial and technical resources to validate, source and market conservation credits as commodities” (Hannis and Sullivan, 2012: 6).

Hannis and Sullivan outline how habitat banking will be enabled by the use of an indirect habitat scoring methodology, whereby “credits can be produced, in advance of, and without *ex ante* links to, the debits they compensate for, and stored over time” (IEEP et al., 2010: 9, quoted in Hannis and Sullivan, 2012: 10). The authors present one of DEFRA's (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) worked examples, in which six hectares of arable land are earmarked for a housing development. The value of the biodiversity on the development land is calculated, then represented by credits. The developer must pay for habitat totalling the same amount of biodiversity credits<sup>91</sup> to be preserved to offset the project, with multipliers added to

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<sup>91</sup> Which will not necessarily equate to the same total area, depending on how each piece of land is evaluated.

mitigate any risk<sup>92</sup> (ibid: 13–14). One inherently alarming element in this example, which Hannis and Sullivan's analysis seems to miss, is that no account is taken of the existing land's value as an arable field. Arable means crops, which indicates that the example field must be of a high quality agricultural grade, not marginal pasture. Furthermore, biodiversity offsetting locks more land away, in the example six hectares of purposely created meadows. In DEFRA's example, the net loss of potential agricultural land is doubled, yet there appears to be no heed taken of how this could affect food security.

Curran and De Sherbinen (2004) note the significance of food and nutrition as one of the three household “consumption clusters” which (along with construction and transport) make up nearly 70% of an economy's material extraction and energy consumption, and more than 90% of its land use (ibid: 111). According to Fairlie's (2011b) hypothetical OPD example, food makes up the greatest proportion of a household's environmental footprint, even in a low-impact dwelling (ibid: 60). The significance of food production cannot be underestimated, and policy which would significantly reduce the capacity to produce food invites uncertainty. As Rival (2006) has shown, historical ecologies indicate that what outsiders imagine are pristine habitats are more usually the product of deliberate and sustainable management practices initiated generations since (ibid: S84). To enclose these environments, which are valuable precisely because of local management, ignores the contribution that local users can make to biodiversity whilst extracting a sustainable livelihood.

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<sup>92</sup> for instance, if the land is not already established as biodiverse, it might not over time represent the same degree of biodiversity as existing biodiverse habitat would.

### **8.2.3 Environmental footprinting**

Environmental footprinting is a way to audit domestic consumption so as to account for a household's impact on what are perceived to be global resources. Demonstrating a low environmental footprint is a key part of the planning application for an OPD. In Wales, environmental footprints<sup>93</sup> are measured in global hectares (gha). Estimates are that there are 1.88 gha available per person worldwide; whereas the UK average is currently 5.4 gha and the world's average is 2.7, the WAG requires OPD applicants to demonstrate a footprint of 2.4 gha or less.

Environmental footprinting builds upon existing notions within geography and ecology, about “shadow acres”, or the amount of area needed for either a product of activity which is not reflected at the point of consumption (Curran and De Sherbinin, 2004: 115). This makes ecological footprinting a powerful tool, because it offers a way to make disparate forms of consumption comparable in terms of their externalities (ibid). Fairlie(2011b) illustrates how these sorts of models do not accurately reflect complex ideas like environmental impact by using the EFA method chosen by the WAG to evaluate Norman, a hypothetical edge-of-settlement OPD<sup>94</sup> applicant. Norman achieves an environmental footprint of 2.42 gha, which he would need to reduce by 0.02 gha to qualify for OPD permission. Norman's downfall, though, is expensive butter, because consumption is measured in pounds spent (except for energy used and transport, which is measured in either kWh or kilometres). Therefore, buying more expensive food is considered a greater environmental footprint, regardless of how the

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<sup>93</sup> Or, ecological footprints, the terms are used interchangeably.

<sup>94</sup> In offering this example, Fairlie's concern is to answer the notion that because all of the WAG guidance is for open countryside OPDs, the policy is only aimed at “hard-core back-to-the-landers” (2011b: 59).

food is produced (ibid: 61). Fairlie cites Bill Knight, one of the originators of the Environmental Footprinting methodology, who notes that people living in social housing on a low income may also achieve a very low environmental footprint, even if they have no green aspirations (ibid). My ethnographic data has highlighted other issues in what is inevitably only a partial view of low-impact dwelling.

One interesting aspect of the environmental footprint regime is the weight of local and national Government consumption, which the latest EFA tool for Wales sets at 0.9 gha, a full half of the environmental footprint that is apparently available per capita, and equivalent to the world's average over-consumption. Critics argue that a low individual footprint is not possible if they are made to account for wasteful Government practices outside of their control. It is no small irony that the existence of the devolved Welsh Assembly Government that launched OPD generates a higher environmental footprint. While EFA is by no means a perfect way to represent actual environmental impact, it is conceptually less flawed than offsetting models, given that personal consumption is quantified and thus there is potential for change in domestic consumption, an area in which it has hitherto been elusive or over-complicated to gauge or effect change (Curran and De Sherbinin, 2004: 108).

#### ***8.2.4 Offsetting and EFA: contradictory models***

Inevitably, when complex things or processes are rendered comparable with a range of other things, this reduction entails a loss of complexity and detail. What I have attempted to do here is to present, by way of comparison, some of the methods that

governments adopt in order to make these disjunct comparisons. I presented carbon offsetting, which is a popular strategy operated by governments, transnational organisations and even individuals, whereby carbon acts as a universal yardstick to reconcile disparate spheres of activity (Dalsgaard, 2013). The exchange of carbon credits, however, effaces the fact that overall consumption is not affected, just displaced. Wales has adopted a very different model, not based on offsetting. Households, organisations and even individual acts are made accountable at the point of consumption. What is interesting is that by expressing consumption in terms of money spent, the model has an anti-consumerist bias. The idea that a low income equates to less of an environmental impact is oversimplified, but even critics note that it is an adequate model, if a model must be adopted, since no model is without its flaws (Fairlie, 2009: 60). In effect, this means that OPD, with its adherence to the ecological footprinting exercise, is well placed to be a policy for anybody on a low-income, whether they have green aspirations or not (ibid). The message is clear—consumption has a direct link to environmental impact: lower one by lowering the other.

OPD, then, represents an unusual way forward for the WAG. EFA couldn't be further from offsetting as a core model. I have already made the claim that OPD is a utopian policy, but the material presented here makes that fact unassailable. Returning to Abram and Murdoch's (2002) notion of a planning rationality, environmental footprinting thus represents the technical aspect of that rationality. The next section will explore in greater detail how sustainability, as imagined by the WAG and its EFA paradigm, is performed on an everyday basis, highlighting the complexities of being seen to be sustainable, and some of the failings in the model.

### **8.3 Meeting the demands of policy**

Key to OPD policy is the requirement to be demonstrably sustainable, in the sort of terms outlined in the previous section. As such, a core part of Tir y Gafel's planning permission rests on the ability of residents to demonstrate that they are making a livelihood from the land in question, as well as demonstrate that their dwellings meet a high standard of sustainability criteria, and building codes. Applicants must be seen to be being sustainable, or in other words, residents must perform sustainability (Butler, 1990), in the way that the WAG imagines it. Below I will explore some of the strategies which have made LID practice knowable, and governable. In many cases, these processes of recording and regulation deeply contradict much of the essence of LID. I will suggest that the effect of inspections and reporting conventions for LID is to miss much of the point, and potential, of such projects.

The case studies below are mainly derived from research done at the Lammas project site at Tir y Gafel, since these were the only participants who had chosen to engage openly with planning. It must be noted that OPD, which was discussed above, came into effect during the period of fieldwork. Therefore, Lammas' permission for a low-impact ecohamlet was granted under a different planning scheme, Pembrokeshire County Council's Policy 52, which allowed for low-impact development in the "open countryside". As such, much of the contradiction inherent in the system appears even more paradoxical given that the local authority is curbing its own ability to meet its own planning guidelines, any potential tension derived from local authorities implementing government OPD doesn't enter into these examples.

### ***8.3.1 Progress and timetables***

Residents of the Tir y Gafel ecohamlet were required to comply with aspects of Policy 52, for low-impact development by regular reporting to demonstrate compliance. Certain aspects of the planning requirements were considered reasonable. For instance, all planned building work ought to be completed within five years. This also meant that all temporary dwellings would have to be removed by this time. This included the campervans occupied by general volunteers, as well as the small trailers attached to some plots, and the few static caravans and other structures that were residents' temporary homes. Jenny told me she was glad about that: "I am really sick of all these vans and caravans, I can't wait 'til they've gone. This just wasn't what I had imagined". Perhaps few people had envisaged how the site would appear with all these scruffy white vans and caravans, as they weren't included on any plans or proposals for the Lammas site, but it certainly didn't fit with Jenny's expectations of an ecohamlet.

During fieldwork the five-year deadline had seemed sensible. Because I encountered the Tir y Gafel group fairly early on in the process initial building work was in full swing on all but two plots, and work on the group's community hub, having been granted a generous funding grant, had been started. The fact that the group had switched their attention to a shared project indicated a sense of security. I felt that this must have derived in part from the buoyancy evident in group morale having been finally granted planning permission, and the motivating factor of having a steady stream of, sometimes very capable, volunteer assistance. I got the distinct impression that 5 years was felt to be a generous deadline for many plot-holders.

At the time of writing and as the five-year deadline approaches, the outlook is quite different. During follow-up meetings I learnt that (at least as of 2012) progress was quite slow for some plot-holders, some plots had changed hands entirely, some had not even begun any building project, and the “terrace” had not been started since the residents could not agree the design. One plot-holder had finished an initial structure very quickly and then devoted a lot of time to the communal hub building. The initial structure, a large and sub-divided roundhouse was eventually to become a guest *space*, however at present it provided a very comfortable family home. I later heard that the family were considering simply not complying with the requirement to build their projected home within the five years, they were comfortable, the dwelling they had was adequate and they just wanted a rest from building projects<sup>95</sup>.

The strictures of the bid for planning permission effectively set each plot-holder a specific trajectory, while it was unclear what the consequences of not complying would be<sup>96</sup>. While I am not speculating as to whether that the project will or will not come to fruition, what is evident is that the generous-seeming five-year timescale for the group to demonstrate its “sustainability”, not just by building a zero-carbon dwelling, but establishing a viable livelihood to meet 75% of the household's needs, is not adequate in practice without exerting a degree of unwarranted pressure for most people. This is why I have suggested that voluntary labour is an absolutely crucial element of making OPD possible and have devoted a chapter of this thesis to exploring the

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<sup>95</sup> Although, at the time of thesis submission building had commenced on the main dwelling which had been planned for this plot.

<sup>96</sup> I noticed, however that residents' Planning applications had to account for the reversibility of their buildings, in other words plans contained details of how easy it would be to demolish dwellings and how materials that could not be removed or reused would be compostable.

practice. It remains to be seen whether the group will meet the deadline, and what should happen if not. I suggest that these issues are an example of the disjuncture between the processes of dwelling and development. Characteristically, developers must work to strict deadlines and to not do so is a question of profit and reputation. By contrast, dwelling is a continual process of engagement with place, and arguably, may never truly be completed.

### **8.3.2 *Bean counting***

Another requirement for residents at Tir y Gafel is that by the end of the 5-year period they must meet 75% of their needs<sup>97</sup> from activities directly connected to the land. This idea is carried over to the new OPD policy, which in this case is stricter, in that 100% of needs must be met from the land in question. In both cases this requirement seals the connection with the land and legitimates the reason for wishing to dwell on or occupy the land in question.

In Chapter Six I discussed a period of time spent volunteering with Sam's family at Tir y Gafel. As well as the building work presented in Chapter Six, I was also able to discuss at length with Sam the rigours of meeting the requirements from Pembrokeshire's planning department to do with demonstrating livelihood. Sam and I joked about bean counting—for that was quite literally what he explained that he was required to do. If a resident kept a vegetable garden, in order for the produce to be considered part of their livelihood it would have to be recorded as such. Garden produce could make up a significant part of the family's diet, indeed while I was working with Sam and their long-term volunteer Marina, the family ate the leftovers of a supper that

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<sup>97</sup> As Alexander (2005) notes, needs are cast as inherently economic, and not social (ibid: 456).

Marina had prepared which seemed to consist simply of a spiced pumpkin, from the garden of course, and perhaps an onion which was likely to have been from the garden too (though I did not inquire). Horticulture on this scale has the potential to provide most of the fruit and veg a family can eat, but also reduces the amount of shopping trips required in order to obtain fresh produce. I noticed that many residents participated in a bulk food order from a wholefoods co-op that would deliver. Certainly, this food order alongside a productive vegetable garden and small-scale animal husbandry would almost negate the need to shop in town. Even very early on, one of the plot-holders was producing bags of salad leaves to sell to other residents. Access to fresh food on site was important at Tir y Gafel as Lammas had to produce a Traffic Management Plan as part of the application, which would limit car journeys to and from the site.

In order to count garden produce as part of the family's livelihood, reporting conventions required Sam to state how many kilos of beans he had produced in a year, how many kilos of strawberries, tomatoes etc. Sam was highly critical of the method, and I could see why. Eating fresh food from the garden each day was very different from harvesting an annual yield which could be easily weighed, and in fact this would be a useful figure to know if one was practising larger scale agriculture. In order to meet the reporting requirements, Sam told me that he ought to weigh and record whatever he picked each time—very tiresome when a variety of produce is gathered. Perhaps crops for storing, like onions, garlic, pumpkins or potatoes could be treated in this way, but I observed that most gardeners tended to favour the constant production of fresh vegetables than to store quantities of produce. Of my research participants only Pat and Mary practiced food preservation as standard, due in no small part to their freezer. The

planning requirements simply had no bearing on either the practice or the scale of practice that horticulturists, permies or kitchen-gardeners employed. I observed this again amongst the gardeners at Y Mynydd, obviously no need to report back to anyone as to how much veg was produced, but usually produce was harvested directly for the kitchen, sometimes a tiny bit of many things for one meal.

### **8.3.3 Buildings regulations**

Tir y Gafel participants also had difficulty with building regulations (*regs*, hereafter), in spite of planning having permitted the ecohamlet. A clash of values meant that residents were being asked to adopt techniques which were not low impact—such as incorporating a layer of plastic beneath an earth floor—which for participants represented a serious ethical compromise. This example neatly illustrates Abram's (1998) observation that alternative rationalities will become subordinated when dealing with bureaucratic systems (ibid: 6). In some cases the application of building *regs* made a direct contradiction of planning requirements, such as the insistence that Jason's home be fitted with a mains powered smoke detector, (building *regs* requirement), while the entire ecohamlet must be off-grid, with no mains electric (planning requirement). It was the application of building *regs* which illustrated most clearly the rift between the dwelling and development perspectives, a contradiction which seemed to hinge on the fact that building *regs* for developments were being applied to dwellings, and that these were two very different things.

Jason and Michelle's home was deemed to be in breach of 11 out of 16 relevant building *regs*. Jason outlined his experience in a magazine article:

“The building control system is aimed at developers ... However low-impact self-builders are both developers and occupiers: development and usage are concurrent and continuous. As needs occur and resources become available, so the shelter evolves. This is a very different process to that for which the building control system is devised.”

(Dale, 2011: 55).

Jason's view indicates that treating low-impact dwellers as simply consumers is not adequate, commensurate with a provisioning approach (Narotzky, 2005) low-impact dwelling must be seen as a continuum of production and consumption that will resist evaluation as a “finished” product. The clashes between low-impact techne and building regs that are documented in the article illustrates how policy for both planning and buildings *regs* can be at odds, further undermining institutional hegemony.

Harkness (2009) describes the way that Earthship Fife's interactions with building inspectors meant that the usual Earthship design had to be modified. In particular, problems arose because inspectors were not sure how to evaluate reclaimed materials, especially the non-standard materials used in Earthship construction, such as old tyres. Inspectors requested that experienced Earthship builders be involved in the build so as to minimise risk. In particular, Harkness notes that inspectors had no criteria for assessing the idea of passive solar heating, and the idea that solar gain would be retained, expecting that the space would be ventilated as a conventional building. Eventually, though, the Earthship was accepted as an anomaly. Graeber (2009) portrays New York building inspectors as less kind, suggesting that the enforcement of building

code was used as a way to close down New York squats (ibid: 284). Certainly the insistence for self-builders to meet building industry standards is complicated not only in terms of the different level of professionalisation, but the low impact DIY ethos means, or even requires, that non-standardised materials be used. If the issue cannot be resolved by an exemption for low-impact dwellings, there is a risk that OPD policy will become unworkable.

#### **8.3.4 Standardisation**

Other research participants have made specific reference to *regs*. Mervyn, for instance, has not attained planning permission for his family's dwelling, but he told me that it was “pointless” anyway. He felt as though he might get planning, but knew for certain that his home would not meet *regs*. Mervyn pointed to the beams across the kitchen ceiling, above where we were sitting at the kitchen table, quaffing hot drinks. I could see that the beams still had bark on, they were odd shapes but of equal-looking length, Mervyn explained that the four beams were from one big trunk which had been split into four along its length. “That”, he continued:

“is much stronger than even the chunkiest beam from the saw mill, because it doesn't cut across the grain of the wood. But *They* [building inspectors] wouldn't allow it, it's hardly “standard” [Mervyn makes quote gesture], it hasn't been certified or whatever. I mean, how could they evaluate this?”

The tree that provided Mervyn's beams came from the slice of woodland that the family occupy, which is the site of a ruined farmhouse. Ruined dwellings are dotted around the valley where Mervyn's place is, many of which were abandoned to make way for a

large-scale state owned forestry plantation. In many ways, these beams represent the very essence of the low-impact *techne* that the Welsh Assembly Government have sought to capture in the OPD policy, they were locally sourced and generated no waste. The strictures of building *regs* mean that rather than building in a true vernacular style, from the materials that surround the dwelling and are easily available, Mervyn would have been expected to obtain approved building materials and presumably ignore the resources on site. In all likelihood, Mervyn would have had to fell trees in order to clear the land for building, not use the trees in the construction of his dwelling but rather buy in standardised and certified zero-carbon timber. This example indicates even a tension between different Local Authority departments with a stake in determining the character of the built environment. Chapter Seven has suggested that planning policy is preservationist and therefore focussed on retaining local character. New policies which seek to incorporate ecology into planning practice favour “local” material as a result. In this case we can see that “local” is discursive, as it does not really mean the closest, since standardised and approved building materials must be derived from industrial processing, even at a small scale, which in itself, in most cases<sup>98</sup>, represents a distancing.

### **8.3.5 Key contradictions**

The above discussion illustrated how most of the problems low-impact dwellers faced when trying to demonstrate their sustainability was in negotiating their position vis-à-vis the different models that the council expected them to comply with. Most of these models, it could be argued, really only could apply in an industrial setting. For

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<sup>98</sup> Though not all cases, I am aware of one workers' co-op in West Wales who share a mobile saw mill and are able to produce planks for people, often on-site for either a fee, or, usually, a share of the timber.

instance, the criticisms of building *regs* centred on their applicability to developers and irrelevance to dwellers. Furthermore, ideas which evaluate agri-business have less relevance to kitchen-gardeners. The practice of being sustainable is dependent very much on defining current and future needs. The question of what constitutes needs is an inherently social one, but as Alexander (2005) notes, in practice, the issue of sustainable development, “is often more heavily weighted towards environmental preservation and is less clear on what is meant by 'society'” (ibid: 456).

By exploring some aspects of low-impact dwelling and ecovillage networks I hope to have highlighted the limitations of economic and environmental models developed for industries when applied to smallholders or householders. Perhaps one solution would be the development of a set of dwellings regulations, acknowledging the inherent difference between building and dwelling (Ingold, 2011). Scott (1998) has noted that it is not unusual to see an informal order which underpins the formal order of state planning (ibid: 310). The autonomous low-impact dwelling tradition can be viewed as one such informal order. As such, there needs to be greater acknowledgement of the transferral of knowledge from the informal to formal order if the Welsh Assembly's sustainability policy is to become meaningful. Otherwise, what remains is a clear example of the alternative rationality that low-impact dwelling represents becoming subordinated to, in this case, the more dominant bureaucratic order (Abram, 1998: 6). Low-impact dwellers point out that the net result will be no adequate provision for small scale low-impact dwellings (Dale, 2011: 56). Pickerill (2013) suggests that up to ten thousand people currently live in low-impact dwellings in the UK (ibid: 181), a population which is set to remain largely unplanned.

The implication of all these contradictions, however, is that policy is at risk. Different arms of the bureaucratic machine contradict each other and often work against each other, nothing illustrates this clearer than the idea that to appease building *regs* an OPD must have a mains-powered smoke alarm, but a condition of planning is that the OPD must be off-grid! Sharma and Gupta (2006) go as far as to suggest that bureaucracies subvert themselves, due to the fragmented and diffuse nature of state power in a globalised context: “officials at lower levels of state bureaucracies may not support programs initiated by others higher up in the hierarchy, and might even actively try to sabotage the execution and goals of initiatives planned from above” (ibid: 15). The idea of above/ below is certainly played out in the Welsh context as the Assembly's utopian planning policies are grappled with by local authorities tasked with overseeing their uptake. There are clear tensions at different points of government which begin to undermine the coherence of programs like Agenda 21.

#### **8.4 Multiplicity of the state**

The final aspect of Wales' new planning strategy which demonstrates that it is a new planning rationality is its situation within state networks. Here I shall discuss the interplay between planning and the state very briefly as these ideas have been explored at different points throughout this thesis. In a globalising world, the state may appear diminished but the idea of the state, or what a state does, is reproduced through disparate institutions and practices. Sharma and Gupta note that the state is not simply a “set of government agencies and functions that are clearly marked off from society”, adding that other institutions normally regarded as social are routinely “annexed to the project of domination and governance” (2006: 46). Throughout this thesis I have made liberal use of the term, the state, which has generally appeared as a hegemonic category.

The idea of a complete and totalising state government is not unproblematic, even more so in the age of globalisation, and I may well have used “bureaucracy” or “governance”. Instead, I chose to use “the state” to describe the matrix of rules, requirements, bureaucracy, inspection, legal notices, challenges, court cases and fines which have comprised my participants' relation to planning. It is, I feel the relation between planning and environmental politics which make the idea of the state more tangible in this case.

Although in descriptive terms this may efface the more nuanced experiences of forms of state or, especially, bureaucratic power that participants negotiated, the reason for presenting the state in such a manner is found in the interplay of global environmental politics on nation states and subsequently local authorities. The main focus of this chapter—the idea of sustainability—may be seen to emerge from the arena of global institutions which envelope individual states, it is implemented by states, but enacted at the level of localities. Agenda 21 was remarkable precisely because it followed this global-state-local trajectory. Sustainability, therefore is one way in which the authority of the state is reproduced at different scales. Planning, too, is a particular form of state utopianism, it is the collective vision of a locality, region, nation or of groupings at an even wider scale. Therefore, the idea of the state remains a useful reference point in the context of this research.

#### ***8.4.1 Agenda 21, or, how the global order is reproduced at local scale***

According to Sharma and Gupta, (2006: 46) states are not always visibly powerful and centrally organised, but exert strength through constituent agencies and networks which promote specific aims. The sustainable development agenda is one example of this, my research has shown that low-impact dwellers in Wales have experienced the effect of a

remarkable coherence from the level of global politics through national governments right down to the local authority. Rio's "Agenda 21" was always intended to be implemented at the local government level, indeed, local government representatives were present at the original Rio summit (Harman et al., 1996: 41–42) and at the subsequent Earth Summits five, ten and twenty years later. Agenda 21 is implemented at the regional level through *Local Agenda 21*, or LA21. As such, environmental politics reproduces the global at the local level, I interpret this as local manifestations of state hegemony. According to Harman et al. (1996), Chapter 28 in particular of Agenda 21 is concerned with local authority implementation of sustainable development, and states that local authorities ought to undertake a consultation process so as to reach a local consensus and interpretation of Agenda 21 (ibid: 42). The emerging policies have been concerned with community, planning and sustainability (Fairlie, 2009: 14), and have supported for example, ideas such as coproduction of policy and collaborative planning. Agenda 21 set a precedent for governments to implement strategies for sustainable development at all levels of public engagement.

As we have seen, the idea of offsetting has been a key feature of sustainable development plans. An alternative political discourse on sustainable development is exemplified by the "One Wales One Planet" policy adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2010. The rhetoric of the policy again references a global environment and strives for a global standard in terms of consumption. However, the perceived solutions have a different character. I have interpreted the Policy as somewhat nationalistic, and as a way for the devolved Welsh Government to assert itself and the Welsh identity vis-à-vis global issues. Wales can boast of being the first industrial

nation, the first fairtrade nation and now has its sights set on being the first sustainable nation (Agnes, one of my participants suggested to me that Wales should become the first organic nation). In EU terms, Wales is considered an impoverished area, West Wales and the Valleys were classed as “objective 1” in the 2000–2006 European Structural Funds Programme, a sore reminder of Wales' comparative marginality nowadays. A formerly mineral and resource-rich land, Wales' topography indicates valley development mainly for the purposes of resource extraction—for the industrialising UK—and a road network that links west to east quite efficiently but can be frustratingly slow north to south. As such, OPD represents one way for Wales to assert its own interests and its own identity by promoting zero-carbon homes made from locally sourced materials; it has done so with one eye on global issues and the other on local solutions.

#### **8.4.2 Case study: OPD**

Wales' new strategy for sustainable development, *One Wales: One Planet*, outlines how Wales intends to use only its fair share of resources within the lifespan of one generation. Currently, the aim is to reach 1.88 gha per capita, which was the 2003 quota. Because this figure is based on the earth's usable area divided by population, this measurement is subject to change. One Planet Development (OPD) is part of the Assembly's strategy to meet its ecological footprint. OPD is a simple concept; if a proposed development can demonstrate that it will provide 100% of its inhabitants needs, and be zero-carbon, then it won't be considered against ordinary planning rules which control development outside of areas agreed within local development plans. On closer examination, there is a radical anti-consumerist bias underpinning this policy. As

discussed above, apart from energy usage and travel, which have existing units of measurement, environmental footprint is primarily measured against money spent, therefore lowering consumption of external goods and services will lower environmental footprint. Although this method of reducing complexity so as to render different categories commensurable is somewhat flawed, it is not tied to the imperative of economic growth which seems to underpin most if not all of the other approaches to economic environmental management, such as offsetting.

OPD embarks from the inherited planning paradigm, which favours strict “zoning”. Essentially OPD will allow a residential development at a site hitherto designated as commercial/ industrial/ agricultural (i.e. not residential), if the applicant can demonstrate a need to live and work in the same place. In addition to OPD, Wales' new policy makes a provision for rural enterprise dwellings where dwellings are linked to a viable business. Not only is OPD a departure from prior planning policies in Wales, but it differs markedly from the new sustainable development guidelines set out for England, which are based on offsetting. Although OPD relies on environmental footprinting as a way to quantify environmental impacts, it avoids many of the critiques about alienation or ambiguity that may be legitimately levelled at globalised strategies for sustainable development. Wales' planning strategy begins to reject land-use patterns based on separation, and fixes the impact of consumption at the domestic level. Obviously, the per capita environmental footprint contains 0.9 gha generated by government alone, which is higher in Wales due to the extra layer of government that the Assembly represents. Perhaps openly accounting for its environmental footprint is another way that the Assembly feels will demonstrate transparency—one of its

“ideological touchstones” (Schumann, 2007: 838). Reckoning environmental footprints in terms of money spent on goods and services is not without flaws, but as Fairlie (2011b) notes, short of a life-cycle analysis on everything consumed, it is as adequate as other models (ibid: 61). By adopting environmental footprinting, rather than offsetting, the WAG is asserting a distance from the UK. Furthermore, by expressing Wales' consumption in terms of *global* hectares, Wales is asserting its position in the sphere of global environmental politics. A devolved Welsh Assembly, working in a distinctive way in a globalised context represents the ongoing process of the proliferation of governance, not a down-scaling of the state to a more local level. The following section explores the specific interplay between globalisation and devolution.

#### **8.4.3 Devolution and globalisation**

In 1997, Wales voted by a very small margin in favour of a National Assembly for Wales, which was established in 1999. The Assembly was expected to oversee a break from, as Schumann (2007) puts it, “the historical culture of adversarial, insulated politics in the UK while operating within the limits of UK and EU governance structures” (ibid: 838). For Wales, devolution has been a process of emerging from its position within the UK, and the relative marginality that this has meant. Schumann notes that the “ideological touchstones of transparency and inclusion” have led Wales' process of devolution, and describes different methods that Wales has adopted to set itself apart from England and the UK. Planning is one area of policy which the Assembly is responsible for, as such, Wales' planning strategy was bound to be somewhat different in character than what had gone before. Tewdwr-Jones (1997) notes that the planning system for England and Wales was held to not reflect “socio-political nuances existing in Wales” (ibid: 54). Whereas the Assembly's forerunner (the Welsh

Office) administered English-style planning for Wales, the Welsh Assembly administers its own, utopian, vision for Wales. It is my suggestion that Wales' *One Wales: One Planet* strategy expresses Wales' sovereignty by aligning Wales' interests with global interests.

OPD in particular represents the attempt by a devolved national government to explore how global issues may be addressed locally and in the domestic sphere. At first this seems at odds with more general trends towards transnational and global flows of knowledge, people, practice, information and capital. Devolution, however, fits entirely within the project of globalisation, because it represents the proliferation of governance, without compromising the channels through which international agreements, such as Agenda 21, reach and are implemented at local levels. Whereas devolution on one hand is about nationalism, national states and local identities, this is in no way incompatible with globalisation (Aretxaga, 2003), certainly the globalisation of the environment is no exception. Wales asserts this link by tailoring its own planning strategy to global issues, even the title, *One Wales: One Planet* exemplifies my suggestion.

### **8.5 Conclusion: dwelling and sustainability**

This chapter has illustrated the three strands of Wales' new planning strategy that indicate that it is a new rationality in Murdoch and Abram's (2002: 14–15) terms; namely: (1) EFA is a new technical component; (2) sustainable development is the political component; and (3) as policy, *One Wales: One Planet* is a firm part of state networks. I presented research participants' experiences of dealing with this new planning rationality that—along with material presented in other chapters of this thesis

—has highlighted many of the ways in which low-impact dwelling was different, sometimes irreconcilably so, from low-impact development. The sort of economic/environmental/political discourses which I have introduced are of course concerned with sustainable *development*, which implies growth and market logic, though there is no economic implication in the term dwelling. Returning to the idea of differing temporalities, we can at once see that a “sustainability” emerging from a neoliberal economic worldview is at odds with a “sustainability” emerging from environmental discourses, whereas a “sustainability” emerging from social needs, as Alexander notes (2005), may be different again. It has been useful to turn once again to Ingold (2011) in order to illustrate that the conflict between dwelling and building—or in this case, dwelling and development—is perhaps best regarded as ontological in character. This ethnography has demonstrated that a manner of dwelling—characterised as *being-in-the-world*—is theoretically open-ended and far more able to be reconciled with concepts such as environment, which are also *out-of-time* (Heidegger, 1962). In contrast, economy (and certainly neoliberalism) is a relative late-comer, a disjunct concept with no loyalty beyond immediate, short-term return. Attempts to introduce an environmental ethics into the market are circular, resulting in the opening of new markets, as exemplified by the case of offsetting. Dwelling, environment and economy do not, analytically, make happy bedfellows, either within the political discourse which has offered the concept of sustainability, or in anthropological analyses. Applied to this material, we may say that we are presented with two versions of what sustainability is, or even that my participants' low impact ecologies aren't “about” sustainability at all.

In this thesis I have been careful to emphasise that this is an exploration of dwelling—not development. Dwelling is a process which is never fully realised; it is ongoing, and my participants' strategies reflected this. This chapter has established the centrality of the notion of sustainable development in Wales's new planning rationality, and has explored it using examples of low-impact dwelling. Sustainability, and sustainable development, are primarily economic concepts adopted at the level of international politics and filtered outwards to shape local governance strategies. I have also demonstrated that such concepts can affect domestic activity, as in the case of voluntary offsets. I especially focussed on offsetting, because as a mechanism for making disparate things commensurable it represents a sharp contrast to environmental footprinting. Environmental footprinting entails the analysis of domestic consumption strategies, thereby containing the potential to implement change. Offsetting by contrast allows consumption to stay the same by annexing the potential to consume elsewhere, effectively enclosing and locking away something else, be it the potential to consume carbon emitting products and services, or an area of habitat. Because Wales' new planning rationality adopts EFA, and because EFA is so different from other mechanisms for commensurability, *One Wales: One Planet* is a distinctive policy. If we accept that policy is discursively constructed then it is important to analyse *One Wales: One Planet* not only in terms of how such policy acts upon the domestic context, but what it does on a broader transnational scale.

## **CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

This thesis has examined the emergence of different readings/meanings of the notion “low impact” in West Wales. The fundamental split is between low-impact *dwelling* and low-impact *development*. On one hand, activists go back-to-the-land in order to live simply in self-built homes, acting in the immediate temporal and spatial context with little concern to attain planning permission; I have called this low-impact dwelling. On the other hand, there exists a planning system which has only recently made provision for low-impact development. Until Wales' policy on One Planet Developments (and just prior to that a low-impact development policy in Pembrokeshire), planning policy did not treat a low-impact development project any differently to a conventional development project. Now, however, with OPD in place, low-impact developments are subject to a rigorous set of criteria to ensure compliance with zero-carbon technologies and adherence to management plans which guarantee that OPDs will meet inhabitants' needs. This thesis' original contribution has been to develop a political-economic theory of dwelling to analyse domestic development planning in Wales.

My research has shown that these dwelling and development approaches are very different. The development approach applies what are perceived to be ecologically sound materials and technologies to conventional housing and domestic life in order to reach a lower environmental footprint. The dwelling approach is off-grid, it rejects prescribed guidance and the logic of models; it is concerned with making changes to personal and domestic practices at a scale which is intuitively felt to make a low impact

on the nearby and immediate environment. Low-impact dwelling does not readily engage with the notion of a global environment. A third stance sees a middle ground occupied by those who wish to live on-grid, but in what they perceive as a less resource-dependent manner; these people typically seek official permission through available channels, or seek changes to the planning system to accommodate going back-to-the-land as part of a visible environmentalist critique which confronts the issues of climate change, peak oil and sustainability. In this thesis I have argued that the third stance has emerged from a dialogue between dwelling and development.

In casting the main argument as a contrast between dwelling and development, I have taken my cue from Ingold (2011), who suggests that “dwelling” can be opposed to building as a strategy of inhabitation that derives from the perceived environment, as opposed to the culturally (or otherwise) constructed environment—what is usually glossed as the built environment. According to Ingold, the building perspective always presumes a separation between the perceiver and the world. The people and practices I encountered during fieldwork demonstrated a rejection of (or were explicit about rejecting) any such separation; this ideology was at the core of research participants' strategy to reject what we may call the “grid”. Thus I framed such practices as dwelling. Research participants have shown that low-impact dwelling is largely incompatible with building *regs* for conventional homes. Low-impact dwelling is best regarded as a process; ideally *spaces* evolve as needs arise. This echoes some of the ideas that Heidegger (2001) puts across in his 1951 essay, *Building Dwelling Thinking*. For Heidegger, building emerges from the process of dwelling; it reflects a mode of dwelling, and is a consequence of dwelling (Heidegger, 2001: 144). The requirement for

permitted low-impact developments to be built by a certain date and, in a finite manner, to pre-determined plans runs counter to the tradition of low-impact dwelling in West Wales. Low-impact development, we may say, equates to Ingold's building perspective, and in the West Wales context, is revealed as something very different to low-impact dwelling.

I have suggested that One Planet Development is a result of the interplay of the activist practice of low-impact dwelling and the development rationality which has shaped planning practice. Scott (1998) notes that in many ambitious planning regimes, the formal order is only made possible by the informal order, or in Scott's terms, the formal order is “parasitic” upon the informal (ibid: 310). Again, this resonates with Heidegger's notion that building, as a formal practice, emerges from dwelling, which is a habitual practice (Heidegger, 2001: 145–146). Heidegger acknowledges that quite often building underpins dwelling, but claims that this is a reversal of an earlier and more authentic order; Heidegger shows that etymologically (in Old English and High German), the word for building means “to dwell” (ibid).

My material shows that in West Wales, illicit low-impact dwelling has shaped and furthered low-impact *techne*. Typically, low-impact *techne* consists of materials that are locally available and which pre-date industrial processing; low impact techniques are labour intensive: work is often done by hand. As such, low-impact *techne* has a low ecological footprint, and is of interest to governments, like Wales', that are obliged to plan for sustainable development. This thesis has argued that in this context, informal low-impact dwelling underpins Wales' One Planet Development policy. Spaces in which

to experiment with low-impact *techne* have been a crucial component in the process of practice becoming policy, but ironically it has been the business of planning to take enforcement action against unpermitted developments, something which is not unique to this context, as Harkness (2009) documents in the case of Earthship development in New Mexico.

Low-impact dwellings may be regarded as hybrid spaces (Latour, 1993) in the sense that low-impact dwellers represent them as an amalgamation of being, dwelling and nature in one place, and in one thought-process. This is antithetical to modernity, which is premised on the separation of dwelling from nature and other so-called dualities. Many of my fieldsites were examples of such hybrids: physical embodiments of the low-impact ethos, existing in an uncomfortable refraction of planning policy to demonstrate that the habitual separation of people and nature is untenable. This, I argue is a type of activism not based on spectacular action, but on the idea that small, everyday action can bring forth meaningful change (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 476; Lee, 2013: 9).

Participants' experience of trying to meet planning and building regulations indicate that for OPD to be workable, more concessions or revision will be necessary. This research material draws attention to a possible resolution of the two notions of low impact: (1) what happens if we integrate the concept of dwelling with spatial planning? (2) What would a low-impact *dwelling* policy look like, and what would the result be? The Welsh Assembly Government's support for One Planet Developments is part of a strategy which aims to bring consumption in Wales into a range that is considered

sustainable. By using the ecological footprinting method, the issue is framed as a question of changing domestic habits. The WAG's emphasis on the domestic sphere means that an exploration of dwelling has been a pertinent way to approach the question. Research has shown that low-impact dwelling is more than just a DIY version of low-impact development: it requires a perspective change. Models that calculate in terms of the putative efficiency of some materials over others are, in practice, superseded by common sense and the use of what is actually available. My concern has been to outline a political economy of dwelling and I have focussed on Narotzky's provisioning approach. As builder-dwellers, low-impact dwellers use what they can get, materials and strategies that are readily available and forthcoming to them. Common sense thus prevails over abstract models. This conclusion, therefore, will summarise the main arguments of the thesis and explain how it may be read as an answer to the question of integrating dwelling with development.

## **9.2 SUMMARY**

Low-impact dwelling and OPD must be viewed against a backdrop of an increasing counter-urbanisation which is linked to a critique on consumerism, and even modernity itself. Low-impact dwelling offers its proponents an everyday way to realise that critique, whilst working for a better world. That low-impact dwelling is linked to radical ecologies is unassailable; what the practice of low-impact dwelling shows, however, is how sophisticated the back-to-the-land critique on modernity is. Through OPD, counter-urbanisation is set to continue apace and will no longer represent a privileged choice between illicit marginality or a costly rural idyll.

This thesis has provided an account of an alternative mode of dwelling, demonstrating, however, that the presumption of community risks missing the more nuanced politics behind alternative ideologies; it has shown that alternatives to community, such as family or network, are more useful concepts through which to understand ecovillage life. I concluded that community was not a consistent fact of living in an ecovillage—rather it appeared as a compelling and useful category to modify, shape and affirm positive behaviours. I suggested instead that low-impact dwelling was a network, which produced assemblages consolidating around specific aspects of shared practice, reproducing hybrid spaces to test ideas about the inter-relationship of human dwelling, nature and the environment.

Low-impact dwelling constitutes a hybrid practice because it rejects planning's existing logic, which separates people, work and dwelling from nature. Separation is canonical to modernity, but I illustrated that through Spinoza there has been a long-standing counter-current to separation in post-Enlightenment thinking. I used this material to argue that when research participants articulated views about being part of nature, they weren't necessarily reproducing ideas about separation, which might have been implicit in the notion of *choosing* to live as part of nature. This thesis has shown that my research participants held a common worldview, whereby they regarded human dwelling activity as a natural process, no different to that of an animal or a plant.

I introduced the idea that knowledge about low-impact dwelling might be referred to as *techne*. *Techne* alludes to the importance of skill, and acknowledges that low-impact dwelling knowledge requires a period of situated learning, and is generally

unsuited to formal exposition. This was, I argued the key reason why low-impact dwelling know-how has not easily filtered in to formal planning practice under OPD. I presented elements of low-impact *techne* that highlighted that low-impact dwelling is a process that requires adaptation to, and reliance on, the immediate environment. The spaces within which low-impact dwelling takes place are a crucial aspect of shaping the practice. I demonstrated how different research participants negotiated the categories of ownership and occupation, and created alternative models to enable them to go back-to-the-land.

This thesis also explored the range of approaches to volunteering at ecovillages. I used literature on volunteering (Stebbins, 2004; Rochester et al. 2010) to question the notion that volunteering is gift-work, an idea which effaces structural equalities which cast some people as givers and others as receivers of charity. In line with a provisioning approach (Narotzky, 2005, also, Joseph, 1998), volunteers were both producers and consumers, their labour reproduced the role in a much broader context. I also likened some long-term volunteer experiences to a form of apprenticeship, albeit one characterised by a high degree of mobility and an egalitarian relationship between volunteer and host. Research showed that while volunteering may be characterised as a transient, temporary activity, volunteers in fact played a crucial role at the Tir y Gafel ecovillage; volunteer labour was central to participants' strategies for building a viable low-impact development within Pembrokeshire County Council's time frame—and by extension will underpin OPD.

A key focus was on the emergence of planning knowledge in rural Wales. I explored low-impact dwellers' interactions with planning with a focus on slippages

between what participants have referred to as the “two worlds”. This approach has demonstrated that positions are permutable categories which in turn unsettles the normative account of planning as the only legitimate approach to land use. As such, Chapter Seven has shown how Wales' participants engaged with, or circumvented, Wales' existing planning rationality.

I also approached the question of whether OPD was part of a new planning rationality, by examining OPD vis-à-vis the different components of Murdoch and Abram's (2002) notion of a planning rationality. I suggested that the ecological footprint analysis is a model that exemplifies the technical aspect; the discourse of sustainability is the political aspect; and I discussed how OPD is situated within, and actioned through, state networks. I presented participants' experiences and views on the matrix of regulations on dwelling, which demonstrated how incompatible the notion of low-impact development was with low-impact dwelling.

### **9.3 CHANGING PLANS**

When I initially planned this research I believed that the idea of self-sufficiency would be a very important aspect of research participants' lives—and therefore my thesis. I had imagined that self-sufficiency in some way summed up land activism and a critique on large-scale agriculture; I did not fully consider the idea of low impact. Low-impact is an emerging ideology of the broader back-to-the-land movement and so was not prominent at the time that I was planning this research. I had planned to explore how a community worked towards self-sufficiency, but instead I found a network that exemplified low-impact dwelling. I set out to account for the gap between popular and subversive

sustainability discourses; what I encountered were important discrepancies between formal and informal approaches to low impact.

The key change that I had not envisaged, however, was the centrality of the issue of planning in participants' dwelling strategies, and what it meant to be “unplanned”. Being unplanned was a practice, an ideology (the only strongly held ideology) and an identity. I began to see that research participants were pitched against the authorities in an ongoing dispute about the morality of land use. As such, the Welsh Assembly's policy in support of OPDs which was released during fieldwork came as a surprise. This very quickly changed how I framed the research; rather than portraying activist groups in conflict with planners and bureaucrats, I began to see activists, planners and bureaucrats aiming for similar goals, but approaching them differently. OPD highlighted the ongoing dialogue which had been taking place. Admittedly, much of the existing dialogue was dysfunctional, carried on through enforcement orders, court appearances and clear flouting of the rules, but there was a dialogue nevertheless. Without OPD this would have been a very different thesis, and I would not have had the opportunity to explore whether and how development might be reconciled with anthropological theories of dwelling.

This thesis has attempted to present planning as part of a domestic development agenda and as such builds on a growing body of literature in social anthropology (Abram and Waldren, 1998; Scott, 1998; Abram and Murdoch, 2002; Alexander, 2007; Weszkalnys, 2010; Abram, 2011; Abram and Weszkalnys, 2011; Scott, 2012; Abram and Weszkalnys, 2013). This research did not, however, engage directly with planners, or

planning departments. Primarily this decision was made out of concern to protect my subjects and not to disclose their identities to the local authorities. A significant proportion of my research has taken place within a group which is highly secretive and distrustful of bureaucrats; if I had been seen to be working with planners, my reputation would certainly have been damaged. That said, there is certainly scope for further research that takes dialogue as a focus and engages equally with planners. In order to do this, though, research participants must be sought who are already openly engaged with planning.

Another group under-represented by this particular research were the local people culturally defined as Welsh. OPD defines the Welsh Assembly's vision for a sustainable Wales, and a policy of this kind, which is so distinct from offsetting, distinguishes itself as a Welsh policy. My focus on low-impact dwelling has necessarily explored only a small aspect of *One Wales: One Planet*, and accordingly only a small and specific slice of the population. Other aspects of *One Wales: One Planet* could equally be explored, and illustrate a similar interaction between informal and formal models of land use but engage a different sort of person—for instance the provision for Rural Enterprise Dwellings might engage with similar issues but amongst Welsh farmers. From a critical anthropological perspective it has been a tension in the research field when research participants and future OPD applicants have not seemed to reflect on the broader political context of their location within what is the Welsh heartland (Balsom, 1985). In 2015, Wales' newest Planning Bill will debate planning in order to protect the Welsh language. Future research on this topic might address how in-migration—to take advantage of planning regimes amenable to low-impact dwelling,

coupled with the ongoing out-migration of culturally Welsh people—affects the region and its emblematic language. Some of the most pervasive understandings of the distribution of Welsh cultures and identities, such as Balsom's famous Three-Wales-Model (1985: 5), which combines a survey of electoral choices with questions about Welsh identity, are outmoded now that the study is a generation old, and now that Wales has its own National Assembly. There is certainly room to revisit some of this material in light of Wales' current position, but to do so here would have compromised the focus of what is already a wide-ranging account of low-impact dwelling.

I have outlined some of the difficulties in formulating this thesis and what potential directions may be taken to build on this research. My hope is that this thesis will be a useful contribution to the anthropology of planning and development. It has explored the tools available to planners as they reconcile economic and environmental concerns, and how this is brought to bear on the people who will apply to live under this planning regime.

## **9.4 CONCLUSION**

This research has demonstrated a new relevance for the literature about dwelling in the context of planning and development. My suggestion is that using provisioning (Narotzky, 2005) as an approach to account for builder-dwellers, or consumer-producers can augment Ingold's notion of dwelling and render it applicable to a UK context where environments in all their diversity surround us and are not external objects that we can

regard from afar. The idea of dwelling has encapsulated participants' practices, and exposed the gap between formal and informal knowledge, which can be explained by recourse to a comparison between dwelling and development. In this case, development is represented by the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to low impact. All participants considered that the official version of low impact was more geared towards developers than dwellers. Nevertheless, Wales' policy begins to look increasingly interesting. This research has demonstrated just how radical OPD (with its requirement to measure ecological footprint) really is as an interpretation of the global environment paradigm. Instead of offsetting models that mystify the extent of consumption, EFA requires households to account for consumption on-site. The key to a low footprint is low consumption.

Using a theory of dwelling to analyse the low-impact agenda in Wales has raised a key question about whether dwelling can be incorporated into what is essentially a development-oriented agenda. If so, could a focus on dwelling change the way low-impact developments are evaluated, and smooth the way for sustainable rural regeneration in Wales? This begs the question as to whether there is room for dwelling in the bureaucratic state system; in other words, can dwelling be planned? This is really a philosophical question. If one subscribes to the idea of the pre-eminence of dwelling, then planning for dwelling becomes futile; dwelling is already taking place by the time plans come to be made. This raises a further question pertinent to the overarching idea that planning is a future-oriented process. Most of the everyday encounters with planning that I have portrayed have been enforcement, an area where the messiness of planning (Abram and Weszkalnys, 2013: 3) and how it works in the present are made

visible. The influence of low-impact dwelling on low-impact development plans is clear; in this case planning is not only concerned with imagining a future, it is equally concerned with formalising what is already taking place.

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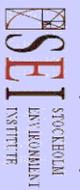
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# APPENDIX I: Environmental Footprinting Analysis

One Planet Development Ecological Footprint Calculator		Conversion factors provided by SEI			
		Existing Household		Use For	
		Actual Figures		Actual Figures	
		Pre Application		(not required on application)	
		Estimated Household		Estimated	
		Figures on First Habitation		Household Figures at Year Five	
		Required on Application		Required on application	
Current Per Capita Ecological Footprint	0.32	gha			
Estimated Per Capita Ecological Footprint on First Habitation	0.38	gha			
Year Three & Year Five review Per Capita Ecological Footprint	0.38	gha			
Future estimated Per Capita Ecological Footprint	0.38	gha			
<b>Input ref. Data entry sheet</b>					
* It is recommended you enter current household figures as a baseline to guide your estimates					
1	Number of people in Household	1	1	1	1
2	Household annual income	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
<b>ENERGY</b>					
3	On Grid electricity	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh
4	Off grid electricity: solar PV	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh
5	Off grid electricity: wind turbine	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh
6	Gas (includes bottled gas) - 1kg LPG = 12.77 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh
7	Biomass - logs - 1 tonne (see notes) = 3869 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh
8	Coal - 1kg = 8.05 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh
9	Oil - 1 litre = 10 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh	0 kWh
<b>HOUSING &amp; INFRASTRUCTURE</b>					
10	Rent or mortgage expenditure	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
11	Capital Cost - renewable energy equipment / water plant - spread over 15 years	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
12	Capital Cost - renewable energy equipment / water plant - spread over 15 years	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
13	Maintenance and repair of the dwelling	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
14	Goods & services for household maintenance	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
15	Water supply and miscellaneous dwelling services	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
<b>TRAVEL &amp; TRANSPORTATION</b>					
16	Purchase of vehicles	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
17	Operation of personal transport equipment (maintenance, services etc)	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
18	Railway transport	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
19	Road transport (buses and taxis)	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
20	Air transport	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
21	Water transport	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year	£ per year
22	Distance travelled by private car	0 km per year	0 km per year	0 km per year	0 km per year
23	Domestic Private vehicle petrol use	0 litres per year	0 litres per year	0 litres per year	0 litres per year
24	Domestic Private vehicle diesel use	0 litres per year	0 litres per year	0 litres per year	0 litres per year
25	Domestic Private vehicle 100% biodiesel use	0 litres per year	0 litres per year	0 litres per year	0 litres per year
26	Domestic Private vehicle reclaimed veg oil use	0 litres per year	0 litres per year	0 litres per year	0 litres per year



27	Meat and meat products (excl. poultry)	£	per year						
28	Poultry meat and poultry meat products	£	per year						
29	Seafood products	£	per year						
30	Fish and fish products from catch	£	per year						
31	Vegetable and animal oils and fats	£	per year						
32	Dairy products	£	per year						
33	Grain mill products; starches and starch products	£	per year						
34	Bread; ruffs and biscuits; pastry goods and cakes	£	per year						
35	Other food products (incl. confectionery)	£	per year						
36	Non-alcoholic beverages (incl. soft drinks)	£	per year						
37	Alcoholic beverages	£	per year						
38	Eating out and take away foods	£	per year						
39	FOOD (home grown) enter only figures for your domestic production	£	per year						
40	Compost purchased	£	per year						
41	Inorganic fertilizer purchased	£	per year						
42	Gardening/ horticultural equipment purchased	£	per year						
43	Seeds	£	per year						
44	Animal feeds bought & fed to livestock for home consumption	£	per year						

<b>CONSUMABLE GOODS (Shop purchased)</b>									
45	Tobacco	£	per year						
46	2nd hand clothing	£	per year						
47	Footwear	£	per year						
48	2nd hand footwear	£	per year						
49	Furniture; furnishings; carpets etc.	£	per year						
50	Household textiles	£	per year						
51	Household appliances	£	per year						
52	Glassware; tableware & household utensils	£	per year						
53	2nd hand household utensils etc	£	per year						
54	Tools and equipment for house & garden	£	per year						
55	Medical products; appliances & equipment	£	per year						
56	Medical products; appliances & equipment	£	per year						
57	Telephone & telefax equipment	£	per year						
58	Audio-visual; photo & info. processing equipment	£	per year						
59	Other major durables for recreation & culture	£	per year						
60	Other major durables for recreation & culture	£	per year						
61	Newspapers; books & stationery	£	per year						
62	Personal care	£	per year						
63	Personal effects not included elsewhere	£	per year						
64	Services	£	per year						
65	Postal services	£	per year						
66	Telephone & telefax services	£	per year						
67	Education	£	per year						
68	Accommodation services	£	per year						
69	Insurance	£	per year						
70	Financial services not included elsewhere	£	per year						
71	Other services not included elsewhere	£	per year						
72	UK residents abroad (UK holiday makers)	£	per year						
73	All other transactions in year not accounted for above -	£	per year						
74	Subtotal	£	per year						
75	All fuel costs in year, inc. vehicle fuel, gas, elect. etc	£	per year						

Verification against annual income. If 4-5% of income then figures OK  
 If less then you need to check the figures you have entered.

From Whales, per capita footprint

<b>CAPITAL INVESTMENT AND SERVICES</b>					
Public administration (central)		0.14			
Education (central)		0.00			
Health & vet services (central)		0.00			
Health & vet services (local)		0.00			
Recreational services (central)		0.01			
Recreational services (local)		0.01			
Public administration (local)		0.06			
Education (local)		0.06			
Health & vet services (local)		0.00			
Health & vet services (local)		0.00			
Sanitary services (local)		0.01			
Recreational services (local)		0.01			
Capital Investment Public Services		0.06			
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>		<b>0.31</b>			
Capital Investment Transport		0.04			
Capital Investment Consumables		0.00			
Capital Investment Food		0.06			
Capital Investment Housing		0.15			
Capital Investment In National Footprint accounts		0.08			
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>		<b>0.24</b>			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>0.52</b>			

## **Appendix II: Correspondence with Lammas**

08/04/2008

Dear All,

*I am an anthropological researcher and have been granted funding to pursue a research project based on the idea of self sufficiency. I would like my particular focus to be on a self-sufficient community in west Wales, and that is why I am contacting you. My project would consist of spending roughly a year, or an agreed amount of time, living as best I can as a member of your community, learning about what you do and why you do it. I would very much like to find out what your general feelings are about this proposal with a view to coming to meet you all and discussing the project further, if, of course you are interested. If possible, I'd like you to discuss my proposal and please to contact me if you would be interested in taking part, or simply wish to know more about me or the project.*

*Many thanks for your time.*

*Regards, Elaine Forde*

Sent: 08 April 2008 12:30:40

*Hello Elaine.*

*Thanks for your enquiry.*

*At present we are still in the planning stages. Even once we get planning permission we will still be 5 years away from being self sufficient. Thus I am not sure if we are the best case study for your project.*

*You could try xxxxxxx*

*With regards,*

*Craig*

*on behalf of the Lammas team*

Date: Tue, 8 Apr 2008 15:23:50 +0000

*Dear Craig,*

*Thanks for such a quick response. It seems we are both in the same boat then, as my project is also in the planning stages. I am aware that you are not beginning construction until this coming autumn (as per your website)- is that still the plan? To give you an idea, I would be looking to be doing my fieldwork some time during late 2009- 2011.*

*What drew me to your project (besides the fact that I had heard about it from some friends in Ceredigion) was that you were just beginning and I thought that - with my researcher's hat on- I would have a unique opportunity to see how you went about creating your community.*

*Now that you have a bit more information about my timescales, would you still think Lammas to be unsuitable for this project?*

*I would really appreciate your thoughts on this.*

*Kind regards, Elaine*

Date: Tue, 8 Apr 2008 20:34:07 +0100

*Hello Elaine,*

*In light of that, maybe we could indeed work together.*

*We have worked with quite a few researchers and students to date.*

*We will be taking on long-term volunteers and I guess you would be considering something along these lines? We would be able to offer a camping provision for accommodation.*

*I am cc'ing in Larch Maxey, who is head of our research department*

*Your proposal sounds quite in depth. Perhaps you can float something to us that either myself or Larch can present at a committee meeting (April 16th is the next one).*

*Something that includes objectives and background.*

*How does that sound?*

*With regards,*

*Craig*

*on behalf of the Lammas team.*

*Date: Wed, 9 Apr 2008 17:52:18 +0000*

*Dear Craig,*

*I'm not sure if you'll have already received a message from me, my machine is really playing me up today. I haven't got the heart to type out another long message suffice to say that my draft research proposal is attached, I'm submitting the final version on 17th April and will try to get it to you in time for your committee.*

*Also, Larch Maxey may find it useful to know that I have secured my funding via an ESRC 1+3 phd studentship quota award through Goldsmiths College (which is why my field dates are so far in the future). My discipline is Anthropology though we may well have many cross-overs in research interests .*

*Please do contact me if you need any more info, I'll be pleased to oblige when my computer's being a bit more friendly.*

*Best wishes, Elaine*

*Date: Wed, 9 Apr 2008 19:46:47 +0100 (BST)*

*Dear Elaine,*

*Thanks for your draft proposal,*

*We will look at it on the 16th and get back to you.*

*Thanks,*

*Craig*