

'Chain gang conservation': Young people and environmental volunteering

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Introduction

This chapter examines how young people come to be enrolled and engaged in programmes of unpaid environmental conservation in rural areas. Set within a theoretical debate regarding the nature of unpaid work and its relationship to voluntary and coercive forms of environmental action, the chapter considers the principal pathways through which people between the ages of 14-25 come to be involved in efforts to protect and enhance rural landscapes and locales. Drawing on a combination of extended survey and in-depth qualitative research in the west and south of rural England, the chapter considers the systems of governance that surround the organisation of these unpaid activities and considers how these activities are rationalised and designed as practical and embodied experiences of citizenship. The chapter argues that enhancing participation rests less on fostering more young participants into the conservation sector than structuring these activities in more productive ways. As a result the chapter argues for the need to include young people in designing programmes of environmental work that take into consideration the reciprocity between the natural and the social relations of environmental conservation.

Research Background

Environmental conservation continues to be a substantive, as well as symbolically, important dimension of policy aspirations for rural areas. From its formative placement in rural policy, where concern to propagate nature's benefits centred primarily on

reversing and restricting habitat losses and securing valued iconic landscapes (Sheil, 1998), these practices today belong within a more complex and ambitious policy narrative of sustainable rural development (Marsden, 2006). Indeed, environmental conservation meets this development paradigm as a way of building resilience into rural systems *not only* through the important, but tightly defined, agendas of 'environmental protection', but as the basis upon which new, and revitalised, modalities of rural livelihood and wellbeing might begin to emerge.

This logic finds expression in a number of ways. Policy makers have placed significant emphasis on designing funding instruments in the land-based sector to put it on a more multifunctional and quality assured footing (Wilson, 2007) and it is noteworthy in this context that a growing cadre of environmental experts, entrepreneurs and advisors are now emerging who are responsible for securing conservation funding, managing the practical delivery of conservation goals, as well as assisting land managers to navigate stable pathways through an emerging culture of environmental regulation and cross compliance (Tsouvalis *et al.* 2000; Ingram and Morris, 2006). From the perspective of economic sustainability these developments are significant, for together they suggest that environmental conservation is emerging as a key sector of the land economy from which to create stable pathways to rural employment.

Yet, important though these relationships between environmental action and professional land management are, they do not exhaust how we might make space for environmental conservation within debates about the character and needs of sustainable rural development. Considered through these lenses it is notable that, alongside these developments, environmental conservation is also marked out by its close association with traditions of unpaid action. Invariably structured through the work of public and third sector organisations and groups, often working in partnership with each other, these activities represent a major, if often hidden, commitment of time, labour and expertise in support of rural conservation goals. In the context of

sustainable rural development such practices are important not only for the agendas of conservation they clearly serve, but because, unlike environmental policy of an agri-centric kind, the structures and mindsets they represent speak directly to wider, and largely vexed, debates about what constitutes a viable 'community', and more precisely, how to foster and recognise these at the level of policy delivery. For example, recent efforts by the Homes and Communities Academy¹ position environmental conservation as a demonstrative facet of sustainable 'place-making' – as much in the skills, values and knowledges these activities cultivate than in the normative outcomes they underpin (Egan, 2004) – and mark out networks of voluntary, charitable and public service activity as a virtuous process central to the means and ends of community reproduction. The logical inference of this discourse is that, as major venues for unpaid environmental conservation activities, rural areas are a stage upon which mutually reinforcing relations between the social and natural can begin to occur; at one and the same time servicing the material needs of environmental protection and enhancement and inculcating individuals into a sense of responsibility for their locales (Measham & Barnett, 2008), and in the context of economic regeneration, producing the very capabilities and inclinations necessary for rural areas to innovate within their changing circumstances. Harnessed correctly, the premise is that unpaid environmental conservation carries with it the potential to have a measurable effect not only on the environmental health and well-being of rural areas, but also on its social fabric and economic prosperity.

In this chapter, we examine critically aspects of this debate specifically in the context of young people: how programmes of unpaid environmental work come to be structured for them, and how these processes then relate to the wider needs and possibilities of sustainable rural development. In this, our underpinning concern with environmental conservation intersects with broader debates regarding how to reconcile a litany of difficult, seemingly intractable, issues that currently impinge on the creation of liveable

¹ Formerly the Academy for Sustainable Communities - the non-governmental organisation set up with an explicit remit to grasp the wider sustainable communities agenda as a set of practical regenerative measures and priorities.

rural spaces (Jentsch and Shucksmith, 2003), not only for those residing in rural areas - where experiences of disenfranchisement and marginalization are now well documented (e.g. Vanderbeck and Dunkley, 2003; Leyshon, 2008) - but for constituencies of young people from nearby towns and cities who willingly, or not so willingly, find themselves corralled into these material embodiments of rural space.

To this end, the following section outlines the problems of conceptualising volunteering as an ethic of care practice, before moving on to consider youth volunteering in the UK. The chapter then introduces the empirical basis of the research, describing the main research methods and techniques used and the geographical scope of work undertaken. Set within a broader theoretical debate regarding the nature of unpaid work and its relationship to voluntary and coercive forms of environmental action, the chapter then goes on to consider the principal pathways around which people between the ages of 14-25 come to be implicated in these programmes of rural conservation activity, outlining the systems of governance that surround their practical organisation, and as result of this, evaluating how these come be to rationalised and designed.

Problematizing Volunteering: the making of communities of practice?

Over the last decade volunteering has emerged as a potential panacea to the fiscal problems of capitalist welfare states attempting to addressing problems of declining political participation, anxieties about welfare provision, and worries about the meaning of citizenship (cf. Milligan, 2007; Ockenden, 2007). Associated with this has been increased interest in the relationship between volunteering and a raft of socio-political discourses such as social capital, active citizenship, social inclusion and health and wellbeing. Academic research has focused attention on understanding the relations of environmental ethics (cf. Conradson, 2005), ethics of care (Cloke et al, 2007; Milligan and Wiles, 2010) and norms of trust and reciprocity (Putnam, 2000) in the ways in which the shadow state produces 'active' citizenship through volunteering (Cloke et al, 2007). However, the motivations for, processes of and experiences and meanings generated

through voluntary activity for both individuals and groups remain relatively under-researched.

Current research by geographers attempts to bring some clarity to years of political and ideological debate about the potential for voluntarism to resolve the 'deficit-gap' between the provision of social services and dwindling public sector budgets (Milligan, 2007). The public sector reforms of the 1980s in health care provision witnessed a partial withdrawal of welfare state provision through the promotion of a shadow state predicated on voluntary provision through 'care in the community' (Fyfe and Milligan 2003a; 2003b). The new Labour government of 1997 continued these reforms through utilizing Etzioni's and Giddens' concept of the 'Third Way' to entrench voluntarism within a political doctrine in which public citizenship and "voluntary organisations are saluted as ideal vehicles through which to express the values, responsibilities and duties of the 'giving age'" (Cloke et al 2007: 1091). Macmillan and Townsend (2006: 14) argue that this represented an "institutional [top down] fix" to embed the concept of community within a shadow state, in which it is administered outside traditional democratic politics. However, as Milligan (2007) has illustrated, provisions within the shadow state are not uniform over space, indeed research on the voluntary sector within health, wellbeing and social care provision has raised concern regarding the enhanced role that voluntary organisations have been given in producing a shadow state (Williams, 2008). The burgeoning interdisciplinary research interest in the voluntary sector as both the subject and context for inquiry includes the recognition of the crucial difference 'space' and 'place' make to understanding voluntary sector activities. Two issues arise here, first, voluntary organisations have been tasked with fostering civic responsibility through creating publics without the recognition that space and extant structures will influence the success of this process (Fuller and Askins, 2010). Second, state contracting has resulted in greater state control and bureaucracy over the kinds of services voluntary bodies can deliver. This raises the question of the extent to which voluntary organisations can ameliorate specific 'problems' identified by

communities or simply deliver state policies. To analyse this in terms of environmental volunteering requires identifying the activity that is undertaken, not just as an understanding of a political voluntary sector, but also as a fluid and diverse volunteering set of communities. These are central concerns to this chapter, which focuses on the production of environmental knowledges by young people at a variety of scales in a wide variety of contexts including river management, hedgerow clearance, footpath construction and transport etc. To address these concerns the following is a discussion on the role of social action in youth volunteering.

Volunteering and Social Action

The disconnection of young people from volunteering and the role of volunteering in producing social capital require further analysis (Farnell et al, 2003). As Furbey et al (2006) suggest, social capital in volunteering extends beyond bonding to building bridges and linking with others in civil society. Of particular interest is the work that volunteering does for both individuals and their communities. While a number of authors discuss the role of volunteering more generally, it is the work of Panelli (2004) that draws attention to social action and its potential use in understanding volunteering through developing knowledges of how beliefs are performed through action(s). Panelli's (2004) suggests that social action symbolises the interrelated and ever-changing nature of socio-spatial life, by seeking to understand how social differences are experienced and negotiated. We argue that social action in volunteerism is under-theorised as previous work has tended to concentrated more on individual behaviour or group activism rather than highlighting how participation in volunteering shapes individuals identities through practices of care.

Cloke *et al's* (2007) research has drawn attention to the role of volunteers in staffing spaces of care, with specific focus on emergency services for homeless people. They argue that it is often the marginalised and 'outsider' organisations that provide the main opportunities for volunteers who seek to help meet the needs of a variety of people

across society. Their work is encouraging as it expands on the motivations of volunteers and argues that it goes beyond 'moral selving', concerned with creating a more virtuous self (Cloke et al 2007: 1099), and instead interprets volunteering as a way of bringing 'ordinary ethics into extraordinary circumstance' (Ibid. 1095). In this way Cloke *et al* (2007) draw attention to spaces of performative care to explore how volunteers perform their roles. However Conradson (2003a; 2003b) argues that although insights into experiences of care in medical and welfare settings have been productively used, a reflective shift beyond themes of medical care can help social geographers to consider care as a form of relation more broadly, and for thinking through the capacities of organizational spaces to further enhanced subjectivities.

Developing Conradson's (2003a: 451) definition of care as the 'proactive interest of one person in the well-being of another', we want to suggest further ways of thinking through the spatiality of care that expand out of the medical arena and into geographies of social care for others with regards to environmental voluntary action. Lawson (2007) develops this by seeking to question the ethical responsibility to care. Her research argues that there has been a shift from a public, to a more personal, responsibility in care founded on values of empathy, responsiveness and attentiveness. Moving beyond the interpersonal, the near and the familiar to care for others or environments, Lawson (2007) seeks to understand the politics of responsibility and the ongoing inequality produced through spatial interrelations.

Barnett and Land (2007: 1066) suggest that 'caring at a distance' often stimulates notions of 'difference', and issues of relating to 'the other'. Similarly, the work of Sayer and Storper (1997) draws attention to developments in social theory which represent new ethical discussions of care for others, and questions if an 'ethic of care' can be applied to the environment and whether is it possible to maintain the personal and embodied values of care when extended over geographical space. Smith (1997) suggests we can frame responsibility and care in terms of shared humanity as part of common

ground to help sustain the more moral case for social justice as equalisation. But her work fails to develop an emotional and embodied account of how such theories of ethics and care can be put into practice, highlighted by Cloke (2002: 591) who further argues that it is far more difficult to discover a sense *for* the other which is 'emotional, connected and committed'.

Through drawing on the literature it can be argued that young people who volunteer become responsible for the environment by 'virtue of the extended consequences of their own actions' (Barnett and Land, 2007: 1069). However little research has explored how young people create compelling reasons for taking responsibility for the environment. As Barnett and Land (2007) try to gain an understanding of why caring, being responsible and acting out of concern for the environment, is not recognised as being an ordinary everyday activity, we feel work on young volunteers has the potential to highlight that in reality this *is not* part of everyday life for many young people. Through geographies of generosity we open up new horizons for understanding the receptive, responsive, and attentive relationship through which practical action is provoked.

Youth Volunteering

The UK Government's desire to increase the numbers of youth engaged in volunteering has been the subject of a number of reports since the mid-1990s (Commission on the Future of Volunteering, 2008). Two major inquiries, the Russell Commission (2005) and the Morgan Inquiry (2008) have both concluded that encouraging young people to participate in volunteering has the potential to solve a multitude of social challenges, such as tackling anti-social behaviour, rehabilitating young offenders, promoting youth citizenship as well as producing a system for young people to develop their skills portfolio. Since the publication of the Russell Commission's highly instrumental report in 2005, which outlined a national framework for engaging and encouraging young people into voluntary work, youth have been viewed as an important and largely untapped

resource for the voluntary sector. In adopting Russell's recommendations the Labour Government set out their vision to promote 'youthful' volunteering in the publication *Volunteering for All* (Home Office, 2006). In this, volunteering was explicitly positioned as a means of fostering social and economic citizenship in inclusive communities by leveraging socially marginalised or skills or qualification deficient individuals into community networks or employment (Hardill et al, 2007). To help promote this policy the Government established 'v', an independent agency dedicated to implement youth-led volunteering initiatives, particularly in the management of local environments where there is now strong evidence to suggest public policy has become more reliant on the commitment of unpaid volunteers to provide certain services (Hill et al, 2009).

The UK Government's drive to enhance voluntary action is predicated on the idea that voluntary agencies take responsibility for identifying the processes through which youths can become actively engaged in the production of communities. This is politically an important shift in emphasis in youth policy and service provision from extant publically funded state youth programs through county youth services to the voluntary sector. However the extent to which volunteering is guided by the principle of community service or is simply an issue of individual training and retraining for the workplace is unclear (Taylor, 2002; Russell, 2005). The change has broad implications for young people and their ability to formulate identities, a sense of belonging and place. Indeed, the youthful ages represent the first period in which young people will have interactions with their communities apart from parental or other adult supervision. Thus, the ways in which volunteering processes include and perceive youth will have lasting impacts on how young people view their communities and their place within them. Currently, rural and urban youth are coming under pressure in particular from two trends, first the desire to preserve public order and safety by inculcating youths into socially inclusive programs of community work and second, the drive to concentrate skills and qualifications development within those voluntary programs. The explicit

message being sent to young people is that through volunteering you can achieve a level of belonging and citizenship, but only on the terms set by those programs of work.

Although there is now significant evidence to suggest that volunteering is important in the production of citizenship (Reed and Selbee, 2001; Murphy et al, 2005), is valued in communities (Hughes and Black, 2002; Handy et al, 2005) and is undertaken by a variety of groups/individuals (Zappala and Burrell, 2002; Greenslade and White, 2002), we wish to argue that, counter to current policy initiatives to include young people in community cohesion, there is a contradictory social movement toward increasing constraints on the ability of young people to assert their autonomy within their communities. This is a paradoxical view on the part of adults and agencies. On the one hand, fear *for* young people's safety has grown with the relentless media hype around 'stranger danger' and the belief that abduction, molestation, and abuse of, and violence amongst, youth is increasing at an alarming rate. Surprisingly, there is also a salient fear *of* young people, as adults and agencies react to conceptions of youth as drug-addled gang members without conscience or self-control. Parents often resolve this paradox by dividing young people into their own and the *others* (Aitken, 2001). As a result, parents strive to limit their children's interaction with other young people, which seems in direct conflict with the aspirations of current voluntary sector initiatives.

A further problem for promoting voluntary action amongst young people is the changing nature of social control on youth's access to, and ability to use, public space. Volunteering is often conducted in public space and beyond parents' ability to limit their own children's movements outside the home. In the name of protecting their youth (and protecting the rest of the community from other youth) communities have adopted approaches that fundamentally inhibit the identity formation process. Curfews, anti-loitering ordinances, 24-hour automated surveillance and stricter policing are obstacles that young people increasingly must negotiate in their use of public space (Owens, 1997; Leyshon, 2010). In addition, the increased surveillance and management

of young people's lives, means that finding space in which to 'hang-out' has become more difficult for young people and therefore volunteering is now viewed as a way of both regulating and including young people in communities.

Despite decades of scholarly and media focus on the problems that 'troubled' youth pose for the community, it is our assertion that environmental voluntary programs have made little effort to include young people in the planning of environmental activities or indeed community structures. Nevertheless, there are differences in the ways in which environmental professionals view the inclusion of young people. The more recent decision by the UK government to require communities to consult young people in decisions that affect their lives might indicate an increasing acceptance of youth in communities. More broadly, in the remainder of the chapter we will explore the ways in which environmental professionals and other adults view the place of young people in environmental programs and consider the extent to which young people are viewed as a problem to be solved or a source of community strength.

Environmental Volunteering

In the UK the environmental volunteering sector is currently thriving with nearly 80% of all those who volunteer on a regular basis engaged in projects that focus on conservation, the environment or heritage (Low et al, 2007). LANTRA (2008) have estimated that this equates to approximately half a million environmental or land based volunteers in the UK. Further evidence from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (Hill et al, 2009) and the National Trust (2005) suggests a buoyant recruitment ethos pervades the sector with 300,000 and 52,000 volunteers respectively. However the distribution and age profile of environmental volunteers is more disparate. The majority are in the South-East which boasts 34% of all environmental volunteers in the UK, whereas the South West, where the research for this chapter was undertaken, has 19% of the total. These figures perhaps reflect the considerably higher population density in the south east rather than less activity in the south west.

Volunteering more generally has also grown in the last decade. As Russell (2009: 13) suggests “from 2001 the number of people volunteering formally at least once per year in England and Wales has increased slightly, from 39 % in 2001 to 43% in 2007”. However the number of individuals volunteering on a more regular basis, for example at least once a month, has remained consistent at 27% since 2001. The overall picture of volunteering is problematic as public data is limited and measures different forms and durations of engagement. What is evident, however, is that young people between the ages 16-24 are more likely to volunteer *informally* in the previous month than any other age group – 41% compared to the national average of 35% – but surprisingly they were the group least likely to have *formally* volunteered – 24% compared to the national average of 27% (DCLG, 2008). Despite the Government’s efforts to increase the numbers of young volunteers, youth volunteering has remained static since 2001 (Hill et al 2009). Further, youth volunteering is not universal, for instance the 2007/8 Citizenship Survey illustrates that young people between the ages of 16-19 are more likely to volunteer than 20-24 year olds. In terms of gender differences, young women and young men roughly volunteer in equal numbers (Low et al, 2007), however young women are more likely to volunteer in a ‘social’ capacity whilst young men are more inclined to participate in sports (Gaskin, 2003; Nacro, 2004). Ethnically Asian young people are statistically the least likely to volunteer compared to white and black cohorts (DCLG, 2008). This may merely reflect the way ‘data’ is collected, as surveys do not consider ‘non-traditional volunteering roles’ or community engagement through other mechanisms, such as religious affiliation.

Evidence from environmental volunteering surveys indicates that the sector is dominated by an ‘older’ white demographic of volunteers (O’Brien et al 2008). Surveys by Black Environment Network (2002) and IVR (2004) show that 96% of BTCV volunteers and 98% National Trust volunteers can be classified as white. More disturbingly perhaps were the results of the LANTRA (2008) survey of 315 environmental volunteers that

reported only one person said they came from an ethnic background. This does not compare favourably to overall volunteering amongst ethnic groups once per month, which stands at 22% (DCLG, 2008). O'Brien et al's (2008) survey also illustrated that the average age of environmental volunteers was 43.2 years. Retirees in particular contribute significantly to environmental conservation volunteering. Nationally, 26% of all volunteers are retired, but this again subject to regional and organisational differentiation. For instance, in the North East of England 64% of volunteers were over 55 (Ockenden, 2008) whilst the figure is lower in the South West at 52%. Further 52% of all National Trust volunteers were over 65 years of age, whilst the IVR (2006) identified that 46% of Wildlife Trusts volunteers were over 65. Also organisations like the BTCV have a predominately younger age profile (Powell, 1997), probably reflecting the BTCV's drive to recruit students.

Notwithstanding the complex picture painted by the data, environmental volunteering in the south west of England appears to be "vibrant and healthy" (Russell, 2009: 20). Indeed significant numbers of people are volunteering who are potentially gaining from the benefits highlighted in the Egan Report (2004) not only by developing practical and personal skills but also contributing to the well-being of communities. Current research suggests that young people volunteer for a variety of reasons and that volunteers are paradoxically motivated through both 'altruism' and 'selfishness/egoism' (Merrell, 2000) which Wardell et al (2000) term the 'duality of volunteering'. As such the most commonly cited reasons by young people for volunteering are either community/citizenship focused, 'helping people out' and 'being a good citizen' (Lister et al, 2001; Ellis, 2004) or personal career development (Ellis, 2002; v, 2008). Contemporary research on the context, experience and outcomes of volunteering suggests there are five broad motivational reasons to explain why young people volunteer (Devine, 2003; Ellis, 2004): personal feelings, personal needs, altruism, experience and personal rewards. These motivational practices are often ventured into through informal support networks such as the family and friends (Roberts and Devine,

2004). However, as Devine (2003) has identified, little is known about how different motivational practices change over time, how volunteers become involved through various networks, how volunteers manage their time with other commitments. To this end the remainder of this chapter explores, through a qualitative analysis, how young people become involved in, and experience, environmental volunteering and how through volunteering young people develop environmental skills and knowledges and a sense of self. We begin by discussing the research methodology.

Research Methods

The empirical findings of the study are drawn from research conducted in the West and South of England – encompassing Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, and Somerset – offering the study an illustrative and distinctive mix of landscape contexts in which to explore its concerns. We used a mixed methodological approach involving: an extensive structured survey of environmental organisations and groups offering opportunities for unpaid/voluntary environmental conservation in rural areas; in-depth interviews with individuals responsible for the design and delivery of, as well participation within, these environmental programmes; and finally a combination of depth interviews and focus groups with young people² aged between 14-25 and encompassing both participants and non participants in environmental conservation activities.

Before moving on it is first necessary to say something about the problems of defining youth in this research. Youth as a category is understood to be the gap between being a child and an adult, but this deceptively simple statement hides quite a complex debate about whether youth ‘starts’ at a certain age. The Children’s Society, for example,

² In contemporary youth studies there has been considerable debate on how to refer to people aged between 13-25 (Wyn and White, 1997). The terms ‘child’, ‘teenager’ and ‘adolescent’ are now perceived to be inappropriate referents, the latter because of its association with deviance and the former two as they are believed to be demeaning. In accordance with these considerations we have chosen to refer to the research volunteers in this study as young people.

suggests that youths are people between the ages of 13 and 25 (cf. Adams and Ingham, 1998), while the Citizenship Survey uses the category 16-24 (DCLG, 2008). We have chosen a slightly longer age range of 14-25 to reflect the nature of young people engaging with environmental organisations in our survey. However this effort to order youth into categories is problematic for two main reasons; first it homogenises them into a single group and ignores underlying differential experiences; second, it is predicated on deterministic developmental theory that portrays young people in transition, from childhood to adulthood (Skelton and Valentine, 1998). In the empirical section we address these concerns through teasing out different experiences and illustrating that environmental education is part of a life course and not just for a 'transitional' phase.

The purpose of the extensive survey, conducted electronically and by post, was to deepen insight into key research themes across a larger sample than would be possible by in-depth research alone. Interviews with key informants, in turn, were designed to elaborate on the general insights of this survey through more interpretive approaches to analysis: to tease out the complexities of what shapes and limits how programmes of environmental conservation are devised, enacted and accredited by conservation groups, as well as what issues underlie effective partnership working with the wider youth and community sector. The final element of the methodology was designed to gauge motivations and disincentives for participation among different groups of young people and their receptiveness to different forms of learning and training as envisaged by programmes of environmental conservation work.

In total, the study solicited the views of 115 organisations/groups over the lifetime of the project. The extensive survey drew 82 responses from invitations to 273 environmental organizations/groups, representing a response rate of just over 30%. Depth interviews were conducted with 46 key informants from the environmental conservation sector, community organisations, schools and social services. A

combination of one to one interviews and focus groups were employed to solicit the views of 68 young people.

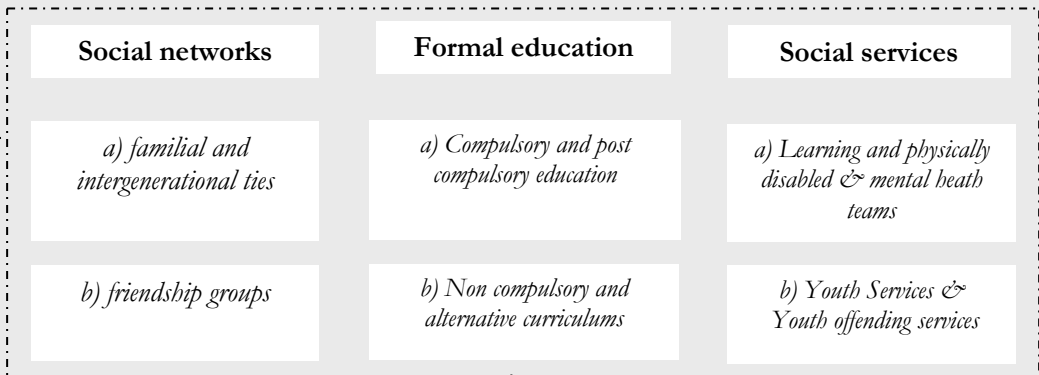
Evidence: Pathways to Participation in Rural Environmental Conservation

At the outset of this chapter we proposed three research themes. First, how are programmes of unpaid environmental work structured for young people? Second, how do these processes then relate to the wider needs of young people? Finally does environmental volunteering offer the possibility of sustainable rural development? These questions are best answered in a discursive way as they are closely linked.

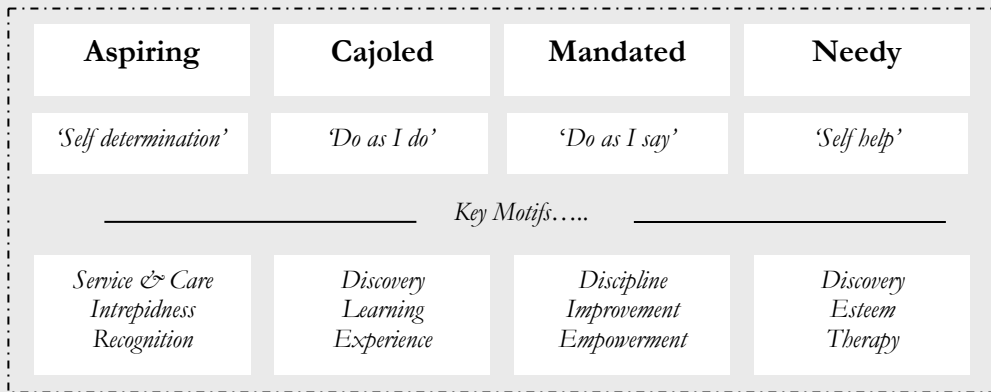
In Figure 1 overleaf we depict an overall picture of the way in which voluntary and unpaid environmental conservation activities in rural areas are structured in relation to youth participation. Our research indicates that young people find pathways to participation in three key ways. First, in accordance with Low et al's (2007) findings, they find pathways through *informal social networks* whereby engagement in environmental conservation occurs either as a consequence of other family members' engagement in these activities, or as result of the participation of others among their peer group. In both cases participation is often marked out by a 'do as I do' logic, where older family members, or peer group leaders guide others into activities through a weak form of coercion, or what we term *cajoling*. Intergenerational guidance is often shaped by a parental notion of the value of 'joining in' or 'discovering' an activity, while enrolment through peer groups often occurs because the activity implies the building of 'social capital', such as creating friendships and earning respect (Mohan and Mohan, 2002). Given this, it is worth noting those peer groups 'leaders' tend to be motivated by *aspiration*. These aspirants are marked out by their sense of 'self-determination'. They regard activities as desirable because, alongside peer group benefits, conservation activities reflect ethical positions (notably ideas of 'duty', 'care' and 'service'), imply experiential benefits (such as 'intrepidness'), fit life goals (such as acquiring skills and

knowledges for a career) and accrue formal markers of achievement (such as awards and certificates). Familial instruction tends to be strongest in the 14-16 age range and younger. Peer group leaders with aspirational identities function across the 14-19 age range.

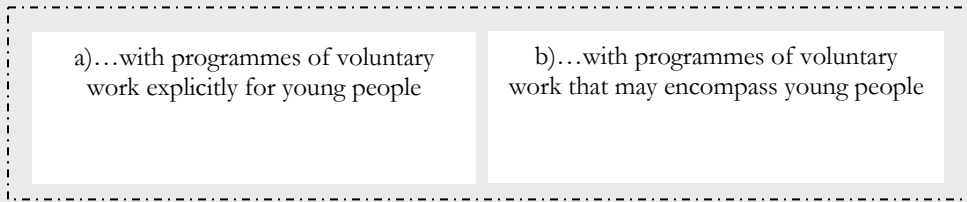
Pathways to participation



Participant identities....



Environmental Organisations...



Youth Organisations....

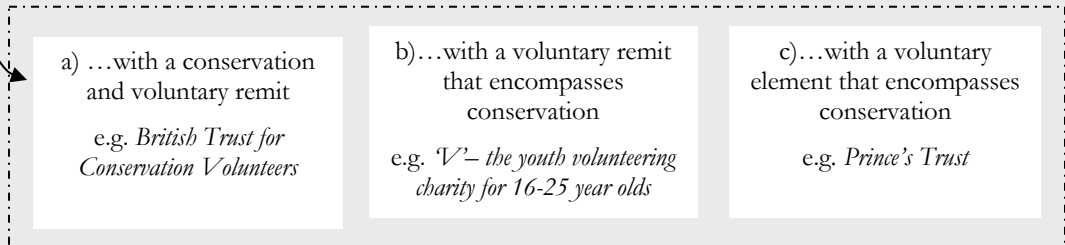


Figure 1. Youth participation in rural environmental conservation: networks, pathways and identities

Second, pathways emerge through more formalized *structures of education*. However, these structures are elided in the volunteering literature (cf. Hill et al, 2009) as there is an implicit assumption in volunteering research that young people only volunteer because they have made an affirmative decision. In these instances participation initially occurs as a result of the mechanisms of governance and empowerment surrounding young people in schools, colleges and universities. Important distinctions should be drawn here between compulsory, non-compulsory and post-compulsory contexts to participation. Compulsory contexts refer to the enrolment of those in the 14-16 range who need to meet the requirements of 'conventional' educational attainment (such as GCSEs). The participation of individuals here is defined, in small part, by the formal authority of the education system itself, which may *mandate* individuals to engage in these activities whether they wish to or not (a 'do as I say' logic), but this pathway is primarily a context in which 'early' aspirants find an outlet for their underlying interests and enthusiasms.

Similarly, post-compulsory education routes encompass 'mature' aspirants; that is, young people in the 17-25 age range who align activities very directly with wider vocational and accredited benefits. Non-compulsory education, in contrast, is dominated by a grouping that participates by mandate; individuals in the 14-16 age range who have, in different ways, fallen out of mainstream education and find themselves undertaking conservation activities through 'alternative' curriculum activities. These are individuals who are defined as 'problematical' in some way. Typically, they are considered disinterested or unable to engage in conventional academic learning. As one youth worker in Worcestershire suggested, there is the assumption that, "these are young people who are not going to be high achievers. These are the ones with the reputation in school for being the thickos or whatever". More often than not these individuals are also considered disruptive to other pupils' learning.

Individuals are thus directed towards conservation activities as means of empowering and/or controlling them.

Third, pathways emerge through *community and youth development remits of social services*. Participation in these activities is often facilitated for those physically and/or learning disabled, as well as those with specific physical and mental health needs, a process of *empowerment through therapy* (Williams, 2007). But beyond this, it also involves the youth and youth offending services developing more *mandatory pathways* to conservation. They do this because their remit is, depending on the perspective taken, to empower and/or control youth who are not in education, employment or training (so called 'NEETS'). It is also of note that the work of youth services also interacts closely with the wider criminal justice system, particularly over issues of probation and community service. This is an important source of unpaid conservation work in its own right (Nichols and King, 1998).

A demographic profile of the young people participating in conservation activities from our surveyed organisations is displayed in Table 1 overleaf. The responses point to the generally strong gender mix in these activities, modest numbers of people in paid employment and from needs-led backgrounds, as well as the slightly more common tendency for recruits to be drawn from towns and cities. Perhaps most notably, we should draw attention here to the decline in participants when they reach 16 years of age, with participation then rising sharply after 19 years of age. Our evidence illustrates that this dip reflects, in part, changing priorities in the lifecycle of young people. As James explained, "*Look I was into it at school, then it went out the window...drinks, girls partying*". It also reflects the dissipation of more coercive forms of participation in environmental conservation, such as cajoling by older family members, and the mandates of schools and social services. The sharp rise, in turn, involves what we term the 're-assertion of aspiration'. Many individuals in full time post-compulsory education will volunteer because they believe they 'must' do so to gain a paid occupation in the

sector (the notion of 'doing your time' is one way this is expressed by participants, and points to a element of mandate even within aspirational pathways).

Age	% of groups
<i>Organisation includes members:</i>	
• under 16	63
• between 16-18	47
• between 19-25	80
Gender	
<i>Composition of youth membership:</i>	
• Predominantly male participants	13
• Predominantly female participants	5
• Mixed	82
Employment	
<i>Organisation include youth members:</i>	
• in full-time employment	34
• in part-time employment	41
• in compulsory/non compulsory education	59
• in post-compulsory education	52
• who do not have paid employment	58
• in training for a profession in environmental conservation	54
Geography	
<i>Organisation include youth members:</i>	
• who live in the countryside	66
• drawn from nearby towns and cities	78
• who come from towns and cities further afield	21
Needs	
<i>Organisation include youth members:</i>	
• with special needs (learning/physically disabled/health)	35

Table 1. Demographic Profile of conservation volunteers/unpaid workers up to 25 years of age (n=83)

Some will commit vacation time to programmes of activities because of the pleasure they derive from outdoor and nature related activities. It is also at this point that some unemployed young people, often from rural/agricultural backgrounds will seek out education and training to professionalise and accredit their skills. As Alan (19 year old) stated, “*what I need is certificates [in hedge laying, coppicing], if I get qualified I can probably get a job*”.

Framing Youth Participation

Our research suggests that the structures by which the activities of young people are defined in environmental conservation are the product of internally and externally defined systems of governance. By *internally defined systems of governance* we refer to the mechanisms put in place by environmental groups to rationalise the place of young people in their activities. Here an important distinction can be identified. On the one hand there are environmental groups that *explicitly design in-house programmes of conservation work for young people*, either separately from other activities or otherwise as a distinct element within wider programmes of environmental work. On the other hand, there are those that develop programmes of activity that may, in principle, encompass young people, but where *no overt distinction, or indeed reason, is made to propagate pursuits as specifically youth orientated*. In our survey less than a quarter of groups offered ‘bespoke’ youth activities. Those that did were typically nationally operating organisations with greater resources at their disposal to facilitate youth specific activities in the course of their work, and further, their *modus operandi* tended to be shaped by cognate concerns larger than nature conservation alone. A useful example here would be the National Trust, which actively seeks to incorporate young people into work critical to their mission through a nationally conceived young development programme, rolled out in local and regional settings. In contrast, those choosing not to make this distinction in the design of their programmes tended to be

smaller groups with tightly defined nature conservation and wildlife remits. These groups tended to claim that they had neither the resources nor inclination to set up 'youth clubs' (a label that was, on occasion, employed with disdain). Young people are by no means absent from these groups, but the point is that no internally defined sense of provision is made for them.

Externally defined systems of governance are those mechanisms that act upon the experiences of young people in environmental conservation given wider agendas for youth development. Our research indicates this process encompasses two key circuits of influence. The first concerns the work of those noted in the section above: *educational establishments and/or social services who have reason to facilitate people into environment conservation through mandate or need*. So, for example, our research revealed a number of instances whereby youth and community development officers actively defined programmes of work for young people working with co-ordinators of alternative school curriculums. What is notable about some of these mandated approaches, such as where environmental groups work with youth services and schools to facilitate 'naughty' young people into conservation, is that activities are entirely separated from other programmes of activity, leading sometimes to a 'green ghetto' effect on participants heightening feelings of marginality and otherness among participants. The second, and highly significant, external influence concerns the *wider network of youth organisations who seek out contexts in which young people can be engaged in conservation as part of their own youth development and accreditation programmes*. These youth networks include groups with well defined conservation and voluntary remits, (such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers), those with a voluntary remit, but which encompass conservation activities, (such as 'v' – the youth volunteering charity for 16-25 year olds), as well as those with a voluntary component to their work which, again, may encompass practices of conservation (such as the Prince's Trust and the Scouting Association). Through their (often longstanding) partnerships with environmental organisations and key individuals within them, these

youth networks effectively act as ‘gateways’ to conservation work. In our survey the vast majority of environmental groups, including those who design in-house programmes, interact to some degree with this wider network of youth organisations.

Rationalising and Approaching Activities

In the course of our research we surveyed organisations on the types of activities they undertook and asked respondents to reflect on what capacities they believed were being cultivated in the course of their work. We drew on the range of generic skills and values advocated by the *Egan Report* (2004) to inform this process and the results of this exercise are depicted in Table 2 overleaf. These results raise five issues given the wider findings of our work.

First, it is clear that, where activities are not directly planned for young people, and where associations with wider youth networks are weak, it is the achievement of practical environmental objectives, (such as establishing a vegetated buffer strip as part of a management plan, or replanting a hedgerow) which tend to preoccupy those leading and undertaking work. Conversely, where activities are youth specific and associations with the youth sector are deep, it is far more likely in our view to find organisations that align environmental goals to wider issues of personal development.

Second, we need to inspect with care the specific rationales of these environmental programmes. While a range of activities is undertaken we learnt that there are significant distinctions in programmes of activity regarding the balance between what we term ‘*body over mind*’ and ‘*mind over body*’ environmental practices. Our research shows, for instance, that while most conservation activities will contain an element of active thinking and knowledge acquisition (such as through monitoring and recording activities and designing features of landscape) it is also the case that many are dominated by very routine “grunt work” (such as digging holes; building footpaths;

clearing scrub). While such activities are a necessary part of conservation, and often justified through appeals to physical well being (so called 'Green Gyms'), it is in this vein that young people cajoled or mandated in these activities often recognised and articulated the fine line between their active, and conscripted, participation in volunteering:

- G1 They (National Park) don't know what the hell they're talking about.
G3 (more laughter) I'm in year twelve and like the National Park had to restore their paths, and us mugs had to pay to put chip wood along a bloody path, and it was soaking wet and freezing cold and
G2 You're like 16, 17, and they expect you to carry a massive bag of wood, up this really steep hill and to walk back down again.
G3 And then go back and get another one.
G2 Slave labour.
All agree.
G3 The knowledge we get from it is how to carry wood.
G1 How to lay a path in a flat line, (laugh), in a straight line, but who needs that?

Third, while organisations both through the electronic survey and interview were keen to stress the wider life-skills fostered for young people through their work, our research suggests that wider skill of leadership, management and co-ordination are often deemphasised in these activities. Opportunities to shape and design activities, for instance, occurred in only 29% of cases, while only 5% of groups allowed young people to contribute to the wider organisation and policies of the group. Indeed, whilst lots of organisations often regard themselves as *giving* young people the opportunity to volunteer, it is rare indeed for young people to see themselves as *getting* the opportunity to actively define what it is that takes place and thus cultivate other key skills in the process.

Types of activity undertaken	% of groups undertaking
<i>Scrub clearance</i>	70
<i>Habitat/Species monitoring</i>	68
<i>Boundary restoration and management</i>	58
<i>Foot path design/access</i>	48
<i>Managing or establishing woodlands for conservation</i>	48
<i>Creating or maintaining wildlife meadows</i>	46
<i>Creation of new/management of existing water features</i>	46
<i>Maintaining field margins for wildlife</i>	22
<i>Soil management</i>	10
Skills, knowledge & values cultivated	% of groups developing
<i>Co-operation and teamwork</i>	95
<i>Flexibility and adaptiveness</i>	65
<i>A 'can-do' mentality</i>	65
<i>A commitment to 'making it happen'</i>	64
<i>Awareness of limitations</i>	58
<i>Creative thinking</i>	51
<i>Respect for equal opportunity</i>	49
<i>Challenging assumptions</i>	43
<i>An ability to seek help</i>	43
<i>Openness to change</i>	40
<i>Strategic thinking</i>	35
<i>Humility towards others</i>	29
<i>Entrepreneurial outlook</i>	6

Table 2. Activities undertaken and capacities shaped through conservation activities

Fourth, our research demonstrates that, in some instances, the underlying purpose of activities fails to be adequately contextualised. Opportunities to explain how it is, for example, that an exercise in scrub clearance fits in with wider land management objectives are not always taken, meaning that participants are sometimes ‘clueless’ as to the broader intentions of conservation. Sometimes this occurs because those with responsibility for these wider management objectives, such as farmers, are often absent when activities take place. This can serve to create a sense in which conservation workers and volunteers are merely ‘guests’ permitted to work on the land, rather than active custodians of it. At the same time, we also identified many cases where group leaders went to great lengths to explain the ‘whys and whats’ of a particular activity. So for instance, one conservation officer employed in a community development role on an

estate in South Devon suggested, in relation to one youth programme, that:

I was very conscious of not just going in and doing a job for the sake of it just because it might be enjoyable but because it fitted my longer term management plan as it were for the estate. I wanted them to learn new skills and whatever, hedge layers or coppicing. The skill of what they're doing but also why they're doing it. That was always the driving force.

It is interesting in this context to note that a number of the interviewees within conservation organisations stressed the difficulties they faced in managing activities involving young people even if they had responsibility to do so. Indeed, many of our respondents were trained in the environmental sciences and *felt ill-equipped and unprepared to manage activities as a youth development activity, even if they wish to.* This presents problems for how we understand conservation programmes as activities that necessarily, or effectively, contribute to skills for sustainable communities even in programmes where youth development is a priority. This situation of conservation officers 'trying to be' youth workers can sometimes be inverted. Some organizations from the youth sector involving themselves closely with conservation activities employ individuals that are strongly motivated by issue of youth development, but who find themselves ill-equipped to deal with managing environmental projects. As one Somerset youth worker put it:

It is very tricky particularly for me because it was quite mad coming into it because I had no background in environmental work you know - I was employed as a youth worker. I knew nothing – I did my own exploring in the environment and picked it up.

In other words, the underlying message here is that individuals at the heart of sustainable community networks may not be adequately equipped to create the kind of conditions in which holistic learning takes place.

Fifth and finally, our research indicates that links between these practices of delivering environmental conservation and externally defined processes of accreditation, such as

degrees, HNDs and NVQs, occurs in a surprisingly small number of cases. More common was an emphasis on internally defined structures of certification and award giving, which are key ways of building esteem among young people, but do not map on to the wider labour market so effectively.

Enhancing participation

Taking these networks, pathways, identities and practices all together our research suggests that youth are a highly visible presence in environmental conservation activities, and that the issue of enhancing participation rests less on how to foster more participants into the sector than how to structure these activities in more productive ways. Certainly our findings imply that many, particularly larger and therefore more visible, environmental groups tend to draw on 'ready made' communities of young people, by which we mean that many groups and organizations are often passive recipients of a 'willing' or 'mandated' community of participants. As one, nationally active, environmental organisation put it:

We don't have much of an active recruitment strategy in as much as that we just have volunteers falling out of our ears and we don't need to...for the most part we get an awful lot of people just approach us just saying can we volunteer, can we volunteer, can we volunteer!?... It can make us quite lazy in making a kind of more, I mean [we are] very keen on ensuring, of involving a wide range of people and a representative demographic, but I think some of the more higher up managers are not that bothered about that because we are achieving our objectives.

Such a view makes the idea of 'community engagement officers' – a common role within many large environmental organizations – something of a misnomer. In some cases the activities of these organisations are oversubscribed, and thoughtful recruitment campaigns (segmented, for instance, according to different youth audiences) are simply not there.

Our assertion is that, rather than providing an opportunity to bring young people into the discussion over volunteering in their communities, the current focus on public order and skills development has paradoxically accelerated the marginalization of young people. This is not the way it has to be. The rapid pace of development in both town and countryside and concurrent need of communities to redefine themselves and their future needs should offer a chance to institute novel approaches leading to greater inclusion of the views of young people and to a more holistic community – one that balances the needs of residents, workers, and business owners. In conducting this research, we hope to uncover better ways of understanding what young people need from and have to offer to their communities and how, by using a more inclusive approach to development planning, the community as a whole can benefit.

Emerging work in the area of geographies of young people has begun to show how informal leisure spaces are critical locations in the development of young people's sense of self and citizenship (Leyshon, 2008). Simply being with other young people, such as in environmental volunteering, enables young people to construct and perform their identities and in turn, reflects the ways in which local spaces are constructed and appropriated. In particular, central to our argument is that young people will only develop an ethic of care for the environment if they are able to perform an affirmation of the self in, to borrow a term from Conradson (2003b: 521), a 'positive space', i.e. the creation of these spaces has the potentiality to produce 'hopeful and at times transformative relations'. This co-production of caring for self and place is central to producing long-term aspirational volunteering. Finally, we would like to suggest that to develop better mechanisms for the participation of young people in environmental volunteering and the more effective inclusion of youth, we believe environmental agencies can move from a process of provision *for* young people to planning provision *with* young people. Young people have much to offer in support of vibrant and sustainable communities and can help plan activities that are informed by their interests. In particular, the more effective inclusion of youth in planning environmental

volunteering can result in the provision of public ‘environmental’ space that benefits both young people and the wider community. In an era of increasingly privatized, policed, and consumption-oriented spaces, focusing on the needs of young people can offer a way to preserve a more democratic idea of public space.

We have sought to capture this need to structure participation more effectively in Figure 2. In the context of sustainable rural development this considers environmental conservation as a context in which ethics of community contribution and environmental care can be cultivated, what we term ‘in the service of community’ and ‘enabling nature’ respectively. Our argument is that it is in the intersection of these two concerns that the aspirations, capacities and esteem of young people are most likely to be enacted, yet as our findings suggest, it is often the case that the precise inversion of these precepts is applied.

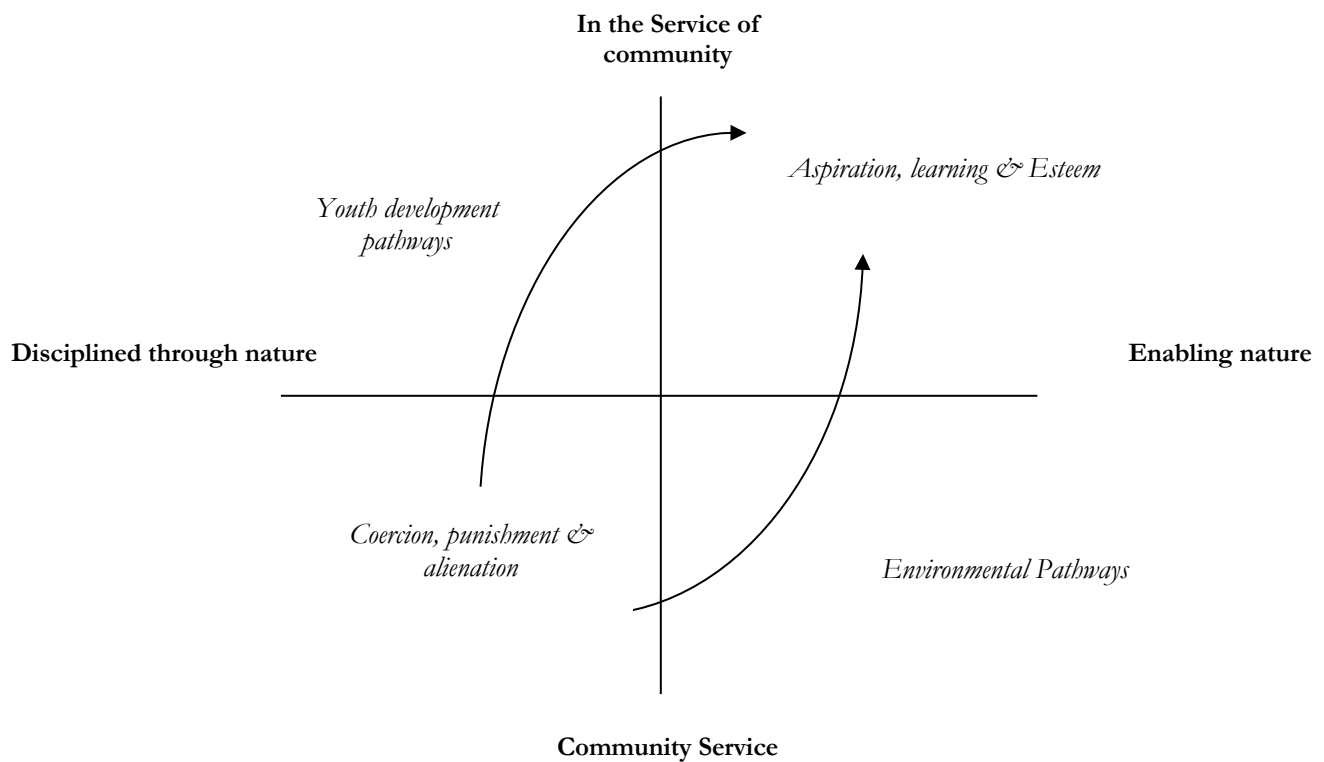


Figure 2 Facilitating the environmental conservation sector

Conclusion

Crucially, pathways to these sustainable intersections of nature and community in rural areas are dependent upon building effective working partnerships between both youth development networks and environmental practitioners. Our key message here is that to build capacity in the environmental volunteering sector and produce life-long environmental aspirants, requires a shift in emphasis from the delivery of pedagogic or disciplinary (coercion) modes of engagement for *ready-made* communities of young people to one based on young people's personal and social development. Environmental education for the sole purpose of the external governance of youth through self-improvement and discipline does not work for young people. Young people need to be encouraged and supported to become aspirational volunteers. In terms of policy, to build future 'aspirants' we need a youth sector that can facilitate the work of the environmental conservation sector at an early stage. In particular, one in which wider life-skills are fostered (such as leadership, management and co-ordination) alongside environmental skills and knowledges.

This chapter illustrates that future attempts to enable young people to learn about and become participants in environmental volunteering will only be successful if youth-serving and environmental organisations implement and sustain programmes that reflect a more comprehensive and integrated approach. This approach combines both instructional and experiential opportunities that are meaningful to young people themselves. To achieve this aim we recommend future research priorities should examine the following questions; what are the long-term effects of environmental volunteering on the life-courses of young people? What are the most effective strategies for integrating youth service-based and voluntary work-based learning for young people? In particular, how can environmental voluntary agencies and youth workers most effectively provide enriched personal and professional development

opportunities for young people, their educators and their potential employers? And finally, how can voluntary, youth services and businesses establish partnerships with each other and most effectively strengthen career environmental education? We need to question when this should begin and how we could better equip youth workers to fulfil this function.

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