

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 participants⁸ 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 DIY⁹ (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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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*¹⁰

“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.

¹⁰ 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*¹¹, or *diolch*¹² 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

¹¹ More correctly, prynhawn-da (good afternoon).

¹² 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 Welsh¹³ and the ease by which bilingual Welsh speakers flit into English whilst speaking¹⁴ 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 community¹⁵, whose institutions are characterised by permanence and

¹³ e.g. *tacsi*/taxi or *garej*/ garage.

¹⁴ 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”.

¹⁵ 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”¹⁶ (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 farm¹⁷ and Chapel are examples of one social world in rural Wales which is inaccessible to “outsiders”¹⁸. 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 identity¹⁹. 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

¹⁶ 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.

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

¹⁸ By which I mean those with no intersection with these institutions.

¹⁹ 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*²⁰ 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

²⁰ 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

dwelling 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.