OUR PLACE MATTERS

An Exploration of Young People's Participation in the Douglas Community
and International Models for Developing Community Participation

CARL
COMMUNITY - ACADEMIC
RESEARCH LINKS
University College Cork, Ireland

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CARL Research Project
In collaboration with 'Douglas Matters'

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What is Community-Academic Research Links?

Community Academic Research Links (CARL) is a community engagement initiative provided by University College Cork to support the research needs of community and voluntary groups/ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). These groups can be grass roots groups, single issue temporary groups, but also structured community organisations. Research for the CSO is carried out free of financial cost by student researchers.

CARL seeks to:

- provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;

- provide their services on an affordable basis;

- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;

- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;

- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and

- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers (www.livingknowledge.org).

What is a CSO?

We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include: trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees, and so on.

Why is this report on the UCC website?

The research agreement between the CSO, student and CARL/University states that the results of the study must be made public through the publication of the final research report on the CARL (UCC) website. CARL is committed to open access, and the free and public dissemination of research results.

How do I reference this report?

Author (year) *Dissertation/Project Title*, [online], Community-Academic Research Links/University College Cork, Ireland, Available from: http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/completed/ [Accessed on: date].

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that the dissertation titled: 'Our Place Matters: An exploration of Young People's Participation in the Douglas Community and International Models for Developing Community Participation' submitted to the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of 'Master of Social Work', is my own work.

Where the work of others has been referred to within this research, it has been cited and referenced using approved academic referencing. This dissertation has been submitted through 'TurnItIn' and any changes necessitated by the originality report generated, have been addressed.

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Date: 19th April 2018

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As this research is a CARL project carried out in conjunction with the community group Douglas Matters I want to acknowledge the help and support provided by the members of the group, particularly Louise Murphy for her availability, assistance in accessing schools and practical support.

Finally and perhaps most significantly I want to thank the transition year students of the three schools in Douglas. Your participation in this research through the completion of the survey questionnaire forms the cornerstone of this thesis. May your voices be heard!

ABSTRACT

This research dissertation assesses the participation of young people within the Douglas Community in County Cork, Ireland as well as considering international models of community participation. This research was proposed by the community based working group 'Douglas Matters' and was subsequently formulated as a CARL project.

Primary research was carried out qualitatively using a survey questionnaire which was created by the researcher. This survey was then circulated to transition year students in three secondary schools in Douglas. Secondary research was also carried out in the form of a review of both domestic and international literature relating to community participation.

The findings of this research indicate that there is a need for further services for y/p in Douglas and a need to develop platforms whereby y/p can have a voice in decisions affecting them. The establishment of a youth café and a local youth council are recommended.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

For the purpose of this research study the following terms apply:

- **Young People (Y/P):** Those aged between 13 and 19 years of age.
- **Douglas:** The town of Douglas, County Cork, Republic of Ireland.
- **Transition Year Students:** Young people (as defined above) who are in their fourth year of second level education.
- **Adult Stakeholders:** Those who are in a position of authority, responsibility or influence within Douglas e.g. local politician, Garda, business owner, sports coach, school principal etc.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the chosen CARL research project including a background to the study and its rationale. A further purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research aims, objectives and questions.

1.2 Title

'An exploration of Young People's Participation in the Douglas Community and International Models for Developing Community Participation'.

1.3 Background to CARL Project

Following concerns raised by the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) as to the number of referrals they were receiving from young people (y/p) in the Cork area, a working group was established to address these concerns. A pilot project was run by the ISPCC in the Cork City suburb of Douglas in 2014-2016 through which y/p, adult stakeholders and others living in the area gave their views on the issues which are impacting upon y/p. Following this research a collaborative working group, Douglas Matters, was formed which operates in conjunction with the Douglas Community Association. Douglas Matters requested participation in a UCC Community Academic Research Link (CARL) project in order to gain further insight into what issues are affecting y/p in Douglas and what interventions might address these issues.

The factors which both aid and inhibit the participation of y/p in their local community are addressed in this research study through two avenues. Firstly, y/p participated in a survey questionnaire, the results of which have been analysed and the findings (their voice) presented to Douglas Matters.

Secondly, a thorough review of international models of best practice for community participation has be used to draw up a series of recommendations which Douglas Matters and the wider Douglas-

community could consider following for enhancing their own inclusion of y/p in decisions which impact upon them.

This is a group project which I have completed with two other students, however, each of us have completed three individual, independent and distinct research studies. The research has been carried out in collaboration with UCC Community Academic Research Links (CARL) and Douglas Matters. CARL is a community engagement initiative set up by University College Cork in 2006 for the purpose of supporting the research needs of community groups and organisations. CARL invites Civil Society Organisations (CSO) to submit a research topic of interest to be pursued by students on their behalf (University College Cork, 2017). The CSO that proposed this study is Douglas Matters.

1.4 Rationale

I was drawn to this research project as it is a grassroots community project. Social work has a rich history of being community based. In recent decades social work practice has moved primarily towards statutory-run services and the focus of the work is towards the individual rather than the community (Teater, 2014). Nevertheless social work continues to take place within communities and the individuals we work with exist within a wider community. The core objective of this research study has been to evaluate y/p within a particular community and analyse that community's willingness to encourage the participation of those y/p.

There is evidence to show that certain members within a community often hold the balance of power in their favour, thus the views of others in the community are not heard (Coulshed and Orme, 2012). Therefore it is important that I identified the potential power imbalances within the Douglas community and encourage the involvement of a wide and indiscriminate sample of the members of the community. This was achieved through my collaboration with the other two researchers who are contributing to this CARL project. I focused on obtaining the views of y/p on what issues are affecting them within the community, Cara McCarty obtained the views of a range of stakeholders within the community and Stephanie Tipps conducted a photo voice initiative with a cohort of at risk y/p. As mentioned these are three distinct research studies that will be complied into a single report for Douglas Matters at a later stage.

A personal motivation for becoming involved in this research project stems from the researcher's previous experience of working in a TUSLA residential special care unit for 3 years, responding to youth in crisis and at risk of suicide, self-harm, sexual exploitation, addiction etc. The completion of a social work placement in the Acute Adult Mental Health and the Probation Service fuelled this motivation as the researcher was challenged to consider the complexities of human life whilst also instilling the belief that social work intervention can and does make a tangible difference in people's lives. It is hoped that this research will give a voice to y/p in Douglas by highlighting the issues which may be inhibiting upon their participation in the community.

1.5 Aim of Research

The aim of this research study is to determine whether y/p feel that they have adequate participation in the Douglas community. International models of community participation have been analysed to determine what interventions/resources might increase or benefit y/p's participation in the community of Douglas.

1.6 Objectives

The core objective of this research study is:

- Gain an insight into y/p's perception of their participation in the community of Douglas.

- Analyse the data to determine what y/p value and/or would like to change about the spaces and places that they use in Douglas.
- Review international models for enhancing community participation.

1.7 Research Questions

The specific questions which this research is seeking to answer are:

a) Do y/p feel that they have adequate opportunities to participate in the Douglas community?
b) What are the internationally recognised best practice models for enhancing community participation?
c) Are there interventions which, if implemented, could increase and support y/p's participation in the Douglas community?

1.8 Reflexive Position of Researcher

According to (Maso, 2003, p. 40) 'subjectivity is an inevitable part of the research process'. It is important that I acknowledge that all research carries the potential for bias, on the part of the participants and the researcher. It is hoped that much of my potential bias has been diluted by the fact that this research was a CARL project carried out in collaboration with Douglas Matters and that I was supervised throughout the process by my academic supervisor.

1.9 Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Introduction
The first chapter gives an outline of the research project, including the background to the study and its rationale as well as providing and overview of the research aims, objectives and questions.

Chapter Two: Methodology
The second chapter focuses on the research design including the theoretical underpinnings of the research and the methods used to carry out the research.

Chapter Three: Literature Review
The third chapter reviews literature relating to y/p's participation in the community in Ireland. Furthermore there is a review of international literature as it relates to international models of youth participation.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis
Chapter four looks at the themes that arose following the collection of data using a survey questionnaire. The findings are discussed and a number of graphs/tables used to display the data.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations
The final chapter ties the research together by relating the findings of the data to the literature reviewed and making conclusions and recommendations both in a general sense and specifically to Douglas Matters. The chapter and research project closes with a reflective piece relating to the researcher's experience of conducting the research.

1.10   Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction to the reader of the chosen CARL research project, outlining the background to the study as well as its rationale. The research title, questions and aims were presented along with a definition of terms and a brief overview of each chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

This section will outline the theoretical foundation of the research as well as the research process used in gathering and analysing the survey data. The ontological and epistemological position of the researcher will be clearly stated and supported with reference to relevant literature. The chapter will also include an overview of the research design and the chosen method of qualitative data collection and analysis. The chapter will conclude with an acknowledgement of the ethical considerations of undertaking a research project of this nature.

2.2 Philosophical and Theoretical Underpinnings

Teater (2014, p. 4) states that 'theories assist social workers in understanding, explaining or making sense of situations or behaviours'. The main theory which is applicable to this study is that of systems theory and the ecological perspective. Given that this is a CARL research project the researcher utilised a participatory paradigm whereby the research questions were constructed in collaboration with the community group; Douglas Matters.

A post positivist paradigm was used in the data collection and data analysis guided by critical realism. Critical realists hold that knowledge about the environment and world we live in is socially constructed (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p. 17). Furthermore humans are conscious, thinking, feeling beings and their interpretations of the world we live in must be studied (Danermark *et al.,* 2002, p. 200).

2.3 Ontology

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue that a critical realism approach to research is guided by the principal that though there is a defined reality, this reality is interpreted and understood in different ways by different people. In using the ontological approach of critical realism the researcher was able to gather data on the lived experiences of y/p, as interpreted by them, who live and/or socialise in Douglas. In analysing the data the researcher could then identify commonalities in what interventions/resources might increase the participation of y/p in the Douglas community.

2.4 Epistemology

Carey (2012, p. 78) states that 'Epistemology relates to the study of knowledge and science'. The researcher used an objectivist epistemology which allowed for the production of statistical generalizable findings. This numerical data could then be translated into tangible, evidence based recommendations for the community group 'Douglas Matters' to implement in Douglas.

2.5 Methodology

This research study consists of both primary (survey questionnaires) and secondary (literature review) research. The primary research comprised of a survey questionnaire which was conducted with transition year students in Douglas. The logic behind using school going students as the sample group was primarily that the vast majority of y/p attend school. Therefore they are broadly representative of the wider youth population (Coleman and Testa, 2006). Permission to conduct this research was granted by the community group and the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) of UCC. The survey was made up of a series of open, closed, multiple choice and ranking scale questions. Where a ranking scale question was posed an 'other' or 'neither agree nor disagree' option was included. The data from these surveys was then analysed by the researcher using quantitative methods (see 2.9 Data Analysis). This analysis led to the production of thematic findings and recommendations which will enable the community group to have an evidenced based foundation for their implementation.

2.6 Research Methods

Research methods are the procedures used to obtain data (Carey, 2013). The rationale for using survey questionnaires is that it allows for the target participants, transition year students, to participate in the research whilst maintaining anonymity (the surveys had unique identification codes so that identities were protected). The use of surveys also enabled the researcher to gather a large amount of data using pre-prepared focused questions in a format which the community group agreed was the least intrusive platform for the intended target participants.

2.7 Research Questions

A full copy of the survey questionnaire is included in the appendices.

2.8 Sampling

Participants for this research study were sourced using a method commonly known as purposive sampling. This method involves selecting participants based on their ability to provide the required information (Padgett, 2008). The purposive sample was identified in a series of meetings with Douglas Matters. Following these meetings it was agreed that transition year students in four secondary schools located in the Douglas area would provide a representative sample of the population of y/p in Douglas. Permission was sought from each of the school principals prior to any research being conducted. The purpose of the research project was explained to the students and a pack provided to each of them to bring home consisting of an information sheet, parent/legal guardian consent form, a participant assent form, and a copy of the survey. The students then returned the pack to the school, completed the survey and returned it to the researcher. The surveys were matched whereby a unique identification code was assigned to each survey matching it to the participant assent form and the parent/guardian consent form.

2.9 Data Analysis

The survey was designed by the researcher following consultation with Douglas Matters. The survey and the purpose of the research was explained to the sample pool of the first school on 9th March 2018. The parent/guardian consent forms were handed out to the students who then took them home to be signed. The students who had parent/guardian consent and had signed participant assent completed the survey on 12th March 2018. A total of 65 surveys were handed out and 26 were received back completed. The same process occurred in the second and third school during the school week of 19th-23rd March. Figure 1 shows the response levels for each school.

	Maximum Potential Pool	Surveys Handed Out	Surveys Completed
School 1	96	65	26
School 2	80+	33	10
School 3	80+	74	7

Figure 1: School Response Figures

2.10 Ethical Considerations

It was not necessary to apply for ethical approval from any external agency for the purpose of this research study. However there were a number of considerations to take into account regarding the target participants of this research project. As the participants are y/p it was necessary to apply for approval to conduct this research to the UCC social research ethics committee (SREC). This application was made in December 2017. Permission to proceed was granted by SREC in January 2018 with no recommendations/alterations required.

2.11 Limitations

As a researcher I recognise that one of the core limitations of the methodology used in this research study is the number of y/p who completed the survey. Unfortunately it was not possible to gain access to all four schools in Douglas despite efforts to do so. I successfully gained access to three schools and handed out a total of 172 surveys and received back a total of 43 completed surveys. It is acknowledged that the number of surveys completed was disappointing given the large number that were handed out. However, there were a number of factors which may have influenced the low response rate. Firstly the students had to take a consent form home to be signed by a parent/guardian and many forgot to get it signed. Secondly there was disruption within individual schools due to time-tabling whereby I was unable to meet all of the students to whom I had given a survey. Finally some students may not live/socialise within the Douglas area and/or for various reasons did not wish to participate in the research. Whilst the low response rate is a limitation I nevertheless am confident that the data obtained is of use and will be of interest to Douglas Matters. Furthermore I have learned through this experience the importance of having a large sample pool and allowing for unexpected interruptions.

2.12 Conclusion

This chapter sought to outline the theoretical foundation of the research. As in every research project the researcher must take a specific ontological and epistemological position, these were clearly stated and supported with reference to relevant literature. The chapter included an overview of the research design, chosen sample and the method used for data collection and analysis. The chapter concluded with the ethical considerations and limitations of the method used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the context and background of this CARL project. An explanation of 'participation' will proceed a wider analysis of y/p's participation in Ireland. International examples of community participation will then be presented along with a thorough review of current literature. The chapter will conclude with the reader's attention being drawn to the relevance of this study to social work practice.

The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) flagged concerns as to the number of referrals they were receiving from y/p in Cork, this led to the development of a pilot project called Douglas Matters in 2014-2016. Y/p, adult stakeholders and others living in the area gave their views on the issues which were impacting upon y/p as well as the positive aspects of living in the area. Following this pilot project a collaborative working group, Douglas Matters, was formed which operates in conjunction with the Douglas Community Association.

Douglas Matters requested participation in a UCC Community Academic Research Link (CARL) project in order to gain further insight into what issues are affecting young people in Douglas and what interventions might address these issues. Of specific concern to Douglas Matters was the participation of y/p in the community of Douglas and whether or not the spaces, places and services in the area are meeting their needs. It is the aim of this research thesis to determine whether y/p feel that they have adequate participation in the Douglas community. Through the use of a survey questionnaire the voices of y/p have been obtained on this issue and insights gained into what changes they feel would improve their participation. In the initial meetings and discussions with Douglas Matters it was acknowledged that the research also ought to allow space for the y/p to highlight the positive aspects of life in Douglas. The questions in the survey were posed in a manner that such views may be included.

3.2 What is Participation?

The participation of y/p in their communities and in decisions which affect their lives is important. It is important because y/p have experiences, abilities and rights as citizens which, when utilised, contribute

to a rich and diverse society. Furthermore it provides them with knowledge and skills which can only serve to better their development within a community (Checkoway, 2011). Participation includes initiatives by y/p, adult stakeholders (e.g. youth workers, sport's coaches) and community organisations (private and public) to merge together in intergenerational partnership (Percy-Smith, 2010). This will be discussed further as relevant literature is reviewed. Participation has a range of definitions naturally dependent upon the context in which it is used. The 'participation' which this literature review refers to is that which the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines as the:

> . . . "ongoing processes, which include information sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes"
>
> (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, p. 3).

3.3 Young People's Right to Participate

Article 12 of the UNCRC outlines that y/p's views must be included in policy making which impacts upon their lives. Ireland ratified the UNCRC in 1992 committing itself to the rights of y/p to voice their views in all matters affecting them. A crucial policy aimed at meeting these commitments was the National Children's Strategy 2000-2010, this was followed by Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014-2020 (2014), the national policy framework for children and young people. During the past two decades a range of further steps have been taken to support the participation of y/p. Such steps included the establishment of a national advisory panel of children and y/p: a national youth council and thirty-four local child and youth councils specifically aimed at y/p aged 12 to 18 years. The first full ministerial post and Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) was established in 2011. This led to the publishing of a national strategy 2015-2020, specifically centred on children and y/p's participation in the decision making process. Ireland became the first country to introduce such a strategy (Horgan *et al.,* 2015).

The establishment of the office of an Ombudsman for Children in 2003 further highlighted the state's efforts to ensure that y/p have a voice in the development of policy, legislation and services.

The DCYA, which has overall governmental responsibility for the implementation of policy and practice guidelines relating to y/p in Ireland, included in the goals of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014-2020 (2014) report a recognition that:

". . . promoting the participation of Children and Young People in decision-making involves taking their views seriously and acknowledging and responding to them appropriately"

(Horgan, *et al.,* 2015, p. 31).

The DCYA set out a range of participatory initiatives to ensure that the views of y/p were heard and considered in the decision making process. These are outlined in figure 2.
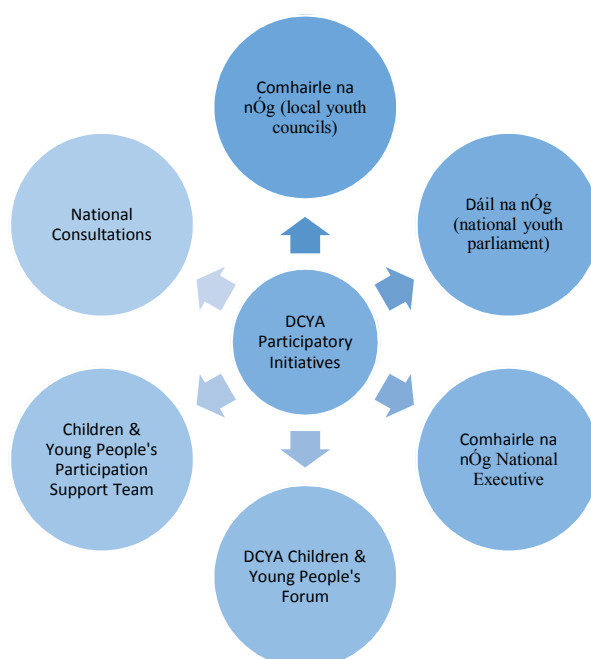
Figure 2: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014-2020 (2014), Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

It would appear that given the range of initiatives mentioned, particularly those implemented on a governmental policy level, y/p would have ample opportunity to participate in their communities and influence the decisions which affect them. However, y/p participate in their communities in a range of ways, both formally and informally. Their participation covers a multitude of environments and contexts making an analysis of their engagement far more complex than a summary of government or rights based initiatives (De Roiste and Dineen, 2005). Therefore, through further scoping of the literature the participation of y/p on a daily basis as well as a consideration of the theory, local and

international models and a social work perspective will be analysed in order to offer a more robust assessment of y/p's level of participation.

3.4 The Participation of Young People in Irish Communities

According to most recent data, the ratio of y/p (15-19 years of age) in the total population of Ireland is 6.4% (Eurostat, 2017). The spaces and places in which y/p participate on a daily basis varies between home, school, sports centres and public spaces. Most Irish y/p involve themselves in planned community activities such as sports clubs, youth groups and other after-school activities. Research shows that a high percentage of Irish y/p are active in their community and participate in at least one sport and one hobby each week (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012). Throughout the literature there appears to be widespread acknowledgement of the positive associations of y/p's participation, with some 382,600 young people participating in local youth clubs in 2013 (National Youth Council of Ireland, 2013). Some y/p become involved in formal public life through joining local youth organisations and/or local and national youth councils. These formal avenues of participation are, however, in the minority when contrasted with the high number of y/p who are involved in more informal activities such as local sports clubs, scout groups or other recreational clubs. The purpose of such informal participation is largely interest based with social engagement being the goal rather than political influence or a desire to change policies (De Roiste and Dineen, 2005).

In an extensive study conducted by the DCYA (2012) y/p ranked education, sport and activities as some of the top things they like about living in Ireland. Interestingly when asked what they disliked: education, economy and finances as well as anti-social behaviour ranked as the top factors (DYCA, 2012). There appears to be some disparity here in relation to y/p's views on education. As the breath of literature relating to y/p's participation within the school environment is extensive and the aim of this research is y/p's participation in the community the focus will remain on after or 'out of' school participation. It should be noted that this is an area for future or further research.

3.5 Barriers to the Participation of Young People

Having looked at the ways in which y/p participate it is necessary to evaluate the barriers to such participation. The literature outlines the importance of providing opportunities and platforms through

which y/p can engage in self-organisation in contexts which they interpret as relevant to their lived experience. As discussed earlier this is inclusive of, though not limited to, opportunities for informal participation (Forde, *et al.,* 2017). Such participation can be as formal as a y/p's involvement in a local youth council or as informal as 'hanging-out' with friends in a local public space. Contrary to evidence provided in the literature, opportunities for the participation of y/p in self-initiated and informal activities appear to be actively dissuaded through restrictive community management policies. These can include the use of curfews, controls by police who may associate large numbers of y/p with problem behaviour and media induced moral panic relating to perceived issues associated with y/p such as anti-social behaviour and substance misuse (Morrow, 2005). Research also suggests that adult agendas and particularly those of local adult stakeholders has led to attempts to design y/p out of urban spaces. The exclusion of y/p from the decision-making forum and the attempt to dictate what spaces and places are allocated for their use leads only to tension in the youth-adult relationship. This is turn causes divisions within a community with y/p seen as a 'problem' or a cohort of society that must be 'managed' rather than being viewed as equal contributors to the community (Rogers, 2006).

Some of the key factors which act as barriers to y/p's participation have been highlighted by Taylor *et al.,* (2008) and include:

i. The challenge of moving beyond consultation whereby the 'voice' of y/p may be noted but little is done to consider their views in decisions which actually affect their lives.

ii. A pre-occupation with formal and structured decision-making processes which are predominantly adult led and therefore it is adults who set the agenda.

iii. A failure to acknowledge y/p's autonomous action in everyday (ordinary) life.

The potential for y/p to be active and valuable citizens is often overlooked or curtailed by adult agendas. This stems largely from assumptions regarding the capability of y/p to contribute a meaningful voice to the decision making process (Lansdown, 2010). Such assumptions are challenged by research evidencing the increase in y/p's ability for decision-making lies in direct correlation to the responsibilities and opportunities afforded them (Freeman, 2011).

Aim 5.3 of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, 2014-2020 (2014) recognises that y/p need opportunities to engage in civic discourses which ultimately influence policy:

. . . "This requires effective ways to draw on children's views, locally, nationally and internationally"

(DCYA, 2014, p. 102).

The intention may be to proactively involve y/p as agents of change in matters concerning them but the wording suggests otherwise. Simply drawing on the 'views' of y/p does not go far enough in ensuring that they play an active role in the direction of policy-making. Furthermore, the process of involving y/p in early stage discussions in order to obtain their contribution and then failing to include them in the latter stages of policy-making, development and implementation of their views can lead to what has been termed 'consultation fatigue'. This is the process whereby y/p grow sceptical of engaging in government consultations as it has brought little meaningful change to their daily lives (Sinclair, 2004).

3.6 Bridging the Divide between the Formal and the Informal

It is apparent from the research to date that the decisions which impact upon y/p are made within the context of everyday life rather than through political or legislative structures (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). The reality is that most y/p participate on a daily basis in the lives of their local communities but do so through less formal systems than youth councils or national governmental consultations. The number of y/p participating in the formal decision-making arena is relatively small (Leonard, 2016).

Percy-Smith (2010) suggests that y/p's participation needs to be viewed as being inclusive of their daily lived reality rather than solely through their involvement in formal structures. This is supported by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) which suggests that the inclusion and socialisation of y/p as active members of society occurs primarily through 'youth-in-context' interactions in the daily settings in which they participate. In other words, y/p decide where and how they spend their free time and what spaces they adopt as their own. This is despite efforts by policy makers, Gardaí or local adult stakeholders to obstruct or influence this reality.

There is a need therefore for governmental responses to reflect this through its introduction of local (community based) grassroots projects which serve to engage y/p in meaningful participation that may not necessarily have a formal agenda or end goal. Unless y/p are given joint ownership of how they

spend their free time and their voice is heard in decisions affecting the shaping of their community then they cannot be expected to feel valued as members of that community.

3.7 Youth-Adult Partnership

Existing research suggests that when y/p are encouraged to take on leadership roles within communities through governance, activism, organising, media and research then their development is enhanced and community participation is promoted (Sullivan and Larson, 2010; Christens and Peterson, 2012). In research conducted by Forde, *et al.,* (2017) the importance of spaces where there is shared responsibility between y/p and adults was highlighted throughout the interview data. Y/p can claim a sense of ownership when they are involved in relevant decision making such as design, activity schedule, means of fundraising etc. of a given space. The participants of these interviews were involved in youth cafés and youth clubs and spoke of their sense of ownership of these spaces (Forde *et al*., 2017). The concept of intergenerational partnership stems from the awareness that young people are relational beings who thrive when given opportunities to participate alongside their adult counterparts in areas which interest or inspire them. Such partnership can occur where there is intergenerational dialogue and a joint respect of roles (Wyness, 2012).

Local stakeholders who are involved in the lives of y/p (youth leaders, sports coaches etc.) hold a significant role in encouraging and promoting young people's participation. The literature shows that y/p are commonly 'resource-poor' compared to adults within their community and therefore there is a responsibility on adult stakeholders to reach out and invite the participation of y/p (Shier, 2010). The core elements of youth-adult partnership are depicted in figure 3*.* Adapted from the Zeldin, *et al.,* (2012) model of youth-adult partnership[1].

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[1] "Citizens across generations working together to address common concerns" (Zeldin et al., (2012: 385).
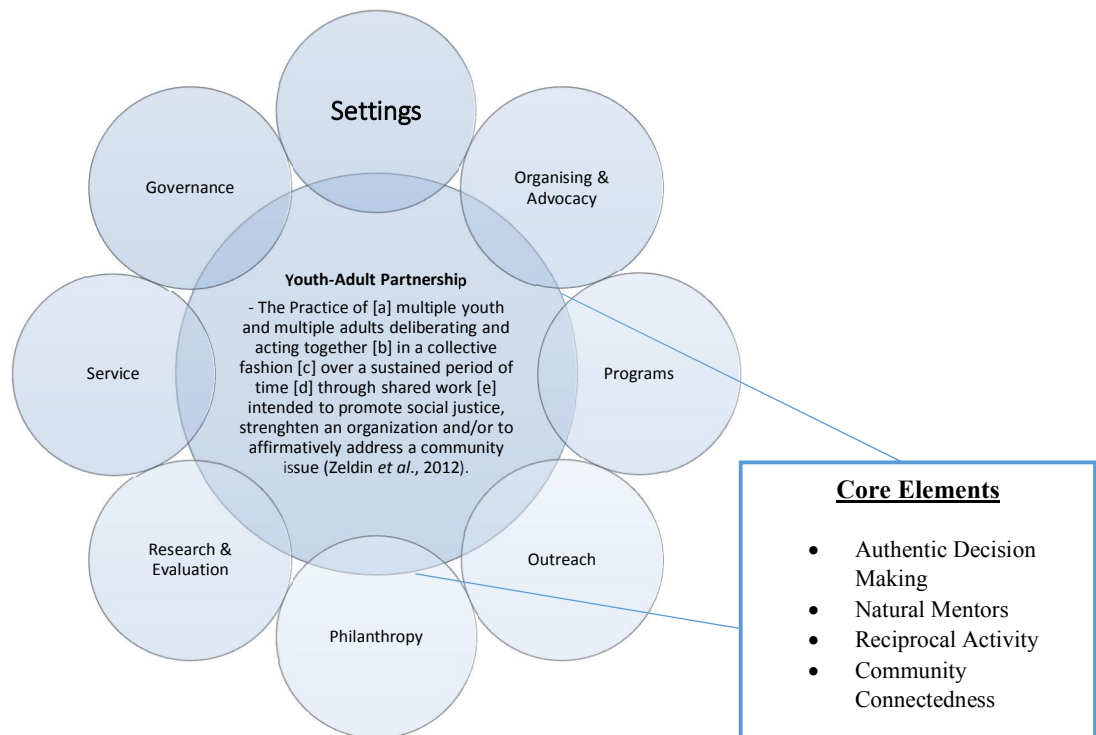
Figure 3: Adapted from the Zeldin et al., 2012 Model of Youth-Adult Partnership.

Inside the figure:

Settings

Governance

Organising & Advocacy

Service

Youth-Adult Partnership
- The Practice of [a] multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together [b] in a collective fashion [c] over a sustained period of time [d] through shared work [e] intended to promote social justice, strenghten an organization and/or to affirmatively address a community issue (Zeldin *et al.*, 2012).

Programs

Research & Evaluation

Outreach

Philanthropy

Core Elements
- Authentic Decision Making
- Natural Mentors
- Reciprocal Activity
- Community Connectedness

3.8 A Space and Place for Young People

International research suggests that despite our living in a 'global world' whereby the perception may be that we are increasingly influenced by other nations and cultures y/p continue to preserve their local cultural identity. This is achieved through the balancing of the "local me" and the "global me" as they traverse new sociospatial boundaries (Zachary, 2000).

Goffman's concept of frontstage and backstage regions refers to the spaces and places which people occupy on a daily basis. The suggestion being that people respond or 'act' differently based on their physical environment e.g. a college student may present much differently in the college canteen amongst their peers then when seated in an exam hall. Whilst this argument is predominantly concrete it does not apply in all contexts. Goffman himself highlighted the fact that individuals use space in different ways to "rehearse, manage and protect the integrity of their role performances" (Goffman, 1971). An example of this might be a group of y/p socialising in a local park. They will likely 'act' differently depending on the time of day, who is present and what activity they are engaged in. Therefore pace is fluid and ultimately the individual is the one who dictates how they act within it (Massey, 2005).

Furthermore the spaces which y/p occupy have changed dramatically in recent years due to the development of technology. Where formally y/p had to physically leave their house to meet friends there is now a new space which was non-existent for past generations; cyberspace.

> "Nowadays, young people's access to a home computer which may be located in their bedroom links home-space to cyberspace, making distinctions between "inside" and "outside", private and public space appear redundant, or at least fluid"
>
> (Abbott-Chapman and Robertson, 2009, p. 421)

Research carried out in the UK by Wang and Edwards (2015) found that there is a widely held belief that y/p expose themselves to potential harm through their use of online spaces to interact with others. This was shown to be unjustified as the reality is that y/p use online spaces to build relationships and practice their identify using similar strategies to offline interactions. This is supported by Ellison et al., 2011 who suggest that y/p use social media to build social capital and strengthen relationships which have already been formed offline. This suggests that offline interactions amongst y/p continue to be the predominant 'space' where relationships are established. The question then arises whether it is possible to identify spaces which would help foster y/p's positive peer interactions and increase their participation in the local community?

Percy-Smith, 2010; Nolas, 2015 call for the formation of informal spaces for y/p to congregate and spend their free time such as a youth café or youth centre. This follows a recognition that if such 'safe' spaces are not available y/p will inevitably source their own spaces to congregate and socialise which may not be safe such as the derelict or isolated boundaries of urban areas. Nolas (2015) argues that the establishment of such informal 'organic' youth spaces enable y/p to develop solid relationships both with adult volunteers or youth workers and with their peers and to have a place of connection within the community.

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of Youth Cafes in Ireland over the past decade. This is due in large part to *Teenspace, the National Recreation Policy for Young* People (Office of the Minister for Children, 2007). Teenspace recommended national governmental investment in the provision of youth cafes, funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. A study by Forkan, *et al.,* 2015 found that there was a minimum of one youth café in every county, Cork having a total of 20, the second highest after Dublin.

In a recent study by Moran, *et al.,* (2018) into y/p's discourses about the youth café model in Ireland it was concluded that such spaces allow for:

- Y/p to make informed choices about risk taking behaviour e.g. sexual health, alcohol and drug misuse, and driving. This is due to the fact that many youth cafes also act as places of information and/or external service provision (counselling, addiction advice etc.).
- A place where y/p can be themselves whilst also connecting with others and building positive relationships with adults and peers. This is particularly the case where there is a youth-adult partnership model in place.
- Informal attendance by y/p which creates a sense of autonomy over the space. As there is no one forcing them to attend they do so of their own accord.

The youth café model adheres to principles of autonomy, individuality, anti-discriminatory practice and empowerment. These align with core social work values and principles of practice.

3.9 International Models for Enhancing Young People's Participation in the Community

In order to draw comparisons with the current opportunities for youth participation in the Irish context it is worthwhile looking at other jurisdictions and assessing if recommendations can be drawn from their policies or practice. For the purpose of this comparative analysis three international models have been identified; Sweden, Germany and Finland. They were chosen following an extensive review of various European governmental policies as well as academic literature relating to the participation of y/p in local and national policy development. It will be shown that these countries each have similarities with the Irish context but also some important differences which could be adopted to enhance the participation of y/p in Irish communities.

3.9.1 Sweden

According to most recent data, the ratio of young people (15-19 years of age) in the total population of Sweden is 5.3% (Eurostat, 2017). Swedish youth policy is unique in that there is no single document covering youth affairs. Rather a cross-sectorial approach is taken whereby youth issues are considered across a range of governmental policy documents including education, employment, health, housing, power, culture etc. This ensures that all government decisions that affect y/p have a youth perspective. This perspective is based on human rights and outlines that y/p are to be treated as a diverse group of

individuals with different backgrounds and circumstances. Furthermore, all y/p should be afforded opportunities to influence and participate in decisions affecting them.

Leisure time accounts for a large portion of a y/p's life, therefore how they use that time is significant both for their development and sense of purpose. In an extensive research study conducted in Sweden between 2012 and 2014 researchers sought to determine the importance of meaningful leisure time for y/p (Fredriksson, *et al.,* 2018). The study drew from the examples of two youth centres in Sweden which are operated by an NGO but funded by the Swedish government. These youth centres adhere to the Ottawa Charter which states that,

'Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their every-day life, where they learn, work, play and love'

(World Health Organisation, 1986)

These youth centres also seek to actively promote the four main areas of the Ottawa Charter: build healthy public policy, create supportive environments, strengthen community actions and develop personal skills. The conclusions drawn by the researchers included:

- The integration of family, school and community. Partnership and collaboration between y/p people and adult stakeholders (including parents) is crucial for health-promoting settings and sustainable youth projects.
- NGO's play a key role in civil society often ensuring that youth projects are sustainable and more cost effective.
- Use of practice-based research on an ongoing basis enables y/p to be actively involved in developing and improving youth centres.

(Fredriksson, *et al.,* 2018).

3.9.2 Germany

According to most recent data, the ratio of y/p (15-19 years of age) in the total population of Germany is 5.1% (Eurostat, 2017). The Youth Strategy introduced in 2015 focuses on y/p and places them at the centre of inter-ministerial cooperation. The main principle of the Youth Strategy is the participation of y/p. The most recent development is the Jugendcheck, translated as 'Youth Check'.

This is an instrument which assesses the impact of national legislation on the day to day lives of y/p. In addition, it assesses whether or not y/p were actively involved in the development of local youth initiatives and projects. In 2009 the German Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development launched a research initiative titled 'Adolescents in Urban Neighbourhoods'. The aim of this initiative was to encourage the participation of y/p in urban development and planning, with y/p being active participants on the projects. Three pilot slots were run between 2009 and 2013 with a total of 55 individual projects ranging from city and region land use plans to neighbourhood urban renewal projects. Another project focused on public space design and re-development plans whilst others involved site and building design for the transformation of youth facilities (Heinrich and Million, 2016). This initiative marked a major development in the participation of y/p in German society. What was key to its success was that it was run on a top-down structure meaning that planning and policy obstacles were less of an issue than if a bottom-up approach had been taken. This initiative stands as an example of the possibilities available to actively involve y/p in their community using innovative and creative means.

3.9.3 Finland

According to most recent data, the ratio of y/p (15-19 years of age) in the total population of Finland is 5.5% (Eurostat, 2017). In many respects Finland remains the standard bearer for youth participation in Europe and it could be argued; worldwide. It is one of the few countries which has a specific law protecting the rights of y/p, which has been in place since 2006. The Youth Act 2017 replaces the original Youth Act 2006 and was updated in order to,

> ..."promote young people's social inclusion and opportunities for exerting an influence; improve their skills and capabilities to function in society; support their growth, independence and sense of community"... (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).

The Act is supported by the Government Decree on Youth Work and Policy 2017. Aside from these national policy documents there are a range of measures which enshrine youth participation in Finnish society:

- Each secondary school (known as Upper Secondary) must have a student union. Any student can join these unions and they are used to defend the right of students at local and national level. They organise recreational and training events, publish articles and magazines and offer their members student cards which can be used for various discounts. This system is somewhat comparable to the Irish University system of students unions but commences at a much younger age thus encouraging y/p to know their rights and become engaged in activism long before they leave second level education.

- All municipalities (local self-governing administrative units) must have a youth council or an equivalent advocacy group for y/p as authorised by the Local Government Act 2015. These youth councils operate at a local level to influence the planning, development and implementation of activities relating to y/p across a range of sectors including: wellbeing, health, environment, education and public transport.

- The Survivors-Young Child Welfare Developers Team established in 2008 uses the knowledge and experience of y/p who have been, or are, in care to develop child welfare policy in Finland. This innovative approach is actually quite logical when you consider the experience which these y/p have. It is recognised by the Finnish government that the knowledge base of these y/p is invaluable and so they participate in informing and guiding future child welfare policy.

3.10 Relevance to Social Work Practice

This research focused on the participation of y/p within the specific geographical location of Douglas. It could be argued discussions such as this are predominantly the remit of community work and not social work. However, it could also be argued that the two (social work and community work) are intrinsically linked and there is a space for social work to return to its community roots.

Social work has its origins in community work. In the past the profession was based on the same model and ideals as community work is today. The majority of intervention work was carried out with groups rather than individuals as is the case today. Community development continues to be a core component of social work practice as we can all accept that an individual and their day to day environment are not mutually exclusive.

The changing environment within which social work exists calls for a dynamic profession equipped to respond to localised concerns. Social work and community work converge in terms of shared principles and values which focus on the empowerment of service users and the instigating of social change (Mendes, *et al.,* 2015). 'Community' refers to people of a similar interest/need making use of shared resources/services within a defined geographical area. This seems to be in line with how most social workers view community:

> 'For most social workers, the community is the wider environment in which their work is located'

(Forde and Lynch, 2015, p. 51)

Social work has the ability to bring about transformation and social change, not only for individuals but for the wider communities in which we work. When considering community development from a social work perspective one must retain the concept of 'change from below' or bottom-up practice. This involves assessing where the community is at and working with the strengths, knowledge, skills and resources within a community to orchestrate change. These ideas align with a critical realist perspective (Ife, 2013). Houston (2001) suggests that a critical realist approach is compatible with social work practice as it seeks to uncover and challenge the structures which affect and oppress upon a person's day to day life. In the context of this research study there is a desire to address the structures which prevent y/p from participating fully in their community and present solutions for change.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the reader to the context and background of this CARL project. An explanation of what is meant by 'participation' was presented. An analysis was then given of y/p's participation in Ireland followed by suggestions for increasing y/p engagement in the community. Reference was made to three international examples of community participation. Also included was a thorough review of current literature relating to y/p's participation. The chapter ended with a section on this studies relevance to social work practice.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data which was gathered using the method of data collection outlined in chapter three. The findings and analysis have been grouped together thematically and tables/graphs have been used for visual clarity.

4.2 Theme One: How Young People Occupy Their Free Time in Douglas

A theme arising from the data concerns the way in which y/p occupy their free time in Douglas. For the purpose of this discussion 'free time' is defined in a general sense to refer to any time periods outside of regular school hours. In the survey research participants were asked to identify how frequently they socialise in Douglas.

Frequency	Percentage	Number of Participants
3+ times each week	42%	18
1-2 times each week	26%	11
Occasionally	33%	14
Never	0%	0

Figure 4: How frequently Y/P socialise in Douglas

What is of interest from the answers given is that all of the y/p who participated in the survey questionnaire identified that they socialise in Douglas, and the majority do so more than once each week (Figure 4). Furthermore when asked how they spend the majority of that free time over 30% identified that they do so 'hanging out with friends', whilst 17% said 'playing sport' (Figure 5).

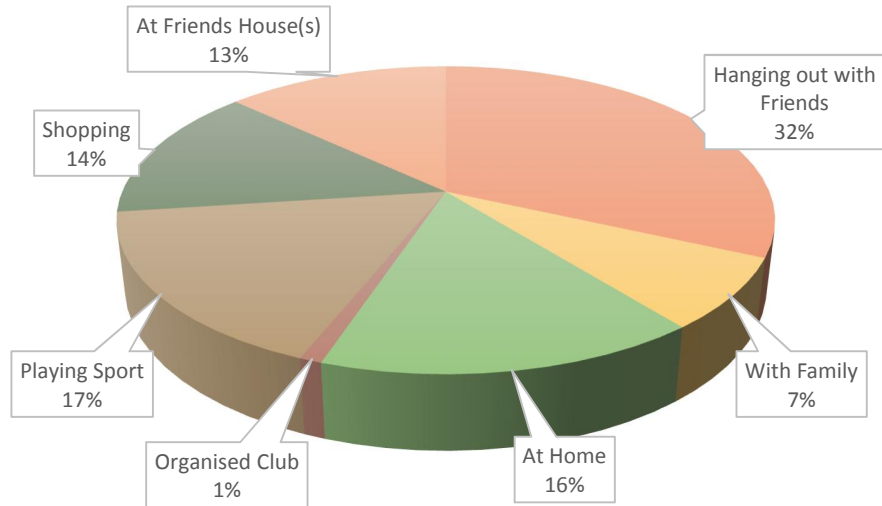**How Young People spend the majority of their free time in Douglas**

- At Friends House(s) 13%
- Hanging out with Friends 32%
- Shopping 14%
- With Family 7%
- Playing Sport 17%
- At Home 16%
- Organised Club 1%

Figure 5: How Y/P Occupy their Free-Time in Douglas

4.2.1 Use of Sports Clubs and Facilities by Young People in Douglas

A section of the survey also relating to how y/p spend their free time asked the y/p to identify which sports they participated in. Figure 6 displays the answers given. It is worth noting that the most popular sporting activity identified by the research participants is 'gym'. This may be a consequence of the recent rise in the popularity of body building amongst y/p and/or the increase in gym facilities available in Douglas. Participants were also asked if there are sports which they participate in which are not available in Douglas (Figure 7). And though some of these sports may not be possible to facilitate in Douglas e.g. sailing as there is no point of access to open water. It nevertheless raises the question of whether sufficient sports facilities are available for y/p in Douglas. There is currently no public access to any open pitches or area for general sporting activity such as is present in neighbouring towns of a similar size and demographic e.g. Carrigaline and Ballincollig.

Sports Clubs/Facilities used by Young People in Douglas
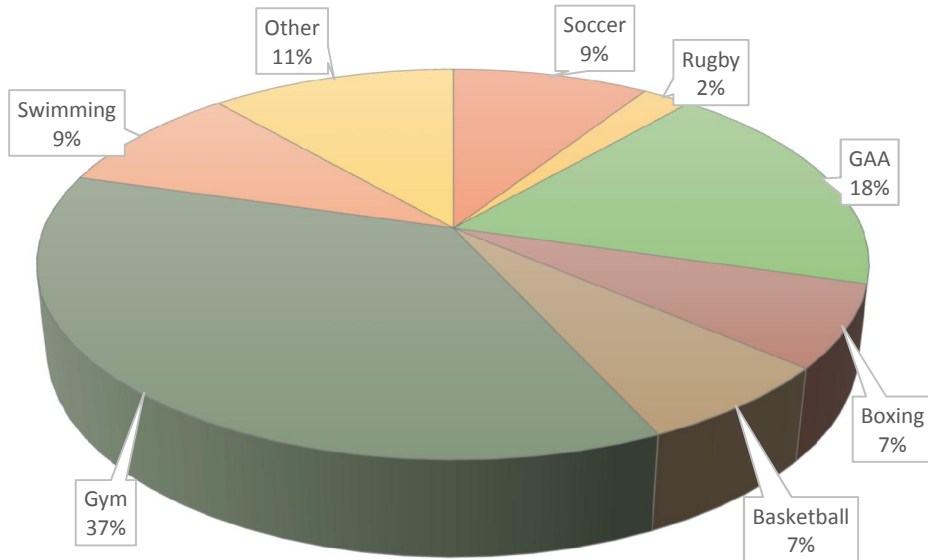

Figure 6: Sports which Y/P participate in.

Figure 6: Sports which local Y/P Participate in outside of Douglas.
*It should be noted that the number who responded to this question was small in comparison to the sample size.

In a study conducted in Sweden it was found that one of the main factors which kept y/p involved in sport long term (through their teenage years) was when there was a sense that they were learning and developing with others. This even occurred in cases whereby the y/p were aware that they had little prospect of becoming an elite competitor within their sport. The researcher concluded,

"I believe this suggests that sports clubs should try to organize activities emphasizing development with numerous opportunities and challenges for motor and social learning, instead of competitions as the only focal point" (Jakobsson, 2014).

A separate question in the survey focused on the people y/p look up to in Douglas. The aim of this question was to identify how y/p view various adult stakeholders within their community. When asked 'who do you most look up to/respect in Douglas' y/p were given a range of people that they could identify (see figure 8). It can be seen that friends had the greatest influence on y/p with 70% stating they were their greatest role model, this was followed by parent/guardian (49%) and sports coach/sibling both having shared influence at 10%. What is perhaps most interesting is those who were rated as not being role models or being people y/p do not look up to in Douglas e.g. youth worker, politician, religious leader, G.P.
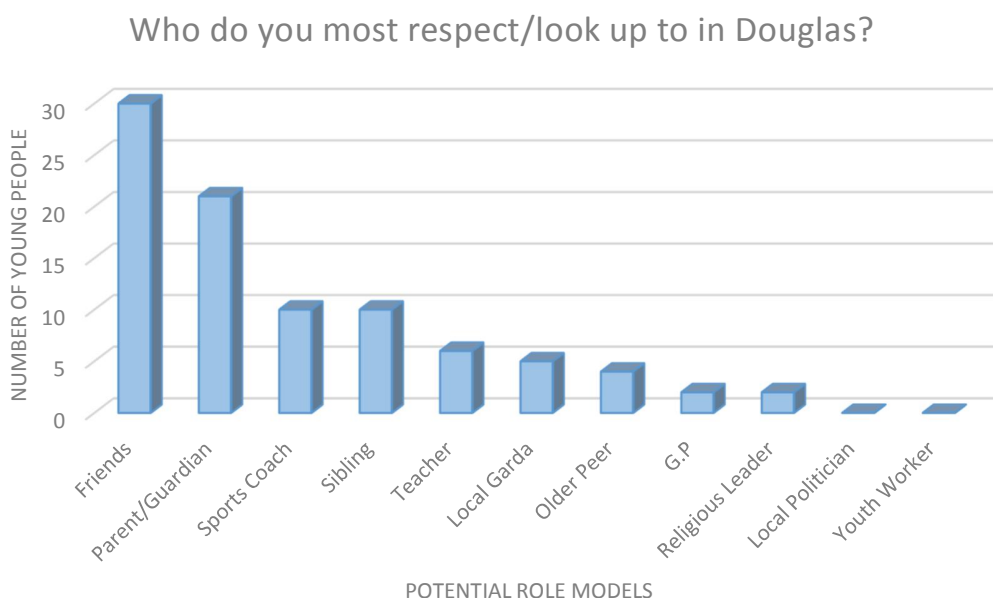

Figure 8: Role Models for Y/P in Douglas

4.3 Theme Two: The Suitability of Services for Young People in Douglas

Having established that the majority of y/p spend their free time 'hanging out' with friends or playing sport in Douglas a further theme began to arise from the data; are services in Douglas suitable for y/p? As can be seen from the answers displayed (Figure 9) there are certain services/resources which the majority of y/p identified as being suitable such as the cinema, parks and open spaces, sports facilities, shopping centres and restaurants. However, there are also services/resources which were selected as not being suitable for y/p such as the Douglas Post magazine and local cafes. The local library was the only service whose suitability was inconclusive with 47% stating it is and 53% stating it is not suitable for y/p.

Suitability of Local Sercices/Resources for Young People in Douglas
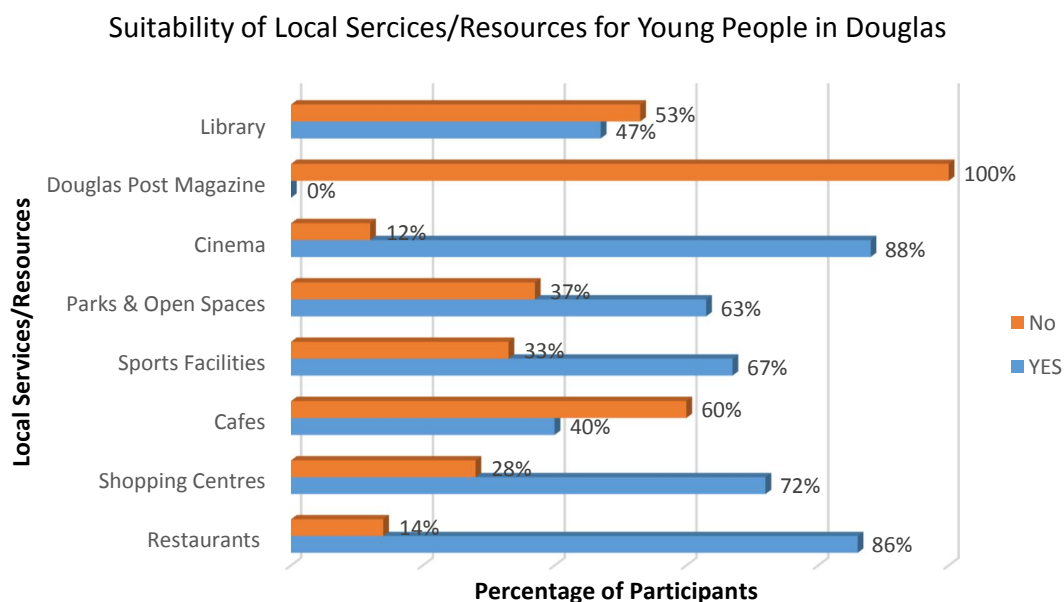
Figure 9: Suitability of Services

4.4 Theme Three: The Provision of a Youth Café in Douglas

In early discussions with Douglas Matters they were keen to assess the desire by y/p to have a youth café or specifically identified space for y/p in Douglas. Therefore a section of the survey focused on such a provision. If a research participant felt that they would not like a youth café then they did not answer the subsequent five questions which centred specifically on the introduction of such a service. The results showed no clear distinction between those who wanted a youth café and those who did not with 22 respondents saying 'yes' and 21 saying 'no'. However, what can be inferred from this is that

there is an appetite amongst young people for a youth café to be established in Douglas, though it must be noted that just as many y/p do not want one.

4.4.1 The Function and Format of a Youth Café

It is noted that there was no clear majority amongst respondents in favour of the establishment of a youth café in Douglas. Nevertheless, it is worth outlining the responses which were given as to the operation and function of any future youth café. When asked who should run the youth café the responses indicated that the majority (68%) of respondents were in favour of a youth café being run by a mix of adult volunteers and y/p in comparison to it being run solely by youth workers (23%). This may be an indication of y/p's willingness and desire to take joint ownership and responsibility for the places and spaces that they use during their free time.

In relation to the function of a proposed youth café the respondents indicated (figure 10) a preference for a safe space (59%) and a venue for events (32%). The youth café acting as a support service for youth was not seen as being a desired function by the respondents with only 4.5% indicating that this should be part of its function.
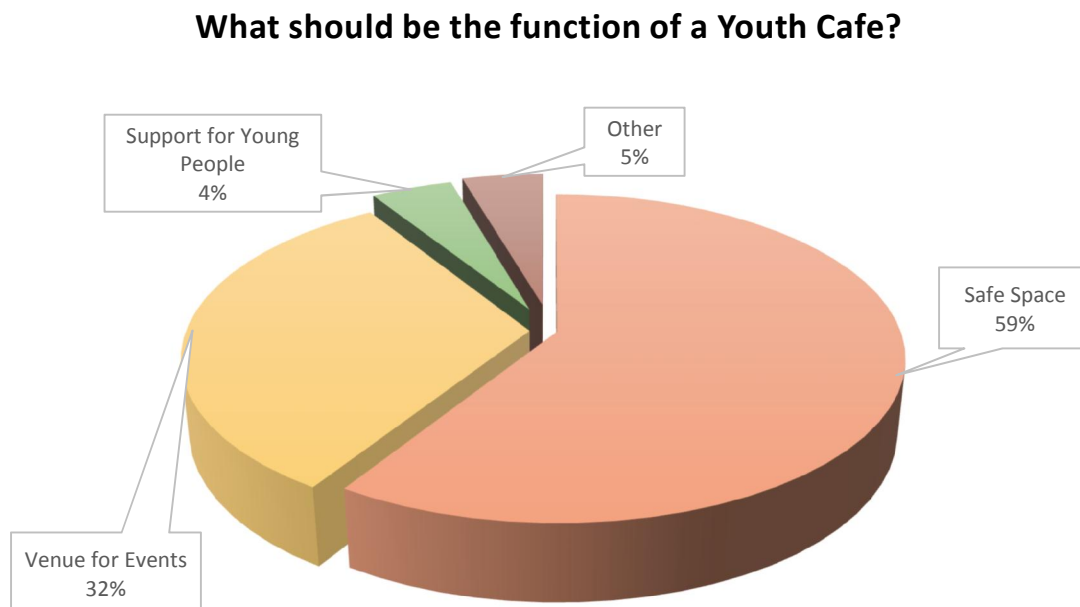
What should be the function of a Youth Cafe?

Support for Young People 4%
Other 5%
Safe Space 59%
Venue for Events 32%
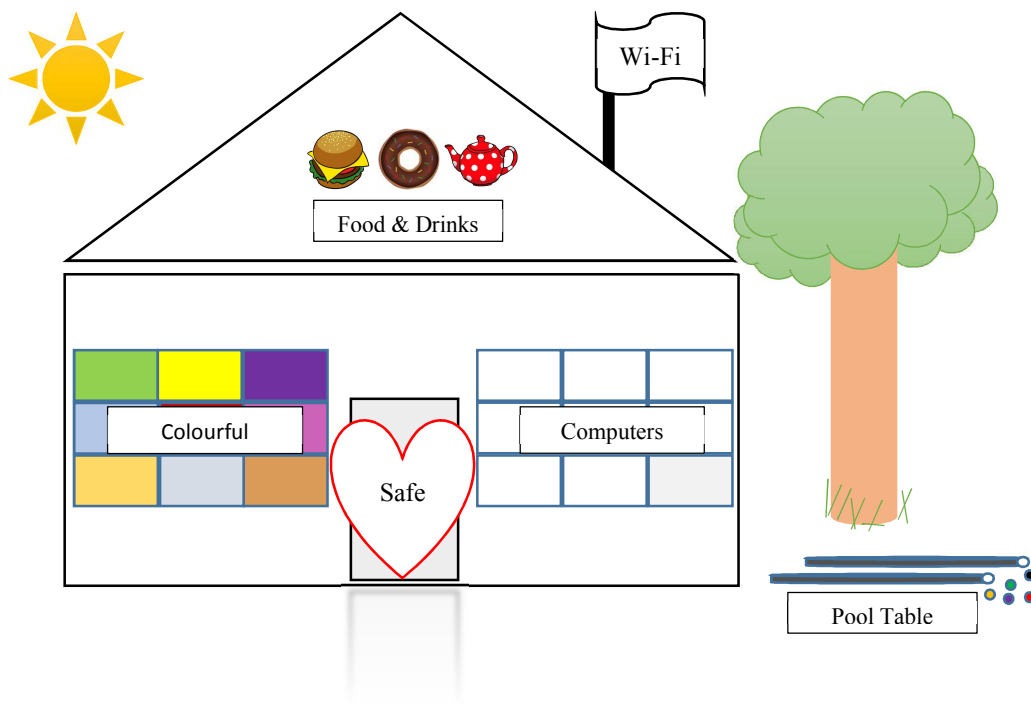
Figure 10: Function of a Youth Café

Figure 11: Design and Layout of a Youth Café

4.4.2 The Design and Layout of a Youth Café

Given that a youth café situated in Douglas would be there for the benefit of y/p it is worth noting what y/p have to say about the design and layout of any proposed café. What should the physical space consist of and how should it look? The data collected relating to this was collected using open ended questions. This was to enable the y/p to freely provide their ideas and vision for an identified space for y/p in Douglas. Consequently there is a large amount of data and it is difficult to arrange it thematically. However, trends did emerge from this data and certain conclusions can be drawn from the information provided. In order to present the data in a format which is easily recognisable and the key design and layout features recorded by the y/p are represented it has been displayed by researcher in a creative manner (Figure 11).

4.5 Theme Four: Issues Affecting Young People and their Voice in Decisions

The initial motivation for establishing the Douglas Matters group was concern about issues affecting y/p in Douglas and a desire to address this concerns through proactive measures. It was important therefore that a question was included in the survey about what issues y/p feel affect them. As can be

seen from figure 12 the main issue highlighted by the respondents was drugs/alcohol (65%) followed by lack of services for y/p (51%). As the main focus of this research is on the participation of y/p these issues were not expanded on further. However this provides a glimpse of the wider root issues affecting y/p in their day to day lives and may be an opportunity for further research.

Issue	Number	Percentage
Drugs/Alcohol	28	65%
Lack of Services for Young People	22	51%
Peer-pressure	21	49%
Mental Health	17	40%
Bullying	14	33%
Absence of Adult Role Models	4	9%
Other	1 (Fighting)	2%

Figure 12: Issues Affecting Y/P in Douglas

Associated with this theme were a series of rating scale questions (see Figure 13) which asked the young people to respond to various statements. The first statement was: 'I feel safe socialising in Douglas'. In response to this question the majority (63%) said they agree or strongly agree with this statement with just 14% saying they disagree. Surprisingly 44% said they neither agree nor disagree with the statement which raises a concern that some y/p may not be sure of what it means to 'feel safe' in Douglas or they are unwilling to voice their opinion on this issue. This appears to contradict the 59% of respondents who desire a 'safe space' in a youth café. However it should be noted that 59% only represents a total of 13 respondents.

A further question asked y/p if they feel valued as a y/p in Douglas. 30% of respondents said they do not feel valued whilst the largest proportion (44%) said they neither agree nor disagree, just 19% said they do feel valued in Douglas. An unexpected finding was found in response to the statement 'Y/p have sufficient opportunities to participate in the Douglas community', 37% said they agree or strongly agree whilst just 28% said they disagree. A further 35% said they neither agree nor disagree with the statement. The reason this is surprising is its comparison to the replies given to the statement 'y/p have an adequate say in decisions that affect them in Douglas', to which 74% said they disagree or strongly disagree, and just 14% said they agree. It appears that there may be a difference in how y/p view their 'participation' in the community and having a voice in decisions which affect them.

Rating Scale Questions

Legend: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
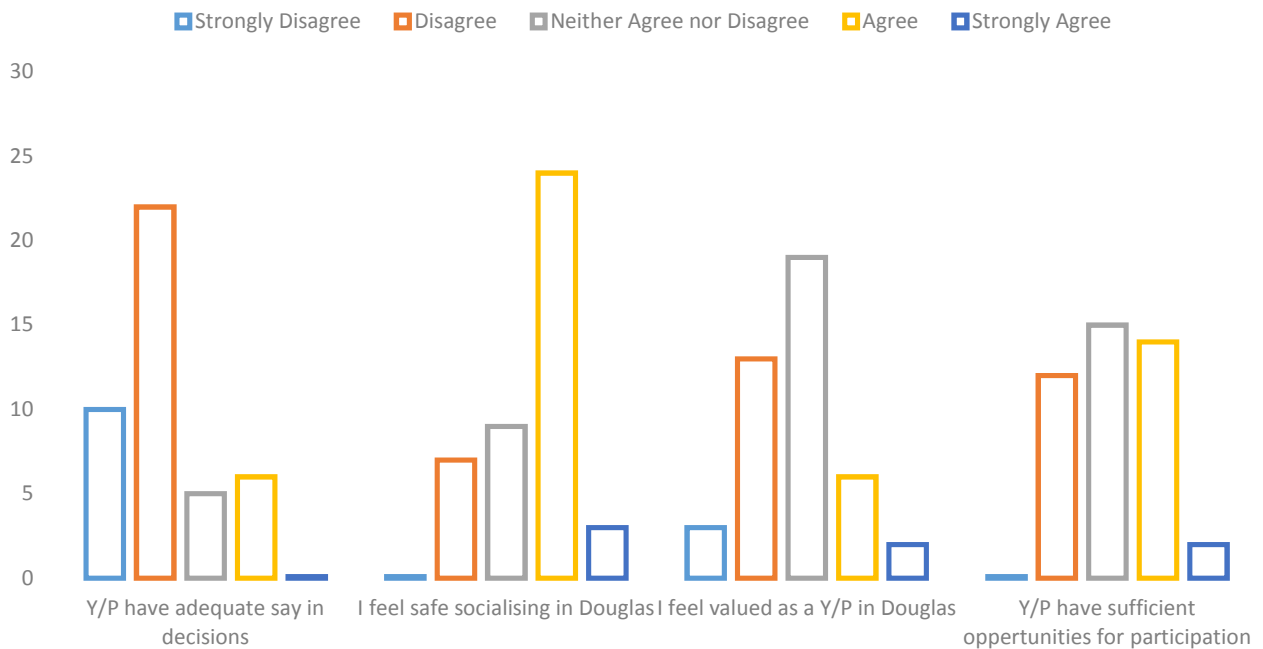
Figure 13: Rating Scale Questions

The final question on the survey sought to specifically address how the voice of y/p might be heard more effectively. This was posed as an open ended question in order to enable the y/p to express freely their feedback. As each individual participant gave a unique answer to this question there is a large amount of data. In order to allow the voice of y/p to be heard it is necessary to print their responses here. These responses have been displayed in figure 14.

Figure 14: The Voice of Y/P

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the main themes which arose following data collection. The findings were presented and analysed thematically and tables/graphs were used throughout the chapter. All names and identifying information of the research participants were excluded from the discussion as per the ethical requirements of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

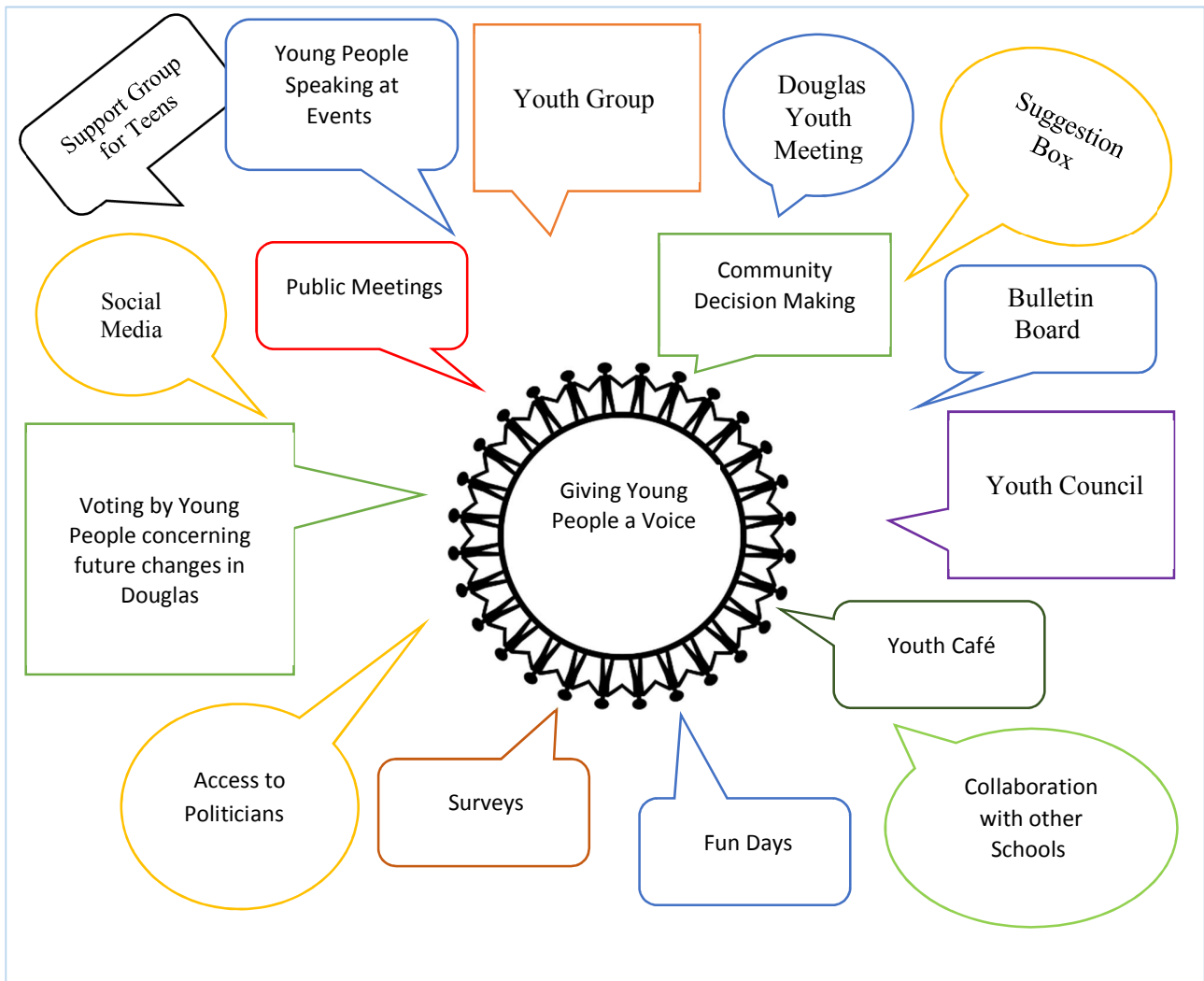Following the analysis of the findings in the previous chapter this chapter sets out conclusions based on that primary data and the information obtained through secondary research; namely a literature review. More specifically this chapter will outline conclusions relating to the participation of y/p in the Douglas community and make a number of recommendations. The chapter will conclude with a reflective piece by the researcher.

5.2 Conclusions

The main objective of this research was to assess y/p's perception of their participation within the community of Douglas. This was achieved through primary research using a survey questionnaire. A second objective was to evaluate international models of community participation in order to draw conclusions and recommendations for potential change in Douglas. This was achieved through secondary research, namely a literature review. Conclusions will be drawn by referring to these initial research questions individually.

5.2.1 Young People's Perceptions

This theme yielded the highest amount of data as the majority of questions in the survey concerned y/p's perceptions on various aspects of life in Douglas. It is hoped that the graphs/tables used throughout chapter 4 assisted in displaying this data for the reader. Taking a few key points for discussion, firstly, it was noted that the y/p highlighted the many positive aspects about Douglas such as it being a place where they enjoy spending their free time 'hanging out' with friends, playing sport or shopping. They also identified that many of the local services/resources are suitable for y/p e.g. cinema, restaurants, and shopping centres. This was a welcome finding revealing that y/p are aware of the positive aspects of their community.

However the findings also revealed that there are issues affecting y/p in Douglas. A somewhat unexpected finding was that the majority (63%) do feel safe socialising in Douglas. It was expected

that y/p would have stated that they did not feel safe given that they identified a number of issues in Douglas: drugs/alcohol, peer-pressure, mental health, bullying. What is perhaps being revealed here is that whilst these issues are not causing y/p to feel 'unsafe[2]' they are nevertheless concerned about the welfare of y/p in their community? One such concern which arose was the lack of a suitable café or space for y/p to 'hang out'. This will be discussed in detail in section 5.2.3.

There was a further stark finding whereby 100% of respondents asserted that the Douglas Post is not suitable for y/p. Although unclear, this may suggest that local media publications are either not reporting on issues affecting y/p or they are failing to reach a huge section of the local population. As mentioned at the start of this section y/p can identify the positives within their community despite the possible negatives. Therefore it is crucial that local media do likewise and provide accurate and relevant news for their readers. This question was included in the survey to determine whether or not y/p perceived local media as being relevant to them.

The final question on the survey which gave the y/p free space to suggest how their voice could be heard more effectively yielded valuable data. This is the information which most significantly captures what can be done to increase y/p's participation in Douglas. This data was displayed in figure 14 and is included in the recommendations section on p.36.

5.2.2 What can be learnt from the International Models?

In section 3.9 international models of community participation were assessed in order to draw comparisons with, and recommendations for, the Irish context. Having looked at Sweden, Germany and Finland as international examples a number of conclusions can be made for consideration in enhancing the participation of y/p in Irish communities, both at a local and national level:

1. The assessment of the Swedish model of youth participation showed the value in placing practice-based research at the heart of service development. This ensures that services for y/p are youth centred and are based upon what y/p want not what adult stakeholders perceive as being 'youth friendly'. Furthermore the concept that youth centres (youth clubs, youth cafes etc.) should be places of meaningful leisure for y/p is something which guides

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[2] It is important to note that this research is part of a larger CARL project with Douglas Matters and Stephanie Tipps was focusing specifically on issues affecting y/p such as whether or not they feel safe in their community.

Swedish youth service development. There is a commitment to ensure that services for y/p foster their wider development. Finally it was seen that partnership and collaboration are fundamental to the success and sustainability of youth projects in Sweden. In contexts where there is youth-adult partnership not only do services thrive but y/p can take joint ownership of their spaces and places.

2. In Germany it was identified that research is being led from the top as governmental departments are enthusiastic about the involvement of y/p. An example was discussed whereby an initiative 'Adolescents in Urban Neighbourhoods' was used to enable y/p to be joint decision makers in urban planning, building design, building renovation and the development of youth centres. The presumption that y/p are neither qualified nor interested in such activity is dispelled by the success of this initiative.

   The example of the Jugendcheck 'Youth Check' as an instrument to assess whether or not y/p were actively involved in the development of local youth initiatives and projects is evidence of the government's commitment to ensuring that youth policy is taken from page to practice.

3. Finland has a commendable history of youth participation and it was shown that they have had specific legislation protecting the rights of y/p since 2006 which they continue to update with the recent development of the Youth Act (2017). A consequence of this legislation is the assurance that there is a youth council in all municipalities (local self-governing administrative units). As mentioned earlier these youth councils operate at a local level to influence the planning, development and implementation of activities relating to y/p across a range of sectors including: wellbeing, health, environment, education and public transport. They are governed by the Union of Local Youth Councils which works with the State and other NGO's to promote the youth councils whilst also taking part in decisions at a national level. The mandatory provision of student unions in all secondary schools (known as Upper Secondary) further guarantees not only that y/p's rights are protected but that they are active participants in activism and advocacy from a young age.

5.2.3 The Youth Café Model

A section of the survey questionnaire focused on the provision of a youth café and whether or not the y/p felt that this is something which they would value having in their community. The results of the survey on this matter were inconclusive as discussed earlier, with 22 respondents favouring the establishment of a youth café in Douglas and 21 not in favour of same. Nevertheless as this was a key feature of the initial and ongoing discussions with Douglas Matters it is worth outlining the potential benefits of the Youth Café Model for community participation. The literature in favour of the use of the youth café model as a form of youth engagement in the community and as a space for y/p to form positive relationships is extensive (Moran *et al.,* 2018; Nolos, 2015; Wang and Edwards, 2015). The youth café model is well established in Ireland with over 20 youth cafés in Cork alone in 2015 (Forkan, *et al.,* 2015). If a youth café is established in Douglas following the pattern of youth-adult partnership suggested by Forde, *et al.,* (2017) it would provide a space for y/p to informally interact with their peers in a safe environment whilst also providing an opportunity for them to take ownership of a place within their community. It is suggested that such a space would meet the need expressed in the data for a café suitable for y/p and a place where further means of community participation could be fostered and planned. And of course this would also be a space where y/p could do what the findings revealed they most like doing in their free-time; 'hanging out with friends'. As Moran, *et al.,* (2018) suggests,

> "…youth work models in contemporary societies must embrace young people's desires to be themselves, to express their individuality and uniqueness, and to develop feelings of connectedness and belonging with adults and peer groups in these spaces"

(Moran, *et al.,* 2018, p.11)

The establishment of a youth café in Douglas is discussed further in the recommendations section below.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the data collected and its analysis by the researcher. Some of these recommendations are aimed specifically at the CARL community partner in this research study; Douglas Matters whilst others are more general in nature.

Recommendation 1: The development of services and resources in Douglas

It was evident following the analysis of the data that y/p spend a significant portion of their free time in Douglas either 'hanging out' with friends or playing sport. Douglas is a place where y/p people enjoy spending their free time and many of the services were identified as being suitable for y/p e.g. restaurants, shopping centres, and cinema. However, a number of other services were found to be unsuitable for y/p including cafes and the Douglas Post magazine. It is acknowledged that the results of this study relating to the provision of a youth café were inconclusive with 22 favouring the establishment of a youth café and 21 stating they would not want a youth café. However, given the extensive literature evidencing the benefit of the youth café model (discussed in section 5.2.3) it is recommended that a youth café be established in Douglas with an agreed review period to determine if it is sustainable long term. It is also recommended that the youth café operate on a youth-adult partnership model as recommended in the literature and practiced successfully in other jurisdictions.

The respondents unanimously agreed (100%) that the Douglas Post was not a suitable resource for y/p. It is therefore recommended that the Douglas Post be made aware of this research project by Douglas Matters and actively seek opportunities to make their publication inclusive of y/p in the community. Though not an exhaustive list of suggestions this could be achieved through; youth journalism, wider reporting of youth events, promotion of issues affecting y/p as well as achievements and positive aspects of youth life in Douglas.

Recommendation 2: Community engagement with young people

Through their participation in the survey these y/p have shown their willingness to be proactive both in providing feedback on their participation in Douglas and offering suggestions for how their community might be improved. They have also provided a wealth of ideas for how their participation could be increased and their voice heard in decisions concerning them. These suggestions were displayed in figure 14 and include the following recommendations: holding of youth and community meetings, access to politicians for y/p, establishment of a youth council, y/p speaking at local events, to name but a few.

Adult stakeholders, local politicians, school principals and all other parties must now respond accordingly. It is recommended that this response be led by Douglas Matters using the momentum of this research project, along with the other two Douglas Matters CARL projects. This could be achieved through the holding of a public presentation highlighting the survey findings to the community, at which I would be glad to present the research. This presentation could be used to guide what happens next in terms of community engagement with y/p.

Recommendation 3: Learning from International Examples

Whilst it is accepted that context is key in terms of policy development and service provision it can nevertheless be helpful to look to other jurisdictions for examples of community participation. Therefore, following the Swedish model of placing practice-based research at the centre of community development it is recommended that any plans for the establishment of services for y/p in Douglas is based on evidence that y/p will benefit from the service. It is further recommended that an emphasis on youth-adult partnership be maintained in the planning of public spaces in Douglas with input from local y/p, the example being the innovative 'Adolescents in Urban Neighbourhoods' project in Germany. The data revealed that the majority of y/p (74%) felt that they do not have an adequate say in decisions that affect them in Douglas. It will remain difficult for y/p to have a voice in their community as long as they are not part of the decision making forum. It is therefore recommended that a local youth council be formed in Douglas to represent the views of y/p on issues affecting them and their community; as is mandatory practice throughout Finland. This should be led by Douglas Matters in collaboration with local politicians and councillors.

5.4 Limitations

It is acknowledged that every research project has its limitations. Having completed this research a number of limitations have been identified. Firstly and perhaps most significantly was the survey sample size. Despite significant efforts on the part of the researcher and members of Douglas Matters to enter more schools and to yield a higher response rate unfortunately this did not bear fruit. A further limitation was the lack of conclusive results relating to some of the survey themes e.g. 'do you feel safe socialising in Douglas?' and 'do you feel valued as a y/p in Douglas?' whereby many respondents answered 'neither agree nor disagree'. This may be due to a lack of

understanding as to the meaning of these questions or the y/p did not feel comfortable answering. This could be explored further through future research along with a wider study of the specific issues affecting y/p in Douglas.

5.5 Reflective Piece

The process of completing a research project is a valuable one as the skills obtained are useful for both the development of specific skills and preparation for future professional practice. I view the past few months as being a journey of development as I have had to learn to piece the research together as I went along. As I took part in a CARL project I had the privilege of working with an active community group who are seeking to bring about tangible change in the community of Douglas.

Notwithstanding the difficultly of arranging suitable times to visit the various schools in Douglas in order to distribute the survey questionnaire, I found this to be the most rewarding part of the research experience. Participating in primary data collection enabled me to gain access to the views of the population whom this research centres on; y/p.

I was surprised by some of the findings, namely that there was no clear majority in favour of the establishment of a youth café. This may be due in large part to the limited sample size and further research may show a clearer outcome in favour of or opposed to establishing a youth café. It was also interesting to note that the majority of respondents (74%) felt that they do not have adequate say in decisions that affect them in Douglas. These and other findings led to what I hope has been a helpful and worthwhile analysis. It is further hoped that the recommendations will be taken on board and applied so that Douglas becomes a community which increasingly includes y/p as active participants.

Through the experience of carrying out this research I have come to appreciate the value of research to inform practice. I plan to include this in my future social work practice through putting myself forward for research projects as well as seeking opportunities to enhance my skill set through training and remaining up to date with current literature.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Confirmation of Ethical Approval

Ethics Committee, Social Research <srec@ucc.ie>

<div align="right">Jan
18</div>

to me

Dear John
The Social Research and Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved your application Log 2017-139 entitled "Do young people feel that they have adequate participation in the Community of Douglas and what are the internationally recognised best practice models for enhancing community participation?" no resubmission required.

Please note the comments of the committee below

- The participant information sheet should include full name, affiliation and contact details for the study PI.

The committee wishes you every success with your research and thanks you for your patience during the review process.

All the best

Liz

From: Ethics Committee, Social Research
Sent: 07 December 2017 13:00
To: John Nicholas Daunt
Cc: Ó'Súilleabháin, Fiachra
Subject: Log 2017-139 Assigned for review

INFORMATION SHEET

Purpose of the Study

As part of the requirements for the Master of Social Work (MSW) at UCC, a research project of our choice must be undertaken. I have decided to carry out a Community-Academic Research Links (CARL) project in conjunction with Douglas Matters. It will be concerned with the obtaining the views of young people (transition year students) on issues affecting them, resources available to them and their participation in the community of Douglas.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve providing transition year students from four secondary schools in the Douglas area with questionnaires. These questionnaires will be completed within the schools during the month of February 2018 provided signed consent is given by the respective school principals and the parent/legal guardian of all young people. I anticipate that these questionnaires will take no longer than 30 minutes to complete.

Why have you been asked to take part?

Your participation in this research has been requested for one of the following reasons:

1. You are a school principal/ teacher or Transition Year coordinators in one of the geographically located secondary schools within Douglas.
2. You are a parent/legal guardian of a transition year student within one of the geographically located secondary schools within Douglas. Your consent is crucial to the undertaking of this research and your child shall not participate in the questionnaire without your prior signed consent.
3. You are a transition year student (young person) in one of the geographically located secondary schools within Douglas.

Do you have to take part?

No, your participation (or that of your child) will be completely voluntary. Should you decide to participate/allow your child to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will also be given the option to withdraw your consent before the study commences and up to **two weeks** after you/your child have participated in the data collection.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. Each questionnaire will be coded so that parent/legal guardian consent forms match a young person's questionnaire. And all names will be removed following the two week withdrawal period. No names of school principals, parents, legal guardians or young people will be used within the thesis, presentations and/or subsequent publications.

What will happen to the information which you give?

This data will be stored confidentially for the duration of the study, available only to me and my research supervisor. It will be securely stored on an encrypted laptop. On completion of the project, they will be retained (without names) for a minimum of a further ten years and then destroyed.

What will happen to the results?

The results will be presented in a research thesis, as well as in a presentation to Douglas Matters. In keeping with collaborative research projects, my research colleagues will also be appraised of the result as the research progresses. These individuals are Cara McCarthy and Stephanie Tipps (fellow Social Work students), Fiachra Ó Súilléabhain (UCC supervisor) and Louise Murphy and David Boule, both representatives from Douglas Matters. The final thesis will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. My thesis will be published on the CARL website. The thesis may be read by future students on the course. The study may be published in a research journal.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

I don't envisage any negative consequences for young people taking part in the questionnaire nor for parents/legal guardians providing consent for their child to participate. It is possible that certain questions on the questionnaire may cause you some distress.

The questionnaire is attached for parents/legal guardians to view in advance of providing signed consent and young people can skip any question which causes them distress.

What if there is a problem?

At the end of the procedure, I will discuss with the young people how they found the experience and how they are feeling. Subsequently if any parent/legal guardian, school principal or young person has a concern, we can discuss your options in terms of who to contact.

Who has reviewed the study?

The Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) of UCC have reviewed this study. Approval for this study has been granted by SREC.

If you need any further information, you can contact the researcher:

John Daunt

UCC Social Work Student

Email: 116221709@umail.ucc.ie

Appendix 3: Parent/Legal Guardian Consent Form

	Identification Number (For researcher's use only)
Parent/Legal Guardian Consent Form	

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

I_____ as the parent / legal guardian of_____ provide permission for him/her to participate in John Daunt's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I give my permission for my child to participate and I understand that my child will be asked to give his/her assent as well.

I give permission for my child's questionnaire answers to be used for the purpose of this research study.

I understand that I can withdraw permission for my child to participate in the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while they are participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use my child's data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity and that of my child.

I understand that disguised extracts from my child's questionnaire may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

    (Please tick one box):
    I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my child's questionnaire   ☐
    I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my child's questionnaire   ☐

Signed:…………………………………….   Date: ………………..
PRINT NAME:…………………………

Appendix 4: Participant Assent Form

<table>
<tr><td>Participant Assent Form</td><td>*Identification Number*
(For researcher's use only)</td></tr>
</table>

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

I _____ provide my assent to participate in <u>John Daunt's</u> research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my questionnaire answers to be used for the purpose of this research study.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my questionnaire may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:
    (Please tick one box):
    I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my questionnaire   ☐
    I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my questionnaire   ☐

Signed:………………………………….   Date: ………………..
PRINT NAME:………………………………….

SCHOOL SURVEY

JOHN DAUNT

DOUGLAS MATTERS

UCC MASTERS OF SOCIAL WORK

COMMUNITY-ACADEMIC RESEACRH LINKS PROJECT

1)

Do you live in the Douglas area? *If you live in Douglas for part of the week please tick 'Yes'.	
Yes	
No	

2)

How often do you socialise in the Douglas area?	
3+ times each week	
1-2 times each week	
Occasionally	
Never	

If you answered 'No' or 'Never' to question 1 & 2 the remaining questions do not apply. Thank you.

3)
Please identify what age you are:

15	16	17

4) Douglas is a place where I enjoy spending my free time.
Please circle your response to this statement.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree
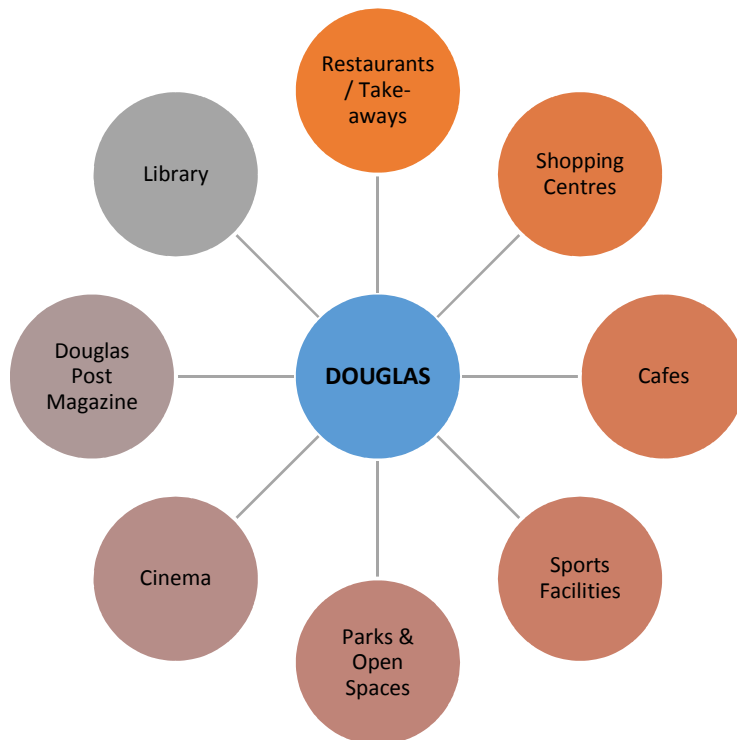
5) How do you spend the majority of your free time in Douglas?
If selecting more than one box please number 1, 2, 3 etc. in order of preference.

☐ Hanging Out with Friends	☐ Playing Sport
☐ With Family	☐ Shopping
☐ At Home	☐ At Friends House(s)
☐ Organised Club/Society e.g. scouts, chess	☐ Other: _____

6) Which of these local services/resources do you feel are suitable for young people in Douglas?
Please circle the ones which apply.

Restaurants / Take-aways
Library
Shopping Centres
Douglas Post Magazine
DOUGLAS
Cafes
Cinema
Parks & Open Spaces
Sports Facilities

7) **Would you like to have a Youth Café (*designated space for young people aged 13-18*) in Douglas?   Yes___ No___**

*If you answered 'No' to question 7 please proceed to question 11.

8) **If 'Yes' then who should run it?**

A) Adult volunteers B) Adult volunteers & Young people (aged 13-18)

B) Youth workers D) Other:_____

9) **What should be its function?**

A) Safe space B) Venue for events C) Support service for youth

D) Other_____

10) **If you were designing a youth café:**

a) **What would it look like?**

_____

_____

b) **What services would be available?**

_____

_____

c) **What information should be available to young people at the youth café?**

_____

_____

Please continue to next page. . .

11) **If you use sports facilities in Douglas please identify which ones you use from the list below.** *Please circle option(s) which apply.*

- Soccer Club
- Rugby Club
- GAA (Hurling/Football/Camogie) Club
- Boxing Club
- Basketball Club
- Gym
- Swimming Club
- Horse-Riding
- Other:_____

12) **Are there sports/recreation or other pastimes which you participate in which are not available in Douglas?**

Yes (please describe) _____   **No__**

Please continue to next page. . .

13) **What issues (if any) do you feel affect young people in Douglas?**

(Please circle the option(s) that apply. If selecting more them one option please rate in order)

- ◯ Lack of services for young people
- ◯ Drugs & Alcohol
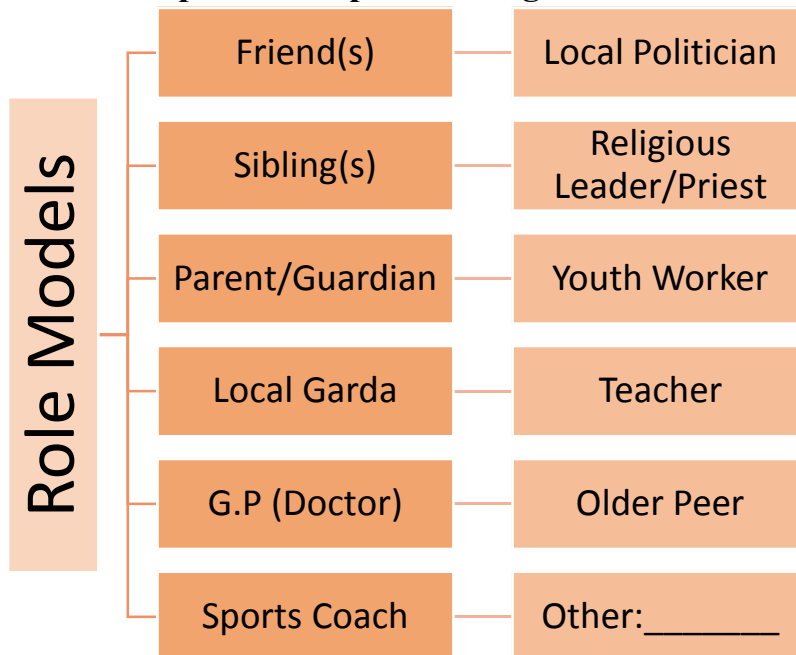- ◯ Mental health
- ◯ Bullying
- ◯ Peer-pressure
- ◯ Absence of adult role models
- ◯ Other:_____

14) Who do you most respect/look up to in Douglas? *Please Circle.*

Role Models

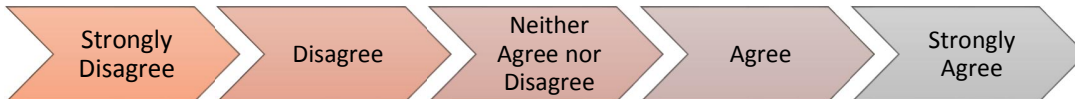|	
Friend(s)	Local Politician
Sibling(s)	Religious Leader/Priest
Parent/Guardian	Youth Worker
Local Garda	Teacher
G.P (Doctor)	Older Peer
Sports Coach	Other:_____

Please circle your response to the following statements:

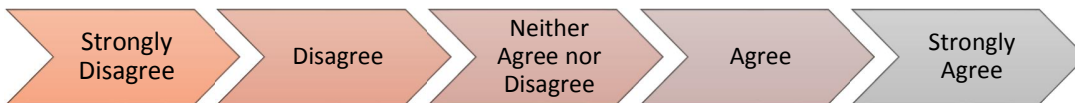**15) Young people have an adequate say in decisions that affect them in Douglas.**
*Please Circle.*

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
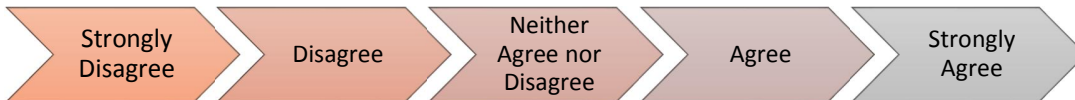
16) I feel safe socialising in Douglas. *Please Circle.*

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

17) I feel valued as a young person in Douglas. *Please Circle.*

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

18) Young people have sufficient opportunities to participate in the Douglas community. Please Circle.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
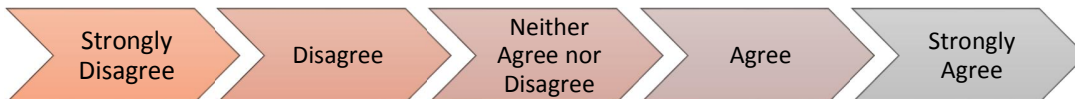
19) In order to give young people a voice in decisions concerning them are there ways in which your voice could be heard more effectively?

_____

_____

_____