



The James
Hutton
Institute

Participatory Video for Monitoring and Evaluation: **young people's experiences of greenspace in Cumbernauld**

Supplementary Report accompanying the participatory videos 'Straight out of Cumby', 'Opposite day' and 'Is Cumbernauld really safe?'

Introduction

This report accompanies the participatory videos produced by S4 pupils on their perceptions of greenspace in Cumbernauld, which were produced as part of the ‘Creating Natural Connections’ programme. This report provides a summary of the data collected during the participatory video process, including data not captured in the final videos, and offers recommendations for improving young people’s experience of greenspace.

The participatory video project consisted of a series of workshops in which pupils created three short films about their experience of greenspace. The aim of the project was to understand how young people (14 to 16 year-olds) perceive greenspace, with a view to using it as a baseline to monitor the impact of the [Creating Natural Connections programme](#) on people’s experience of greenspace. The pupils’ participation was carried out as part of the school’s [Prince’s Trust Achieve](#) programme, designed to support young people at risk of underachieving at school to engage and succeed in education.

Participatory video (PV) is a set of techniques to involve a group or community in shaping and creating their own film, with the aim of bringing people together to explore issues, voice concerns or simply be creative and tell stories. PV offers a way to empower and ‘give voice’ to people who would not normally have the opportunity to communicate their needs and ideas to decision-makers and other groups and communities (Lunch and Lunch, 2006). With regards to monitoring and evaluating the impact of projects by Creating Natural Connections, PV allows intended beneficiaries to express the impact of interventions on them, through the creative medium of film. This method provides an alternative to more traditional evaluation approaches such as questionnaires, where recipients may struggle with the questions and scoring system used. It can also provide more in-depth and nuanced information than traditional methods.

Method

The participatory video (PV) process consisted of a series of workshops carried out throughout the 2018-2019 school year, between September and March. The sessions were facilitated by two to four researchers

from the James Hutton Institute, with the support of the school’s Home-School Partnership Officer and school teachers, who provided support during the PV sessions, a Cumbernauld Living Landscape (CLL) officer, as part of the Creating Natural Connections programme, and the school’s Prince’s Trust coordinator.

The films were developed by the pupils in a participatory way, with support from researchers and other staff to guide the process. We used an adapted version of the PV process developed by InsightShare (Lunch & Lunch, 2006; Benest, 2010). As facilitators, we ensured that all students had the opportunity to develop ideas for the film, make decisions about what to include, shoot the footage, edit it and decide how and with whom the films would be shared. Our emphasis throughout the whole process was to develop trust and respect within the group, stressing the importance of respecting each person’s wish to participate in the roles they felt comfortable in.



Pupils during one of the filming sessions at Broadwood Loch.

The PV method allowed the pupils to explore their own perspectives over an extended period of time, providing an in-depth and nuanced understanding of their experience and views on greenspace. Students' reflections on greenspace emerged through the different activities and through informal conversations throughout the PV process, as well as through the final films they produced.

Consent

We followed a rigorous informed consent procedure, ensuring that both the pupils and their parents were happy for them to be involved, and were able to decide to what extent and in what ways they would take part in the project. This procedure involved four stages throughout the project, in which they decided, first, if they agreed to participate in the initial PV training sessions and whether they were happy to be filmed; second, whether they were happy with the footage they had taken; third if they were happy with the edited film; and fourth, how and with whom they wanted to share their films.

Familiarisation and Training

The initial sessions consisted of six 90-minute workshops with the aim of building trust among the pupils and between the pupils and facilitators, learning how to use the film equipment and different filming techniques, becoming familiar with the concepts of greenspace and monitoring, and reflecting on their local greenspace and how they use these areas. This was done through exercises and games adapted from the method developed by InsightShare (Lunch and Lunch, 2006; Benest, 2010). Figure 1 shows the timeline of these sessions.

This stage of the PV process culminated in two full-day workshops in which the pupils planned and conducted a community event where they shared some of their footage of the greenspace near their school with members of Cumbernauld's wider community, and asked the community about their views on Cumbernauld's greenspace.

Producing the Participatory Videos

The second stage consisted of three full-day sessions in which, in groups of four or five, pupils brainstormed ideas for their film, developed a story board, filmed the footage, and edited the films. Each step was conducted in a participatory way, with pupils taking part in different ways, including contributing ideas to the story board, directing, checking the sound, acting, and editing. Once a rough edit of the films had been created, two of their teachers, the CLL officer, and a James Hutton Institute researcher gave them feedback on their films.

In the final session the pupils presented the films to their families and other members of the wider community at a screening event at the school, during which the audience were able to give students feedback about the films and about the ideas expressed through them.



Pupils created a story board for each film as a way of developing their ideas and planning the video.



Figure 1. Timeline of the workshops carried with the pupils. The blue (lighter) dots correspond to sessions carried out as part of the PV process. The activities and games used are adapted from Lunch and Lunch (2006). The brown (darker) dots were sessions carried out with the pupils by the CLL officer, as part of the Creating Natural Connections programme.

Results

In groups of four or five, the pupils created three short films about their views on greenspace in Cumbernauld, based on their lived experiences¹:

- ‘Straight out of Cumby’. In this film the main character is unexpectedly attacked by a group of teenagers while crossing an underpass, then chased through a park and violently assaulted, before being rescued by a passer-by. The film ends with the attackers running away while a voice-over says: *The whole idea of this film was to show people how dangerous greenspaces can be, and we’re hoping that towards the future these places change and get better for people.*
- ‘Opposite day’. The two characters in this film experience greenspace very differently: whereas one of them enjoys the beauty of the wildlife and landscape while going for a jog in the park, the other seems to be bored and depressed, and notices all the litter that lines the park’s paths. A final message across the screen reads: *Not everybody has the same experience in green spaces.*
- ‘Is Cumbernauld really safe?’. This film opens with two teenage girls being bored in a playground, when they are approached by a gang of bullies who start harassing them. One of the bullies ends up being arrested, so his friends get revenge by attacking the two girls. As the bullies walk away successful, a sign in the park reads: *Welcome to Cumbernauld (the worst place in Scotland)*. In the final scene, a landscape view of Broadwood Loch is overwritten by the message *You don’t notice the nice green spaces because of the violence.*



Pupils filming for one of the scenes of ‘Opposite Day’.

Themes identified through the PV process and the films:

The following themes came up repeatedly throughout the PV process, as well as being a topic in the students’ films. These topics referred to specific locations in Cumbernauld, but also to greenspaces in a general sense.

Use of greenspace. A recurring theme is that the pupils generally do not use greenspaces because they ‘cannot be bothered’. As one student put it, ‘I don’t even go outside’. An exception to this is walking the dog, which either the pupils or their family members do, for example at Croy Hill. Both Croy Hill and Castle Hill were described as places with nice views where one can calm down when they are angry and be themselves. Pupils also remembered a school outing to a local pond (St Maurice’s Pond) two years previously. This was described as ‘relaxing’, ‘cold, muddy, freezing’, and as a ‘quiet space, good to see wildlife’. Another memory of being in greenspaces was a charity walk around Broadwood Loch, which was experienced as ‘boring’, ‘roasting hot’, and ‘tiring’, but also as being fun, spending time with friends. Broadwood Loch was also mentioned as somewhere to go for a run. Greenspaces are also used for spending time with friends, either biking, or just sitting with them. Another use is walking across them as a shortcut (e.g. the parks near Croy).

Greenspace are seen as unsafe places. Another theme is that greenspaces are seen as dangerous, particularly the underpasses connecting these areas. Pupils reported having been bullied or attacked in parks and underpasses, and this is reflected in two of the films they produced (‘Straight out of Cumby’ and ‘Is Cumbernauld really safe?’). Members of the wider community who viewed the films said that they had had similar experiences in the past, or had felt fearful while walking through the local greenspace areas: ‘People are scared of the underpasses; at around 6 or 7 pm, when they start getting their carry outs, kids, grown-ups, etc... a crowd of yobs and drunks. It’s a terrifying experience for anybody, not just kids.’ Greenspaces are also seen as dangerous regardless of the people who use them; one pupil described a BMX track as his least favourite because one time he had fallen down and got hurt. Another student described how she got stuck when climbing in a local quarry and had to be rescued by the fire brigade.

¹ The pupils decided not to make their films freely available online. If you would like to view them, please contact antonia.eastwood@hutton.ac.uk.

Greenspaces are seen as boring. Another theme expressed in 'Opposite day' and 'Is Cumbernauld really safe?', as well as throughout the PV process, was that greenspaces are boring. One pupil described how she enjoys the challenge of climbing Munros; in contrast she finds the greenspaces in the city boring as they do not provide the same sense of achievement. Parks are seen as being for younger children, and playgrounds were described as being 'for babies'.

Appearance of greenspace. Pupils described the parks they do not like as those with old equipment, where there are poles from old play equipment still visible in the ground. 'Good parks' are where 'things are built of wood and that look good'. The presence of litter was one of the topics of 'Opposite day', as one of the elements that that made greenspace be experienced in a negative way.

The views of the wider community

The pupils organised a community event in which, using footage of Broadwood Loch and Westfield Park and aerial photographs of Cumbernauld, they asked members of the wider community about their views on Cumbernauld's greenspace. These views complement those of the pupils. Participants at this event included members of Cumbernauld's Environmental Society and of Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park, a nursery school teacher, and staff and S5 pupils from the school. Participants were generally familiar with greenspaces

in Cumbernauld and use them frequently, primarily for going for walks, but also for jogging, cycling, walking the dog, sledging, outdoor teaching, safety patrolling, and as a shortcut to get somewhere else.

Participants identified their favourite greenspaces as St Maurice's Pond, Broadwood Loch, Cumbernauld House Park, Palacerigg, and Cumbernauld Community Park. When talking about Palacerigg and Broadwood Loch, they were described as: *'I like that both these places make me feel that although I'm living in a very urban area, both make me feel very different, almost wild, not like a park ... especially on stormy wintry days. I live in Cumbernauld but I could be on Skye right now.'*

A recurring theme was the existence of litter. Litter was considered one of the main problems that needed



Pupils interviewed members of the wider community using footage they had taken of greenspace as prompts.



Pupils interviewed members of the wider community using an aerial photograph as a prompt.

to be addressed. One participant described it as ‘very depressing’ and spent some of his free time picking up litter near Broadwood Loch. Air and noise pollution were also mentioned. In particular, the new retail park near Westfield Park was seen as a real concern for health and safety due to increased levels of traffic.

Another concern was the lack of pavements and pathways connecting the different areas, as well as pathways within greenspaces not always being accessible or being insufficient. People were also concerned about trees being felled (particularly ancient trees) and greenspaces disappearing in order to build new houses. One participant described how a new housing development had changed the way she was able to move through the city: *‘I used to be able to walk or cycle ... but I can’t walk along there now, it’s not safe. That really hurts me now, I find myself feeling vulnerable. It’s too dangerous now as a pedestrian. There’s supposed to be paths. I used to go there with my children and grandchildren, but it’s too dangerous. That really hurts me.’* Other safety risks mentioned were used syringes and broken glass which are dangerous for children and dogs.

Participants suggested the need for equipment and designated areas within greenspaces for specific activities, such as picnicking, socialising, quiet areas, wildlife areas, dog walking, outdoor learning, climbing and kayaking. Having outdoor physical education for school pupils was proposed as a way for young people to engage with greenspaces in a safe way. The installation of facilities such as toilets, coffee shops, dog parks, outdoor exercise equipment, interpretation signage and benches was also suggested.

Impact of the PV process

Throughout the process, pupils’ confidence increased, becoming more comfortable with the different roles in film making, such as using the filming equipment, acting, and contributing ideas. Pupils also became more self-confident in a general sense, as reported by students themselves and their teachers. One pupil, who introduced the films to the audience at the final screening said: *‘it took me out of my comfort zone. I normally don’t speak in front of people. But I stood up and talked’.*

It is important to note that the PV process also had an impact on how the pupils perceive greenspace and

nature. In a follow-up interview, one pupil explained that through the PV process and the outings with CLL (see Figure 1), she began to appreciate nature, and started using greenspaces to relax and help manage her stress: *‘I thought it was kind of a great project, because, I never really understood nature... until we did that [the PV project], I never went out. I never went out just to walk about and see how beautiful nature is, how you can connect with different things, and how calm it could be. ... It helped me see the world in a different way. ... [It] actually helped my stress, because then I would just like relax and just sit outside or lie on the grass and think about nothing except from the beautiful blue sky’.*

Making the films enabled pupils to notice nature in a way that they had not done previously: *‘You had to focus on the movement of the person, ... and how your background looked like, so you had to actually focus and make sure the background is good, and that made you look a bit deeper into nature as well’.* Through the filming experience, pupils were able to appreciate the beauty of nature, as well as develop a more active lifestyle: *‘[the PV project] opened up my eyes more, like now I actually go out and play football ... I want to be active, I want to go out, I want to walk... Like yesterday I made my siblings walk from our school back home – that takes half an hour. So we walked through this like forest. It was so beautiful! ... My mum was in shock that I actually walked ... When you’re listening to all those bird sounds, it’s the most beautiful thing ever!’*

The experience of being in greenspace, and in particular seeing a group of deer in Westfield Park, as well as dogs being walked in the greenspace, helped one pupil develop empathy towards wildlife and the wellbeing of animals, as well as a sense of responsibility towards them: *‘I knew that people litter, but I didn’t know we littered that much! We litter so much ... we saw the deer, and that kind of, what if there was glass? That deer could have got really hurt. Many deer get really hurt by eating what we throw on the floor or what we break. And dogs, also the dog-walkers, there are so many [bits of] glass on the floor, and that dog is walking through, so that would really hurt them. The owner might not know, but the dog will feel it, and we are not doing anything to change, we’re just continuing to do what we do. And even, the greenspaces are nice places, but it can become a dangerous place for others, like animals, and for human beings as well. So I think we should look after it better.’*

These quotes highlight the impact that greenspace-based activities can have on young people's lives and on their attitudes towards nature and greenspace. Participatory video can be used as a form of greenspace engagement, which enables young people to express their understandings of greenspace, while at the same time positively impacting their attitude toward nature and greenspace.

Lessons Learnt

- Pupils have limited opportunities to experience greenspaces in meaningful, positive ways. Schools provide some opportunities for this, but the inflexibility of school timetables and curricula and shortage of support staff mean that outings are often limited and restricted to greenspaces near the school, which may not be the most attractive or exciting. In addition, Scottish weather can be a challenge: not having flexibility to go outdoors when the weather is nice also limits pupil's experience of greenspace and nature.
- Greenspaces are not seen by pupils as being interesting or exciting. The equipment and activities offered in greenspaces and playgrounds are often seen to be for younger children.
- Greenspaces are seen as dangerous places, where one can be attacked or bullied, particularly in certain areas such as underpasses.
- The urban design means that to reach a greenspace people often have to cross busy roads, which can be dangerous.
- Engaging with nature and greenspaces in a way that captures young people's interest, such as through participatory video or other activities carried out under the Creating Natural Connections programme, can lead to pupils developing a deep connection and empathy towards nature.

time should be found to travel to the more attractive greenspaces. Greater flexibility in the scheduling of these outings (i.e. when the weather is nice) would enhance pupils' experience of the outdoors and nature. Engagement activities could also be organised during the summer holidays, when the weather is most suitable to enjoying nature.

- Activities for children and young people should be age-appropriate. These could be activities that help with stress management and mindfulness, exciting activities such as adventure sports, or projects that can lead to a sense of achievement, such as volunteering, helping to teach younger children, or developing a creative project such as participatory video. These should enable young people to enjoy greenspaces in a safe, creative and meaningful way.
- Planning should consider the societal context and existing urban design, considering the accessibility and safety of greenspaces.
- More effort should be made to keep greenspaces clean and litter-free to ensure greenspaces are considered attractive places to go to.

Recommendations

- Pupils would benefit from more frequent contact and more positive experiences with greenspaces, which could be organised as school outings. If possible,

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For further information about the project please contact antonia.eastwood@hutton.ac.uk.

Links

Creating Natural Connections programme: <https://cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/category/creating-natural-connections/>

Prince's Trust Achieve Programme: <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/news-views/achieve-programme>

References

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