



**Promoting sustainable living through  
community groups and voluntary organisations**

by

**Michael Peters**

**Philip Sinclair**

**Shane Fudge**

**RESOLVE Working Paper 08-11**



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**Abstract**

In recent times there has been a growing recognition amongst policy-makers of the role for community-based action in contributing to the broader aims of energy policy and climate change. In this paper, we will examine the potential for existing community groups to use their influence and elements of internal cohesion to encourage more widespread understanding and adoption of sustainable lifestyle habits; both amongst their members and within the broader communities of which they are a part. Findings are presented from recent empirical work with a range of well-established community groups for whom environmental issues are not their main priority. A central aspect of the research was to explore both the current status and potential role of groups that may have the capacity to reach and influence a broader sphere of the public than energy/environment specific initiatives of recent times have been able to achieve.

Representing a diversity of interests, age groups and functionality, the results suggest that the potential for more effective 'bottom-up' engagement on climate change and sustainable living might be given fresh impetus by these types of established community groups and their networks. An assessment of what motivates participation and membership in the groups highlights a series of factors common to all groups and a smaller number that are significant for particular groups individually. It is argued that an appreciation of motivating factors can be useful in understanding more clearly how such groups are able to survive and maintain cohesion over time. The findings also suggest that climate change action means different things for different groups, with the diversity of the groups bringing with it the challenge of making sustainable living relevant to a range of interests and different shared values.

The paper highlights commonalities and differences which emerged from the group discussions in an effort to define the types of activity that community groups could engage with, in strengthening the drive towards sustainable consumption and behaviour at local level.

**Keywords:** Community action on climate change, Sustainable consumption and behaviour, Bottom-up engagement, Social organization.

## 1. Introduction

In order to engage with the complex nature of sustainable development, policy-makers in many developed nations are now supporting a strong role for community-based action in contributing to the broader aims of energy policy and climate change strategy. In the UK for example, community action is a recognizable element of the 2009 *Low Carbon Transition Plan* (DECC, 2009) and, more recently, the Coalition Government's *Big Society* and localism agenda (The Cabinet Office, 2010). It has also resulted in a higher profile for local authorities in engaging with the technological aspects of energy infrastructure together with a key role in the delivery of demand-side energy management (Roberts, 2010). A range of initiatives has subsequently been developed, both by local government and grassroots groups, encouraging shifts to sustainable energy solutions and lower carbon lifestyles. As well as demonstrating several opportunities and benefits associated with these endeavours (including the provision of resources, education, information, advice, physical and cognitive space, and pointers to practical action), recent evidence also reveals a series of barriers facing community-oriented initiatives on climate change, particularly in relation to wider public engagement (CSE, 2007). The primary obstacle is well known in the literature and relates to the difficulty of generating interest and participation beyond those already routinely engaged in 'pro-environmental' behaviours and with an existing interest in sustainability issues. The problem of connecting with society more broadly remains a persistent challenge (Fudge and Peters, 2011). Almost inevitably, making this connection requires some recognition of difference and diversity among individuals of the same community. Defining the term 'community' itself can be problematic as society is decreasingly made up of discrete, geographically identifiable communities and is increasingly composed of many diverse communities – which often overlap and sometimes exist in complete isolation from one another (for a full treatment of this issue see Peters *et al*, 2010 and Peters, 2010).

Barriers to public engagement are also symptomatic of broader problems associated with a reliance on local authorities as the principal change agents in addressing the more intractable challenges of sustainable development (Byrne, 2000; Fudge and Peters, 2009). Even for local authorities committed to community engagement as a primary focus for their climate change agendas, problems of poor image and perception in the community, associated historically with low levels of trust and a lack of confidence in local government policies, continue to threaten the progress and effectiveness of locally focused sustainability initiatives.

Insights from concepts and theories associated with social organisation (particularly in relation to social capital, social learning and persuasion theory) signpost the benefits to be derived from tapping into the cohesion and drive of already established social networks and community groups (Jackson, 2005; Peters *et al* 2010). Trust and knowledge are critical in the diffusion of social signals which can promote changed behaviour patterns among groups and individuals (Gardner and Stern, 1996).

This paper investigates the dynamics and organisation of existing, well-established community groups and their networks; particularly ones for which climate change

and environmental issues are not their primary focus. The research was guided by a set of central objectives covering two principal themes. First, 'features of the groups and how they function' in which topics discussed included: factors that motivate membership; group aims and priorities; impact in the local community; and how to improve participation in existing initiatives. Second, 'encouraging sustainable living and action on climate change' where the discussions focused on: participants' understanding of sustainability issues; approaches for engaging members in climate change action; and how being part of a community-based network can improve (or inhibit) the impact of actions being encouraged. A more detailed exposé of the empirical study is provided in Section 3. Prior to this we discuss synoptically the concept of social identity as relevant to communities, community organisation and the progress of action to address climate change.

## **2. Climate change and the social identities of communities**

A growing body of evidence indicates that individuals are not currently consistently willing and/or able to take personal action on climate change (e.g. Norton and Leaman, 2004; Lorenzoni *et al*, 2007; Spence, *et al*, 2011). Although there is generally a high level of awareness of environmental issues in the UK, concern about the threat of climate change remains relatively low in priority for most of the public and has in fact declined in perceived significance in recent years. This has accompanied a slight increase in scepticism on the issues of impact severity and human influence (Spence, *et al*, 2011). The literature in this area suggests broadly that limited public concern is one major factor, and that the link between attitudes and behaviour is currently weak. As Platt (2011) points out, changing attitudes and behaviour remains a critical factor in the success of initiatives to tackle climate change and, that even after the introduction of the Green Deal<sup>1</sup> in autumn 2012, the creation of consumer demand for energy efficiency measures will continue to be problematic. Platt suggests that community energy projects could play an important role in generating public support for the broader task of investment in and construction of new energy infrastructure.

Indeed there is substantial evidence that individuals are often more willing to take action when they are part of a physical or virtual community, or any such network that encourages them to take action with others (Jackson, 2005; Peters *et al*, 2010). Among such communities or networks, non-governmental organisations and the 'third sector' (which includes national voluntary organisations, local community groups, trade unions, co-operatives and faith communities) play a prominent and influential role in society. Hale (2010) in fact, identifies a need to establish a widespread understanding of the connections between climate change and a range of issues that are important to many of these groups, such as poverty, housing, health, security and well-being. The evidence underpins the development in recent years of theories of how group memberships and social relations contribute to organisational

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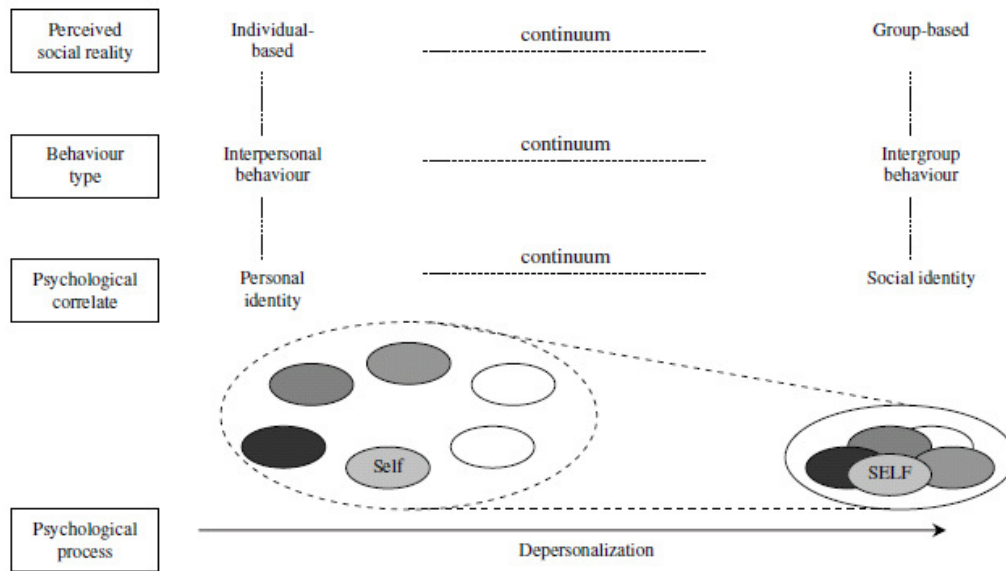
<sup>1</sup> A UK Government policy, to be introduced October 2012, which is designed to accelerate installation of energy efficiency measures in the UK's housing stock. Consumers will be able to pay for installation through the cost savings that the measures deliver (Platt, 2011).

life. These approaches are principally social psychological, deriving from a tradition developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner:

“...in our judgements of other people, ... in our work relations, in our concern with justice, we do not act as isolated individuals but as social beings who derive an important part of our identity from the human groups and social categories we belong to; and we act in accordance with this awareness” (Tajfel, Jaspars and Fraser, 1984, p.5).

The idea here is that groups are not only external features of the world that people encounter and interact with, they are also internalized, thus contributing to a person's 'sense of self' (Haslam, 2004). In recognition of these points, Tajfel (1972) coined the term “social identity” to refer to that part of a person's self-concept that derives from his or her group memberships. Social identity plays a critical function in shaping organisational members' evaluations of and responses to situations. It forms a basis for distinguishing between similar and dissimilar others and as such provides the criteria that lie behind perceptions of the self and the social environment. However, as Wharton points out, much more needs to be done with respect to understanding how particular social identities become salient, and the consequences of salience for community organisations and their members (Wharton, 1992, p. 67). One possibility is known as 'diffusion', which relates to the means by which environmental and other behaviours can be propagated by influential individuals in social networks (Fell *et al*, 2009).

Turner (1982) hypothesised that an individual's self-concept could itself be defined along a continuum ranging from definition of the self in terms of personal identity to definition in respect of social identity; and moreover, that interpersonal behaviour is associated with a salient personal identity and intergroup behaviour with a salient social identity (Haslam, 2004, p.29). Turner coined a term for the psychological process associated with the 'switching on' of social identity: “depersonalization”, a process of self-stereotyping by means of which the self comes to be perceived as categorically interchangeable with other in-group members (Figure 1). Issues of personal and social identity were central to the focus group discussions considered in this paper. In Section 4 results on factors that motivate participation and continued membership are presented, and in Section 5 we discuss their relevance to the encouragement of action on climate change through sustainable living by community groups.



**Figure 1:** Variation in self-categorization as a function of depersonalization

Note:

**Self** = self as unique individual with personal identity salient

**SELF** = self as interchangeable group member with social identity salient

The shift from **Self** to **SELF** comes about through depersonalization (self-stereotyping)  
(Source: Haslam 2004, p. 31)

### 3. Method

The main empirical study involved a series of deliberative focus groups with 'key informants' recruited from a range of selected community groups. The main criteria used in determining the choice of groups were:

- *Set-up:* we sought groups that are well established, have large memberships and cover a range of purposes and activities;
- *People:* we aimed to achieve representation from groups comprising a range of member 'types', e.g. in terms of age, gender, religious/secular;
- *Position on environment and sustainability:* we sought participation from groups for whom these issues are not the primary focus for their activities and purpose. The only community groups for which this criterion did not apply were those recruited to the 'Conservation group' category.

The format (about 3 hours) provided scope to carry out a broad range of activities and discussions. Participants were community leaders – senior representatives of organised community groups and social networks – who were clustered together into five separate focus groups. In total the five groups contained representatives from over 30 separate community organisations – most of which have widespread memberships and networks extending nationally across the UK, and in some cases internationally (e.g. the Women's Institute, the Scout and Guide Associations, and the Rotary Club - see Table 1 for full details of groups).



The use of focus groups is primarily a qualitative methodological tradition in which a trained facilitator probes the participants' knowledge and attitudes about a pre-designated set of topics. Focus groups are particularly useful where there has been little previous survey work to support greater understanding of people's representations of a topic (Millward, 1995). Information is usually most reliably collected by elicitation, where there is the potential for participants to learn from each other during discussions (Belton and Stewart, 2002). Typically, focus groups have between six and sixteen participants; in these particular groups, the number of participants ranged between nine and twelve.

<b>Workshop name</b>	<b>Participating groups</b>
<b>Women's Institute</b> ['WI group']	12 key informants from 5 WI groups: Sutton Green; Worplesdon; Mayford; Pilbright; Brookwood.
<b>Youth Workers</b> ['Youth group']	Surrey Youth Development Service; Rainbows (5-7 yr old Brownies/Guides); First Effingham Brownies (7-10 yr olds); Guildford Youth Council; Third Farnham Scouts (4-25 yr olds); Bushy Hill Junior School, Merrow; Burpham Primary School; Surrey County Council Youth Worker; Duke of Edinburgh Award; George Abbot School; First Guildford Company of Boys Brigade.
<b>Membership Groups and Parish Councils</b> ['Membership group']	Rotary Club of Guildford District; Ripley Parish Council; Ash Parish Council; Guildford Society; Cranleigh Parish Council; Leatherhead Rotary Club; Fetcham Residents' Association; Camberley Society; Godalming Woolsack Rotary Club; Worplesdon Parish Council
<b>Faith Leaders</b> ['Faith group']	Sikh missionary society (Elder); Church of England (Holy Trinity Church, Guildford High Street - Vicar); North West Surrey Synagogue (Rabbi); Shah Jahan Mosque (Imam); Guildford Quakers; St Thomas on the Bourne, Farnham (Vicar); Methodist Church (Farnham – Minister and lay preacher); Farnham Baptist Church (Minister).
<b>Conservation Groups</b> ['Conservation group']	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BCTV); Greening the Horsleys (part of wider Greening campaign); Guildford Environmental Forum; Surrey Community Action; Surrey Hills Society; Transition Guildford; Bourne Conservation Group; UK Butterfly Conservation (Surrey and South West London Branch); Elmbridge Environmental Forum.

**Table 1:** Details of community organisations participating in each focus group

## 4. Results and analysis

In the first part of this section, we present a quantitative analysis of motivating factors within and between the participating community groups using frequency and variance analysis. This is complemented with qualitative summaries about motivating factors, policies and procedures, and core activities. Finally, challenges and opportunities for the groups in promoting activity around climate change and sustainable lifestyles are explored.

### 4.1 Motivating factors behind group membership and participation: quantitative analysis

For each group, all participants contributed a 'narrative', which included phrases describing the factors that (a) had motivated participation in the group and (b) had influenced them to continue membership. For the purpose of the following analysis phrases from the narratives are categorised under 'factor' headings (retired/age in adults, moving, contacts,...) and group headings (WI group, Youth group...) taken from a set of twenty 'factor' headings and five group headings. Box 1 illustrates the procedure for a participant in the Youth group who contributed the short narrative shown. Each of the six phrases drawn from the narrative is categorised under one 'factor' heading shown in brackets.

#### **YouthWorkers**

*Example narratives categorised into "factor" headings shown in brackets*

"Hi, I'm a Brownie leader [membership/roles/governance] of First \_\_ Brownies [children/youth], that's aged seven up to about ten [children/youth]. When I'm not doing that I work part time [work] for children's services [children/youth] for \_\_County Council..."

**Box 1:** Narrative analysis of factors that motivate people: example.

Conversely, Box 2 illustrates the procedure for the factor labelled 'moving' which was contributed in the short pieces of narrative shown. Each of the five phrases drawn from the narrative is categorised under one 'group' heading shown in brackets.

#### **Moving**

*Example narratives categorised into "member" headings (names) shown in brackets*

"...when I first retired I moved away from this area to the coast..."

[Female, WI group]

"...well I moved from Leighton Buzzard down to Brookwood in 1978..." [Female, WI group]

"...my husband was made redundant and we bought a business and we looked all round the country for a suitable business." [Female]

**Box 2:** Occurrences of 'moving' as a motivating factor contributed by different group participants

Figure 2 (see end of paper) shows the frequency of occurrence of ‘factors’ in each membership group. The factors are shown on the axis from left-to-right while the groups appear on the axis from front-to-rear. It will be observed that some factors occur more strongly in some groups. For example, the factor ‘environment’ occurs much more strongly in the Conservation group than in the other groups; while the factor ‘children/youth’ is more prominent in the Youth workers group than in the other groups. It can also be noted that some groups occur more strongly in some factors. For example, the WI group occurs more strongly in the factors ‘contacts’, ‘membership/roles/governance’, ‘work’, and ‘children/youth’ than in the other factors.

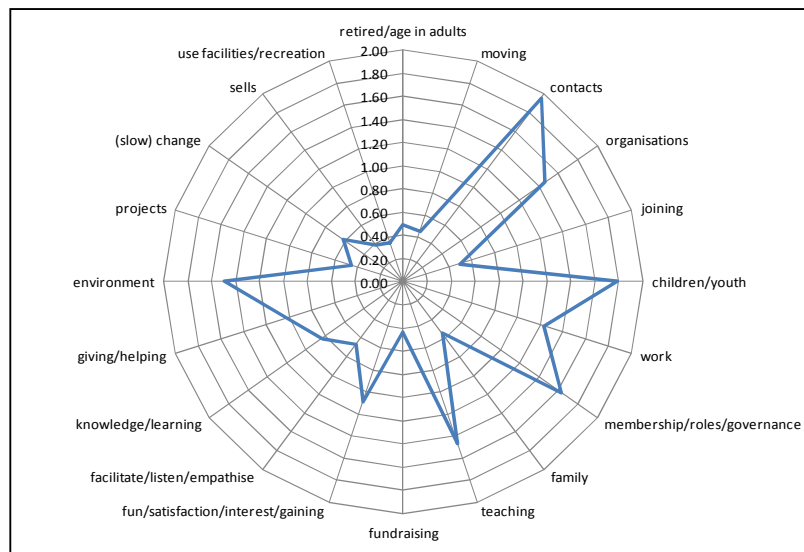
The differences in the variations of factors between and within the groups suggests an analysis of variance (ANOVA), which can test for the significance of factors between groups and of groups between factors. By this means sets of significant factors and groups can be identified that make up a more robust model of motivating factors in relation to the groups themselves.

#### 4.1.1 Analysis of Variance

The F-ratios for factors are shown (Table 2, second column).  $F(19, 3)$  at .95 is 6.39. The significant factors are ‘contacts’, ‘organisations’, ‘children/youth’, ‘membership/roles/governance’, ‘teaching’ and ‘environment’. We present a spider diagram of all the F-ratios using a reciprocal log scale (Figure 3).

<i>Factors</i>	<i>F-ratio</i>	<i>Significant?</i>
Contacts	3.24	Yes
Organisations	4.83	Yes
children/youth	3.62	Yes
membership/ roles/ governance	4.10	Yes
Teaching	4.80	Yes
Environment	4.66	Yes

**Table 2:** F-ratios and significances for factors of variance model



**Figure 3:** “Spider” diagram of scaled significances of factors

For the groups,  $F(3, 3)$  at .95 is 5.81. The Youth group is the only group which shows significance between factors (compared to other groups) with an F-ratio of 5.63. The data from this group and the 6 key factors (Table 2) may be said to represent the results in the most faithful way for the levels of significance chosen. Further discussion of these results is provided in Section 5.

The 'Explained' F-ratio of the overall model of the significant factors (6) and groups (1) is 0.12 which, in turn, is also highly significant (Table 3).

<i>Explanatory</i>		<i>Significant?</i>
Explained F-ratio	0.12	Yes
Residual (error) sum of squares	3272	
Total sum of squares	9879	

**Table 3:** The highly significant "explained" F-ratio of the factors and groups variance model.

## 4.2 Objectives of the groups, core activities and motivating factors: qualitative summaries

### 4.2.1 Women's Institute

Originally established in Canada for the education of rural women the WI has retained its educational role but is seen increasingly as a pressure group, having taken a particular interest in social conditions and providing women *"...with the chance to build new skills, to take part in a variety of activities and to campaign on issues that matter to them and their communities"* (WI, 2011). Focal points for recent campaign activities include safeguarding the future for Britain's dairy farmers, action to improve maternal healthcare in poorer countries, women and climate change, clearer country of origin labelling and combating the risks to honeybee populations. Most of the participants had joined the WI either: as a means of filling the post-retirement gap; after children had left home; or due to the death of a spouse. All of them spoke of the welcome they had received when they joined, the camaraderie of the organisation and the range of activities that were available. In addition, it was a means of getting to know a variety of people in the locality.

### 4.2.2 Youth Workers

The aims of the groups varied considerably, but with 'achievement' and 'team spirit' emerging as common themes. Asked why they had taken up this type of work, participants gave a number of different answers. For some members, it was felt that their childhood experience had been positive and that this provided the primary motivation for working with children. Others felt that they had no choice, while some were persuaded to take up youth work by their own children. In terms of benefits of the work key factors to emerge included: the rewards of seeing children learn, understand, develop and acquire skills – the enjoyment of *"seeing the penny drop"* when something new is understood; the fact that it can be fun; understanding gained from young people regarding their problems; helping children to work side-

by-side with adults rather than in hierarchical or combative relationships; and the pleasure of working with colleagues and peers having similar values and beliefs. Several participants emphasised the importance of patience, and that it is possible to learn a great deal about both the children and oneself.

#### *4.2.3 Membership Groups and Parish Councils*

The specific aims of the organisations represented at this focus group were wide-ranging, though they held in common a desire to maintain/achieve high levels of local amenity, to raise public awareness of the needs of the area and to serve the community. Participants articulated the main motivating factors and benefits associated with this type of work as follows: to get involved in community work and then see things getting better; to increase other peoples' awareness of what *they* can do to help, and to get them involved; to pass some time, keep the mind active and to "*give things back*" to the area; to get things done and build community spirit; to promote "*the good things about where I live*". All participants spoke of the rewards of the work. Although participants felt that it could be demanding and sometimes difficult, it also provides camaraderie, gives purpose to life after retirement, and allows people to help maintain and when possible improve the quality of life in their local communities.

#### *4.2.4 Faith leaders*

The aims of faith groups are perhaps best and most generally described in the words of one participant who said "*...we are here to serve the spiritual needs of the community*". In response to the question of what had initially motivated them to become involved in their respective faiths, most participants emphasised the influence of childhood experiences – both positive and negative. There was general consensus from leaders of all faiths represented in relation to engaging with the agenda outside their own 'internal' communities. Some faith groups see part of their mission as being a conduit for the creation of links across different points and groups in local communities, for example: "*...introducing people to each other, being a link between the schools and the church, the hospital and the hospice, and other institutions in the area. Linking people together at similar times in their life cycles...this is a function that we as a Church try to provide*" (Christian leader).

#### *4.2.5 Conservation groups*

Specific aims of the groups ranged from improving wildlife habitats to promoting areas of outstanding natural beauty and educating the public in their use. The general aims tended to be educational, encouraging the reduction of carbon use, the consumption of local food, and co-operation with local authorities and others to maintain and improve the area. In terms of motivating factors some, having retired, were looking to make a constructive contribution to their locality and to continue using their professional skills and knowledge in another capacity. Others were newcomers to the area and had decided to get involved locally. Still others explained that they were interested in a particular environmental issue and that this had

provided their main motivation to become involved in groups and their activities. Participants discussed what some saw as their organisations' declining memberships. Though there is an increasing number of people at or near retirement age, and many of them are healthier and more affluent than those in previous generations, it was felt that fewer of them are now prepared to give their time to help, perhaps even when they accept the importance of the cause.

### **4.3 Sustainable living, community groups and action on climate change: opportunities and challenges**

#### *4.3.1 Opportunities*

All groups felt that increased collaboration between their organisations could improve climate change engagement, with potential to increase their authority and influence. In the WI group existing contacts with parish or local authorities were identified as a useful starting-point.

Another area of opportunity discussed by all groups was education, in particular the role of community groups as conduits for social learning. Some groups gave practical examples of how this role could be activated. In the Faith group, for example, there was a strong sense that inspirational people wield substantial influence and that the faiths themselves can give such people a podium and facilitate a *"ministry of encouragement"*. This extends to the authorisation of the use of property such as church halls which can ultimately carry an endorsement from religious leaders, felt to be potentially powerful, influential and symbolic:

*"...we all have some sort of group spiritual events, church services, harvest festivals, etc. that are both moral and spiritual and are important because they put down deep roots in our community"*(Christian leader).

Another key area which came across from the leaders of Faith Groups included the opportunity to align the reasons for acting on climate change with the mission and purpose of the faiths in question: *"the gateway to look at concern for climate change is what it's doing to the weakest and poorest in any part of the world today"* (Sikh Leader).

In the Membership group it was suggested that certain events and meetings could be used to host speakers to talk about different aspects of sustainability, for example cavity wall insulation and home energy management. Others, from the WI, said that it would be useful to have a column in a local or free newspaper for disseminating key messages about sustainable living. Attitudinal change was seen as a corollary of education, indeed the Faith groups identified a specific role for themselves in this area:

*"...there are great leaflets coming out from our borough locally but actually it's so easy to recycle those and actually to stop and make them happen is part of what we as religious groups can do. We can't pay for all the messages, we can't pay for all the initiatives but we can help change the attitudes"* (Christian leader).

Building on existing and previous initiatives was felt to be beneficial for all the groups and making action on climate change ‘enjoyable’ was considered important as a persuasive approach:

*“...humour can be used greatly to persuade people. Just pounding and tub thumping annoys people ... there’s much that we can do by example”* (Youth leader).

It was suggested that young people should be offered options and opportunities to help improve elements of their community, embracing a social dimension to sustainability as well as the more familiar environmental. One primary school reported working towards ‘eco school’ status, and that their pupils are increasingly well informed, as a result sometimes taking the lead, for example in turning off lights, overhead projectors and laptops. Other schools are using local suppliers for food, and encouraging walking and cycling for journeys to and from school. Several groups noted that children are becoming increasingly recycling-aware as a specific pro-environmental behaviour. Some schools, for example, run inter-class competitions in minimising waste and recycling. The potential for children to influence their parents was agreed on as a potent opportunity area, as one Youth group leader noted, *“...they’re sometimes shaming them”*.

#### 4.3.1 Challenges

A core challenge identified by all groups was ensuring the impact of campaigns by differentiating between their various influences. For example, a common theme was the desire for more positivity around calls for action to address climate change. It was felt that currently there is too much focus on negative messages rather than on what could be achieved through collective action. This was linked to trust and how it has, to some extent been eroded in recent times through events reported widely in the media, e.g. the University of East Anglia ‘climategate’ scandal and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s mistake regarding the melting of Himalayan glaciers. In the Membership group, leading by example, encouraging and endorsing particular activities were held as potentially effective strategies for the groups that government itself has seemingly found difficult to implement in its attempts to promote behaviour change in pursuit of the low carbon transition. It was also noted that all organisations are in need of more volunteers to spread the burden of work.

A lack of formal co-operation between the different youth organisations emerged as a key challenge for the Youth group in particular. Though highly desirable, the development of more inter-group cooperation was considered to be potentially problematic. Excessive bureaucracy was identified by this group as an obstacle to the mobilisation of good ideas, especially through risk assessments and ‘red-tape’ restrictions.

In the Faith group, a doctrinal challenge was raised in relation to Christianity: on the one hand encouraging earthly stewardship, on the other *“...traditions that apparently promote us to multiply, fill the earth, reproduce as far and fast as possible”* (Christian

leader). In addition it was suggested that the notion of eternal life as *"escape to another world"* means that great care is required when reconciling beliefs with actions. Other specific challenges that were raised as obstacles to the good intentions and potential influence of the groups in promoting sustainable lifestyles included out-of-season supermarket produce, the convenience of private car use and its negative influence on the uptake of other transport modes, and over-exposure to environmental and climate-related exhortations *"...you can reach saturation point where you try to promote something too vigorously and people become bored and put off"* (WI group leader).

## **5. Discussion and concluding remarks**

This paper has focused on a range of voluntary and community sector groups that operate both locally and nationally. The purpose of the fieldwork was to investigate the main priorities of the groups, the factors that attract people to become members, and the opportunities and challenges of applying the drive and cohesion that these groups clearly exhibit to the issues of climate change, sustainability and sustainable living.

The quantitative analysis revealed a series of factors that motivate participation and encourage continued membership in the groups studied. For each group certain factors featured as particularly prominent and different from key factors in other groups. Whilst perhaps unsurprising this finding reinforces the salience of shared values discussed earlier in relation to group identity and self categorisation. In other words the identity of the group stems largely from its core values, its primary objectives and the activities it undertakes and promotes. And these values, objectives and activities feature prominently in the motivating factors. The participants' frequent referral to 'team spirit' and collective purpose indicate the veracity of 'depersonalization', where collective group values become subsumed into a member's own sense of self (Haslam, 1994). Haslam argues that this process *"...underpins people's ability to achieve social cohesion, communicate effectively, influence and persuade each other, act collectively and go beyond the call of duty."* (p. 17). Motivating factors that emerged as significant (displaying the greatest range of variance) across the groups included 'contacts', 'organisations', 'children/youth', 'membership/roles/governance', 'teaching' and 'environment'. The Youth group displayed the greatest range of variance between the factors and for this reason achieved significance.

Hale (2010) argues a need to secure the commitment of groups of the type described in this paper – i.e. with widely varying concerns and constituencies – encouraging them to draw on their influence with politicians and their supporters to enable sustainability progress to be realised. It is suggested that the best way to do this is *not* through continual emphasis on the urgency of climate change for society in general, but rather by showing that the short and longer term interests of the groups themselves can be well served by taking an active lead on climate change and sustainable living. To this end, Hale proposes specific areas of particular relevance to



this paper where voluntary and community sector groups could take the lead in relation to combating climate change, namely (i) national leadership and action by the third sector; (ii) community, local and regional leadership; and (iii) living differently and demanding more.

In the first area, leadership and devotion of the groups would be critical in reframing climate change in the public mind, and in generating possibilities for behaviour change and stronger support for political action. Youth organisations for instance are highlighted as having ‘tremendous potential... to lead, given that the young have most to gain from action now on climate change’ (p.268). A key corresponding message from our focus group with youth work leaders is that in order to motivate young people the issue in question must be made manageable. For climate change and sustainable living, this is likely to entail breaking actions down into small manageable pieces; providing rewards for progress achieved; and recognising that for the younger age groups, issues of an ethical nature (such as intergenerational equity) may be harder to appreciate.

In the second area, it is argued that national third sector organisations – together with government – need to provide much more cooperation and backing to communities that want to take action. Particular groups that are emphasised in this vein include schools, faith groups, residents’ associations and sports clubs; all of which could, according to Hale “provide vital local leadership and action” (p. 269). The desire to develop further this type of leadership and action was highlighted as an opportunity in our own study. The importance of leading by example was referred to by all the groups, and the capacity of schools and other youth groups to guide and continually reinforce sustainability messages to younger generations was emphasised particularly by the Youth and WI group members. This form of leadership could serve to expand and strengthen public commitment to action, as well as to highlight the potential for the delivery of new low carbon solutions, imaginative policy options and emissions reductions.

Under the third area (living differently and demanding more), community groups are seen as potentially powerful enablers, with their national and local networks, in relation to promoting behaviour change and in providing attractive alternatives to entrenched lifestyle habits. Attention is drawn to faith communities ‘which are deeply embedded and able to make influential appeals for action based on values and empathy with others’ and schools, ‘which are potential hubs for local action and influencing parents’ (Hale, 2010; p.270). Results from the Faith group in our study highlights the power of ritual and the potential through this to forge new connections; between people themselves and between people and the natural environment. As one of the participants in this group noted: “...these [religious] rituals go right back through humanity’s history. We are the custodians of these and its what we are experts at doing at all sorts of educational and achievement levels. In terms of connecting with people and encouraging environmental responsibility, its the most potent way of doing it I think.”

The experience of the recent Green Streets community energy challenge demonstrates the broader benefits of addressing climate change at the community rather than the individual household level (Platt, 2011). This initiative involved 14 community groups across Great Britain implementing carbon saving projects with a share of £2 million and technical support from the energy company British Gas. As Platt argues, in addition to the implementation of energy efficiency measures and deployment of microgen technologies, the participating groups “...have also helped to improve community facilities and galvanise local people into taking action on energy, and some have even improved community cohesion in the process.” Clearly, the progress enabled in Green Streets was principally down to the efforts and enthusiasm of the groups themselves. Nevertheless, the provision of initial funding and an infrastructure of technical support were also critical. This point clearly resonates with findings from our own fieldwork. For example, many participants pointed out that while their groups could make a sizeable contribution to encouraging action on climate change, there needs to be the necessary funding and infrastructure in place to facilitate this role. As one of the Membership group participants pointed out: *“...the government need to provide the funding and the infrastructure. The community sector can drive change forward; we are where the people are. But we haven't got the money or the resources to build the new sustainable structures that are necessary for us to advance the messages and facilitate the action.”*

Community groups contribute to the diversity of values, desires and priorities of society. Connecting with them brings a challenge that to some extent reflects wider issues of community engagement in society which have proved to be stumbling blocks to the progress of climate change initiatives. Where there is perhaps greater potential with established groups is in their existing sense of collective purpose, shared values and drive. Many of the participating groups in this study are already actively engaged in campaigning and education programmes around environmental and sustainability issues. Notable in this respect are the WI, schools and the uniformed organisations. Despite the current challenges identified by the groups themselves (ranging from low impact of campaigns, lack of inter-group cooperation and negative media influence on public attitudes) a series of opportunities indicates that practical action on climate change could effectively be further mobilised through community groups and voluntary organisations. Measuring the progress of such endeavours longitudinally would be the most appropriate way to gauge the durability of sustainability change enabled by such groups and provides considerable scope for further academic inquiry. We suggest that the complementary use of quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the focus group narratives in this paper could also provide the basis for future analytical work. This calls for additional correspondence of the methods used with the more systematic analysis of relevant narratives.

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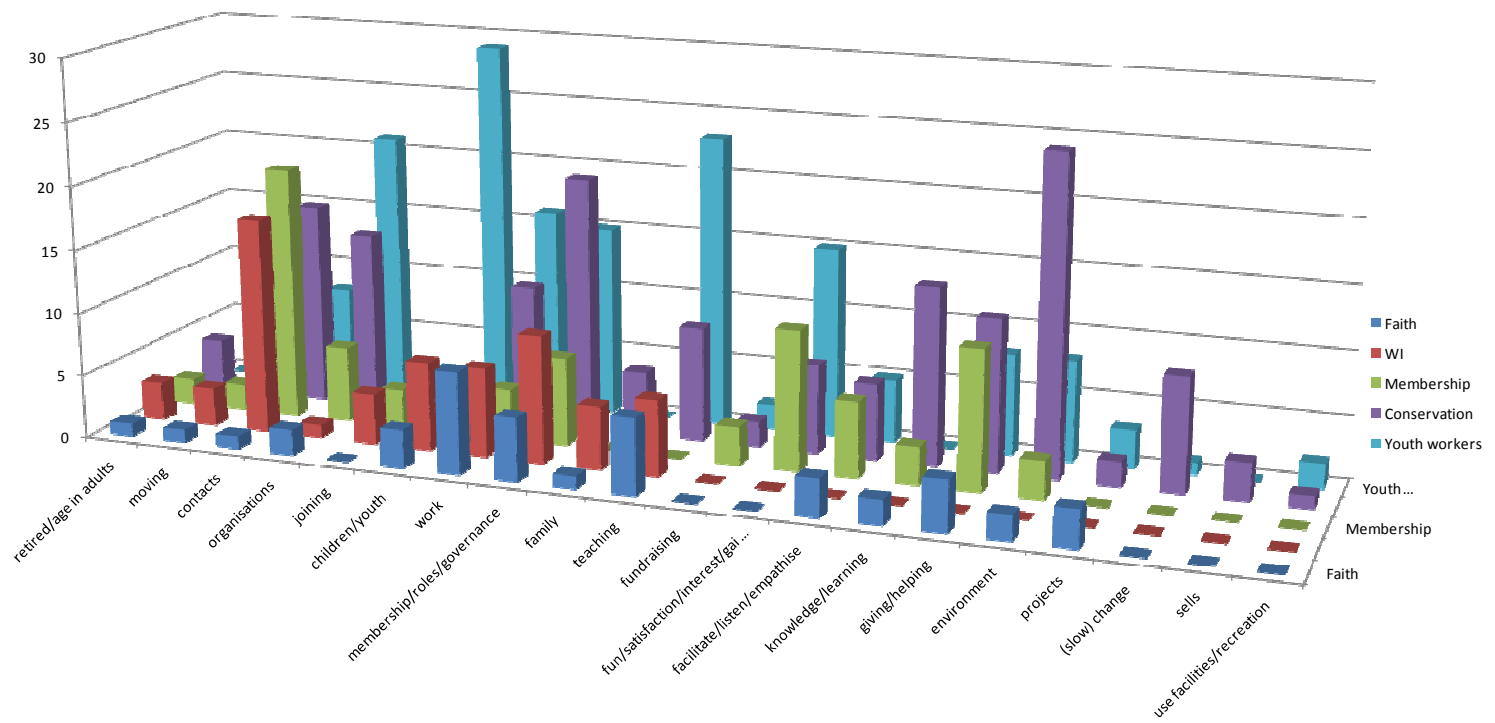
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**Figure 2:** Frequencies of occurrence of factors that motivate participation and continued membership (left-right axis) in each group (front-rear axis)