

Civil society and climate change

Introduction

One of the key concerns about the future of civil society as identified by participants in the Inquiry futures events related to growing pressure on global resources. People were especially concerned about the affects this would have on the good civil society. However, given the increased awareness of the challenge of peak oil and climate change, participants in the Inquiry events also suggested that this concern has the potential of strengthening civil society.

To inform the Inquiry's thinking and action in relation to this theme, the Carnegie UK Trust commissioned the New Economics Foundation (**nef**) to undertake some feasibility research. The information below outlined the findings from this work.

Summary of findings

Key findings from **nef's** research suggest that there are a number of features of the response to climate change that could strengthen civil society:

- There is an enormous range of motivations for citizens engaging in this issue.
- The narrative concerning civil society's response to climate change has the potential to be inclusive, but it needs to be pitched in a manner that reflects the diverse motivations for engagement.
- The emphasis on geographic place (including workplaces) creates the potential to include everyone in that place. The fact that there are many practical things that people can do in that place can also encourage people to work together.
- Climate change affects us all, and therefore cannot be tackled in isolation. It therefore requires people to link-up, and has the potential to strengthen associational life.

It is also worth noting that a recent report commissioned by the Department for Constitutional Affairs on the Future of Citizenship stated while it is unlikely that the British population will significantly reengage with the state, a significant change in the external environment could increase engagement, such as a tipping point in attitudes toward climate change.

While it is possible that people's concerns about climate change may strengthen civil society, there are also a number of features that may also undermine the potential to strengthen civil society:

- The narrative can develop in a way that excludes some groups. Moreover, the narrative has the potential to be unexciting or demotivating.
- Many examples of existing successful actions on the part of civil society associations are located in smaller rural towns and villages with relatively settled populations. Places with more transient communities may find it more difficult to develop sustainable solutions. Moreover, the lack of civil society infrastructure to enable smaller civil society associations to share resources and learning can limit the sustainability and potential impact of local action.

- Inequalities may be worsened if support for action on the part of civil society associations focuses on places that may seem to produce the best results.

Other key findings from the research indicate that:

- There has been a rapid growth in civil society associations that are engaging in the environmental/sustainability/climate change agendas.
- Many organisations, due to a lack of resources and know-how, focus on engaging the 'easy to reach' which tend to be the middle-class.
- There is a tension in how the narrative is framed. On the one hand, there is doom and gloom with an emphasis on 'reduction'. For instance, a focus on minimizing carbon footprints gives the message, according to some, such as Tony Kettle of the Eden Project Foundation, that the best people can do is to vanish. On the other hand, there is the 'Big Adventure' narrative as promoted by The Eden Project Foundation which focuses on exploring 'How good can we be?' This approach sees hope . not optimism . as the engine of change.
- There are examples of how local knowledge and ideas can inform practical action.
- People's concerns about climate change have the potential of establishing new associations (perhaps including groups that would otherwise not have connected). It also has the potential of broadening the agendas and constituencies of existing associations (and their modus operandi).

Research findings

Civil society's response to climate change

Drawing on a local survey by Friends of the Earth (FoE) which mapped community-based initiatives with an interest in climate change in the South-west of England, and a national 'map' of organisations produced by Climate Outreach and Information Network (COIN), the New Economics Foundation estimates that there may be between 2,000 and 4,000 community based groups working on climate change in the UK¹.

The number of groups engaging in this agenda is growing rapidly. The Friends of the Earth survey revealed that 40% of the surveyed groups had been formed since 2005. The Transition Town movement (<http://transitiontowns.org/>) is a good example of this rapid growth: the first transition town was developed in Kinsale (Ireland) in 2005; at the end of 2006 there were ten transition towns; there are now 29 with another 200 thinking of applying formally.

FoE's survey results from the South-west also reveal the nature of local groups:

- 61% have climate change as the core part of their mission
- They have an average core membership of 17 people . with an average of 106 occasional members. (some have many more . Transition Town Brixton has 600 members)
- Only 15% have paid members of staff
- Waste and recycling (49%) and energy use (48%) are the top activities

¹ Grimes, S (2007) *A movement of people. Community Climate Action in South West England*. Friends of the Earth South-west. The I Count website is the participatory element of the Stop Climate Chaos Campaign.

- 59% of groups are independent, 30% are local branches of national organisations (i.e. Friends of the Earth), 8% are faith based groups².

Who is involved?

The examples from the research highlight that the profile of citizen involvement is variable. Ashton Hayes village (Cheshire) is a very inclusive example; it has reduced its carbon footprint by 20% in one year, with a staggering 99.4% of households engaging in environmentally friendly behaviour.

Interviewees from the trade union movement (PCS, T&G, TUC) report that branch meetings and special one-off events around climate change issues are bringing in a wider section of members than the normal usual suspects who attend. Quakers in Business told nef that their conference on climate change attracted a diverse group of attendees simply because the issue impacts people whether they are *'a lawyer or a petrol pump attendant'*.

However, these positive examples are balanced by the overall impression that much civil society activity is less diverse. This finding emphasises that although this issue may have the potential to increase social capital, civil society activity also relies and builds on the current levels of social capital.

To generalise it seems that there is much more buy in from middle class, middle aged citizens. One local government employee saw local civil society climate change activity as predominantly middle-class. CTC, the national cycling organization, report that their membership is predominantly white, male and middle class. Even in urban areas marked by high levels of diversity, building an inclusive diverse association is not easy. For example, Transition Town Brixton is largely white and middle class and has not engaged with local BME communities or the very large local Portuguese community. Bovey Tracy Climate Action described their profile as 80% ABC1s (middle-class).

Interviewees were pleased that the issue of climate change is no longer seen as just for people with sandals and beards. However, four groups in particular were reported as being hard to reach: black or minority ethnic communities, young people, indigenous working class and the very rich who have the highest carbon footprints. For many civil society groups their lack of diversity is due to a lack of resources for outreach but also a lack of know-how concerning how to do outreach. Tony Kendle from the Eden Project felt that the message was not reaching the wealthy, who were dependent on materialism and sheltered from the effects of climate change.

The actions of civil society associations

The groups carry out a variety of activities with regard to climate change:

- Awareness raising
- Creating spaces for discussing climate change
- Practical activities drawing on local knowledge

The FoE survey shows that 68% of the local groups were engaged in raising awareness of climate change issues; from monthly newsletters to pub quizzes, from cinema commercials to DVD and websites.

² The organisations nef spoke to as part of this research reflect this mix. For example, they included the Sunnymead Environmental Group, The Really-Use Less Group of Ledbury, Friends of the Earth Camden, Christian Concern for Oneworld in Reading, Quakers in Business, the Eden Project Foundation.

Spaces for discussing climate change do not emerge naturally. Using already existing places where people come together and feel safe is often a good place to start such as pubs and church groups. The Cornwall Energy Partnership used pub quizzes followed by a talk from a scientist. Feedback suggests that local people thought it was valuable to hear direct from a scientist and to engage with others in an informal relaxed setting. Local prayer groups have also been used to achieve the same outcome.

In terms of practical action some of the most innovative activity has involved utilising local knowledge. Transition Glastonbury, for instance, held a Harvest Show which brought together different sections of the community; the Women's Institute, country market, local food suppliers, food NGOs, children etc. They intend to follow this up by a food mapping event in order to encourage local consumers and businesses to buy local food. A national example of an organisation using local knowledge was the TUC motion tabled by the National Union of Mineworkers in 2005 calling for the development of clean coal.

Which aspects of the response have the potential to strengthen civil society?

The **nef** research identified four key features that have the potential to strengthen civil society; these factors are variable and so in addition to being potential strengths for civil society mobilisation they also contain challenges that will need to be overcome if the potential is going to be realised.

Climate change . the narrative

Climate change has the potential to provide an inclusive narrative . we are all affected by climate change and we can all contribute to action aimed at limiting its impact. In the words of Al Gore, at his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize

“Let us say together: We have a purpose. We are many. For this purpose we will rise and we will act”.

Tony Kettle of the Eden Foundation emphasised the importance of being positive in creating a narrative that will appeal to all sorts of people. Their emphasis is that the transition in life styles required should be framed as the *big adventure* and the challenge is *how good can we be?* Hope not optimism is the engine of change. Cornwall, where the project is based, illustrates the need for such a narrative. Cornwall has been described as a county that has had a 150 year nervous breakdown. Tony describes what happened:

“When the wheels come off big time and you lose all your primary industries. The loss of employment leads to a loss of identity, of purpose, of a reason to live among the people that surround you, of the ability to relate to the geography around you”. (Tony Kettle . Eden Project)

Tony Kettle thought that Cornwall's experience could be a forerunner of what many parts of the world will have to go through during the transition required. The Eden Project is seeking to reinvent the community narrative through cultural events and other activities.

However, the narrative that underpins climate change also has the potential to be unexciting and exclusive. The narrative might develop in ways that do not excite people. Tony Kettle pointed to the carbon footprint metaphor as one such narrative . footprints are something to be minimised and so people are being told the best thing to do is to vanish! Even more serious would be elite/scientific narratives that concentrate on

techno-fixes that would eliminate the role of activity by civil society associations. Finally, as already noted above, many groups are finding it difficult to reach communities not currently represented within their membership and so their narratives often focus and appeal to their existing members. For instance, the Transition Town Movement emphasises connecting with the older generation who have an experience of an economy and society less reliant on oil than a younger generation. This final point leads us into the variety of motivations that citizens have for engaging in climate change action and how the narrative around climate change needs to be tailored to different constituencies.

Motivations

The research has indicated an enormous range of motives for engaging people in issues around climate change. Penny Morley of the Transport and General Workers Union (T&G) said:

“What motivates our members is a lot of different things, like social justice and equality. It’s complex, I mean a lot of our members have children and they’re thinking about that too. It’s a big issue in all workplaces, whether it is coming from the employer because they have had to look at their emissions, or coming from their kids because they’re doing it at school”.

Adrian Dent (CTC) suggested that even the climate change sceptics could be reached. He profiles them anecdotally as being male, older, working class and less educated and has found it very difficult to change their attitudes toward climate change. His approach was to promote cycling in other ways that do not emphasis the benefit of reduced carbon emissions but the result is the same . fewer car journeys. His organisation is one of many whose core mission is not climate change but they are paying increasing attention to it.

In a different context, Development NGOs joined the Climate Change and Development Working Groups, co-convened by nef, through fear that climate change could threaten or even reverse the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

A more theoretical approach drawing on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has been developed by nef and Pat Dade of Cultural Dynamics and is illustrated in the table below.

Group	Motivated by	How to present changes in lifestyle that reduce carbon emissions	% of UK pop.
Settlers	Security, belonging and identity	Safe Living	21
Prospectors	Success, self-esteem and esteem of others	Smart Living	44
Pioneers	Inner directed, with a desire to explore the new	Ethical Living	35

The Going Carbon Neutral project in Ashton Hayes is aimed at making Ashton Hayes the first carbon neutral village in the UK. Ged Edwards conducted a local survey of the motivations of residents and found a variety of reasons that reflect the group typologies

in the above table³. Motivations included, *‘saving money’*(settler concern) and *‘seeing environmentally friendly behaviour as a moral responsibility’*(pioneer concern).

Most of the people who start civil society groups are Pioneers. A clear example is provided by Liz Laine, co-ordinator of Camden Friends of the Earth: *‘My motivation is a moral belief that we are not free to consume the planet’s natural resources without thought for who might suffer’*.

However, pioneer motivations will only resonate with other pioneers and therefore narratives developed by pioneers will only appeal to roughly 35% of the UK population. For other sections of the population, narratives need to be developed that appeal to their motivations. A crude example that illustrates how messages might be reframed to appeal to wider constituencies has been drawn from advertisements of the US Detroit project; a project aimed at deterring *‘settler’*Americans from buying Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV or 4x4). One advertisement claims that SUVs use a lot of petrol, petrol dollars go to the Arabs, so it is likely that some of this money will go to anti-American terror groups. Whilst many will find this distasteful, the point it emphasises is that the dissemination of climate change messages needs to be tailored to multiple constituencies in order to resonate more effectively. The research tells us that pioneer leaders of civil society associations find it difficult and are ill-equipped to engage large numbers of people who have variable motivations.

Another potential problem is that although motivations are wide, they may not be deep enough to overcome inertia or to challenge the deeply held beliefs that run contrary to activity to minimise climate change. Many examples illustrate that although citizens are aware of the climate change issue very few are prepared to do anything about it. Where agency is manifest it is likely to be encouraged and maintained by the final two key factors; a sense of place and collective agency/action.

Another way of understanding the motives of civil society associations to engage with this issue can be explored by understanding the potential impact climate change may have. The table below, drawn from work by **nef** for Oxfam, shows the variety of issues that are affected by climate change:

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Threats and opportunities from climate change and peak oil</i>
Rural poverty	Oil price rises increase the cost of transport and heating. But decentralized energy systems can introduce new sources of income.
Food security	Oil price rises will also raise food costs because of the dependence of agriculture on fossil fuels
Health	Climate change raises the risk of flooding. Those whose homes were flooded in Lewes East Sussex in 2000 experienced a four-fold increase in psychological distress compared to those whose homes were not affected. Stress of this nature is associated with increase risk of hypertension, heart disease and diabetes.
Regeneration	Locally grown organic seasonal fruit and vegetables are most energy efficient and could provide affordable healthy food and improve community cohesion. The very name of <i>‘Growing Communities’</i> in Hackney illustrates the link between food and regeneration.
Job creation	The European Commission predicts that 900,000 new jobs will be

³ <http://www.goingcarbonneutral.co.uk/Baseline%20survey/Gedssurvey.html>

	created in renewable energy systems across Europe by 2020. ⁴
Transport	The Cornwall Food Programme, which brings together the Soil Association and the Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust has reduced the Trust's food miles and their associated carbon emissions by two-thirds.

It is about place

The research has found that most of the groups that have been set up in response to climate change have a place as a part of their name . Bovey Climate Action, Brixton Transition Town etc. This is in part due to how climate change activists see the localisation agenda as a counter to globalisation. The local focus, as with the development of narrative, has the potential to be inclusive . to include everybody connected with that place. Modbury, a small town in south Devon, is one good example from the research. On May 1st 2007 it became the first place in the UK to become plastic bag free. This initiative was driven by Rebecca Hosking, a wildlife filmmaker, who commented:

I think the reason this has worked in Modbury is because I am local and people know me

Other local examples of places wishing to be the first to do something, besides the Transition Towns, are:

- Ashton Hayes aims to be England's first carbon neutral village; this has resulted in 35% of residents becoming more active in village life.
- Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's campaign to make Axminster the first free-range town in England
- Bishops Castle in Shropshire wants to be the first incandescent bulb free community
- North Leigh, in west Oxfordshire, aspires to be the first village to be labelled energy efficient

The workplace is another type of place that has the potential for people to coalesce around issues of climate change. In some workplaces the embedded social capital of the trade union organisation can provide a solid foundation upon which to build. The institutions of collective bargaining are increasingly seen as an appropriate place for the issues of climate change to be negotiated between unions and management. Penny Morley of the T&G said:

“That is what we are trying to do, to try and get deeper penetration into workplaces, to try and get this on the bargaining agenda...We do see it as a bargaining agenda issue. We had debates over the years about if an employer starts to save money through energy efficiency, should there be a more equal distribution of this money. This hasn't really taken off, because management don't see it as something that they should share”.

The key downside on the focus on place is the differentials between different places. The social capital literature suggests that the most deprived areas also suffer from less social capital. If support therefore flows to where organisations are flourishing this is likely to increase and compound inequalities between places. Places where the

⁴ European Commission, Directorate General for Energy, *The impact of renewables on employment and economic growth* (undated).

population is stable are likely to establish collective organisations more easily than those with more transient populations. This research has supported this view; the groups have tended to grow out of other established organisations and have built on previous levels of social capital rather than been started from scratch. The result is that they tend to be middle class and middle aged. The same is of course true of workplaces; if trade unions will increasingly pick up on these issues as part of their bargaining agenda there will be a sizable number of workplaces where collective bargaining and union recognition is not present.

Climate change requires people and organisations to link up

David Ballard, an expert in both climate change and action research, proposes a simple model on the causes of attitude and behavioural change:⁵

Awareness x Association x Agency = attitude and behavioural change

If awareness, association or agency is equal to zero then no change occurs; all are needed to drive change. Agency is defined as the *'felt sense of being able to do something meaningful in response to climate change'*. In a survey carried out by the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee⁶, 92% of trade union respondents illustrated they did feel they had agency with regard to climate change and 76% felt that the green NGOs were doing a good job in raising levels of awareness.

Association supports agency in a number of ways. To begin with climate change cannot be solved by people acting in isolation, as David Ballard explains:

"On huge issues such as climate change or absolute poverty, most things that are 'meaningful' are very difficult unless we do them with others. Association with others can support wavering willpower and can bring a variety of perspectives to an issue and so lead to better decisions".

Association also provides the support individuals require to get through periods of ~~w~~wavering will power. The research also points to the findings from the Ashton Hayes research⁷. Three of the key motivations for residents engaging in the local climate change initiatives were connected in some way to the benefits from associating:

- encouragement of friends and family
- being part of a community based programme
- pride in Ashton Hayes

In addition to connecting individuals to each other through association; the associations themselves need to link up to each other if the response is to be made more effective. The TUC respondents to nefc research stated that their affiliates (PCS & UNISON) are affiliated to Stop Climate Chaos, for example, but the TUC itself is not. In other areas embryonic connections are beginning to be made; nefc research highlights the first county wide meeting of local groups working on climate change in Herefordshire in November 2007. Adam Shadrack explained that Bovey Climate Action was a member of the Dartmoor Circle (13 climate action groups in the Dartmoor National Park area). His group catalysed the coming together of this group but he still felt that there was a lack of county, regional and national networks.

⁵ *Using Learning Processes to promote change for sustainable development* David Ballard .
www.alexanderballard.co.uk

⁶ www.tuc.org.uk/sustainableworkplace/prospect_enviro_nft.pdf

⁷ Ged Edwards - <http://www.goingcarbonneutral.co.uk/Baseline%20survey/Gedssurvey.html>

The lack of resources of many of the groups could be what tips these variables into the negative. Building associations, developing inclusive narratives, producing, drawing on and articulating local knowledge and connecting associations to each other all takes up precious resources; resources that are scarce. Only 15% of the groups in the South West Friends of the Earth Survey had any paid staff. A lack of resources can deter organisers from developing a more inclusive association; Duncan Law of Transition Town Brixton said that they only had the time and resources to engage with people who are already likely to be active. However, by connecting with other groups locally or at the county-wide level, associations might well be able to pool resources especially for projects designed to produce and then articulate local knowledge to underpin local action. The lack of civil society infrastructure to enable small groups to connect to each other and share resources and learning can single-handedly undermine several of the positive features above. The lack of a supportive infrastructure means that many new, fledging and fragile groups will not develop their potential and will possibly simply fade away.