Non-governmental Organisations and Citizen Action on Climate Change: Strategies, Rationales and Practices

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Abstract: The article reports key findings from a fieldwork survey of NGOs conducted in France, Germany and the UK, which investigated strategies to encourage citizen action on climate protection. It illustrates the limited usefulness for NGOs of the 'information deficit' and 'rational actor' models. In contrast, it shows the importance of leading on values, as well as the need to build bridges between ideas and practice by providing opportunities for public engagement and building communities of action. NGOs focus on the positive benefits of citizen action (rather than on compelling behaviour change), with expected benefits extending beyond the material and financial to embrace well-being, personal development and community building, as well as the intrinsic value of protecting the environment.

INTRODUCTION

The 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change led to a system of global climate governance whose centrepiece remains the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. However, the renewal and extension of the latter is uncertain, having now been postponed to the 2014 Conference of the Parties session in Lima, Peru. Over the lifetime of the Kyoto Protocol, climate protection has been enacted mostly in a state-centric and top-down perspective, with an emphasis on national greenhouse gas (GHG) emission targets for industrialised countries. This state-centric turn has generated a sizeable political science literature on national climate policy making (see, for example, Compston and Bailey, 2008; Harris, 2009; Wurzel and Connelly, 2011). Disaggregation of national targets by GHG sources has occurred to a limited extent, and is focused principally on reducing emissions from the industrial sector, with the European Union's Emissions Trading Scheme being the largest case in point. Yet little has been done regarding emissions from the residential or transport sectors, despite the fact that in the UK CO_2 emissions account respectively for 30 per cent and 28 per cent of the total (DECC, 2012: 11). Nevertheless, some initiatives have been taken at the level of cities and 'transition towns' to develop local action on climate (Bulkeley and Schroeder, 2012; Taylor, 2012). Also, the arena of climate action may be opening up, given that a range of public and private sector actors are stymied by the lack of progress on a new international climate treaty, leading to new and complex partnerships investigated by academic researchers in terms of emergent systems of 'transnational governance' (Bulkeley *et al*., 2012; Pattberg,

2012). Thus whilst a context of blockage at the international level, aggravated by the financial and sovereign debt crises at the domestic level, is clearly inimical to 'traditional' climate policy, the limitations have triggered a search for new approaches.

A potential zone for emissions mitigation is found at the level of individuals and households. However, governments have been concerned about making explicit requirements of their citizens in relation to climate protection, apparently on the grounds that the public is not ready. One cause for hesitation arises from the limited understanding of climate change shown by the public (or at least significant segments of it), with causes being erroneously attributed to ozone depletion or nuclear power (see for example Bord *et al*., 2000; Leiserowitz, 2006). Another (related but distinct) cause is limited public acceptance of climate science, as evidenced by varying degrees of uncertainty, ambivalence and scepticism towards it (Poortinga *et al*., 2011). Thus fear of public opposition seems to explain policy inertia towards individual/household emissions control. For the UK, the year 2000 protests against the fuel duty escalator are understood to be the cause of government inaction on transport emissions (Ockwell *et al*., 2009: 313). Initiatives have been limited to publicity campaigns - notably the 1998-2000 'Are You Doing Your Bit?' and the 2008-9 'Act on CO_2' campaigns, together with household energy efficiency improvements. These implied a burden of responsibility placed on the public. Alongside this development, a growing literature emerged to help individuals understand the effects of their actions, change behaviour and become carbon neutral (see for example, Goodall, 2007; Vandenbergh and Steinemann, 2007).

Given this background, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could play an important role in helping to tackle emissions at the individual and household levels, by providing an active interface for public engagement.

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However, during the early development of climate policy in the 1990s 'environmentalists virtually ignored (…) the general public' (Betsill, 2008: 64). Signs that their stance was changing emerged in the 2000s (Hall and Taplin, 2007). Nevertheless, little scholarly attention has been devoted to the ways in which NGOs encourage citizens to take action on reducing their own emissions. This article contributes to filling that gap. It has three main research questions. How do NGOs engage the public and promote citizen action to reduce GHG emissions? What climate friendly activities do they seek to encourage? And what are the reasons behind their choices of strategies and practices? Two strictures on its remit need to be explained. One is that the article limits itself to NGO 'society facing' strategies, understood in a fairly restrictive manner as citizen efforts to mitigate their own emissions. Hence it does *not* discuss NGO 'state facing' strategies related to climate protection (such as lobbying, inputs into domestic policy or involvement in international negotiations). The other is that it aims only to identify the nature and rationale of NGO strategies, but does not seek to evaluate their effectiveness. This is because the links between NGO intent and outcome are too difficult to pin down, given the current state of knowledge.

The article proceeds in three sections: the first clarifies the approach and methodology, the second reports key findings from a fieldwork survey of NGOs conducted in France, Germany and the UK, and the third discusses the wider issues raised by the findings, including the attribution of responsibility as well as the wider benefits of climate-friendly action.

1. Analysing NGO Practices to Promote Public Engagement with Climate: Questions of Approach and Method

Whitmarsh *et al.* (2011: 63) proposed that 'achieving ambitious policy targets for carbon reduction depends on societal engagement with climate change and GHG mitigation'. However, engagement can take many forms. Lorenzoni, *et al.* (2007: 446) defined engagement as meaning 'a personal state of connection with the issue of climate change (…) In other words, it is not enough for people to know about climate change in order to be engaged; they also need to care about it, be motivated and able to take action'. The value of this definition is that it seeks to link the 'cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects' (ibid) of engagement. Indeed, it will be seen that the building of bridges between ideas and action is a core component of NGO society facing strategies.

NGOs have an important role in information provision, as explained by Carpenter (2001: 327): 'part of this action should include a focus on improving public awareness and understanding in all sectors of the implications of the looming impacts of climate change and the response measures necessary to combat them'. Sound as this observation may be, the limitations of the information deficit model are widely recognised. Whitmarsh *et al* (2011: 59) pointed to the mistaken assumption underpinning much public policy which holds that 'the public are "empty vessels" waiting to be filled with information which will propel them into rational action'. Information is not enough, because 'factual information is usually not sufficient to

motivate behaviour' (Chess and Johnson, 2007: 228). In his discussion on methods to change behaviour, McKenzie-Mohr (2000) added a second perspective to the information deficit model, namely the view that individuals act in their economic self-interest. This approach to human behaviour - known as the rational actor model - identifies a major source of motivation, namely financial or material advantage, but its adequacy for citizen action on climate can be questioned, as the discussion below will illustrate. A third perspective is to lead with values as proposed by Crompton, an environmental activist associated with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF):

> Research has found that many people have a more 'inclusive' sense of self-identity - one that may include closer identity with other people, or with other people and nature. These individuals thus tend to value others more in their behavioural choices, and research has repeatedly found that such people tend to care more about environmental problems, favour environmental protection over economic growth, and engage in more pro-environmental behaviour. The issue of how such values are nurtured and 'activated' is critically important. (Crompton, 2008: 7).

Thus the present inquiry into NGO strategies to achieve public engagement will review their responses to (a) the information deficit model, (b) the rational actor model and (c) the challenge of leading on values.

To understand NGO society facing strategies on climate, a hermeneutic framework is proposed whose aim is to clarify both the *scope* and the *means* for public engagement. Five key components can be identified:

1. The production of interpretative framings of climate change, which provide enabling contexts for citizen action.

2. The dissemination of knowledge, through which NGOs reach out and communicate with the public on factual and practical matters.

3. The raising of awareness (or 'consciousness raising'), which involves going beyond mere information provision to mediating between the worlds of science and the general public, and seeking to innovate in relation to values and norms.

4. Enabling and providing practical opportunities for citizen action on climate (including encouragement to behaviour change), whether internally within the NGO's own constituency, or in relation to external partners (by providing guidance and/or acting as an interface).

5. Building communities of action, through drawing up infrastructures, developing networks of support, encouraging solidarity (seeing climate protection as 'a common cause') and promoting wider social learning and action (e.g. beyond an NGO membership base).

At one level, this framework seeks to elaborate the three key dimensions of public engagement identified above - knowledge, motivation and action - by putting more flesh on the bones. But it also responds to two operational dimensions

of analysis. One is that it tries to capture the workings of NGO society facing strategies, and to reveal how they move from ideas to action. In this regard, it must be acknowledged that their strategies are often implicit in organisational conduct, rather than being explicitly proclaimed. (NGOs do not typically write manuals on their own practice.) Hence for explanatory purposes their strategies need to be dis-embedded, even at the risk of fashioning an orderly, 'ideal type' schema to clothe a messy set of social practices. The other dimension is that the framework provides a means to organise and make sense of a rich mass of fieldwork findings emerging from interviews with NGOs.

The danger of unmanageable diversity was recognised during the construction of the survey sample. To achieve comparability, NGOs were selected on the basis of two characteristics: that they had an environmental component to their work and were engaging at least some section of the public on climate issues. To achieve coverage, a cross-section was assembled to include large and small groups, with roughly equal numbers from France, Germany and the UK. Approximately 100 groups were contacted, from which 30 respondents agreed to in-depth interviews, of which all bar two were face-to-face. Whilst the interview sample included some of the largest and well-known environmental NGOs, most of the groups were relatively small and little known beyond their remit. Semi-structured interviews, generally lasting between 45-60 minutes, were conducted in several phases between September 2008 and January 2011 and covered questions of NGO strategic orientations. The adverse context constituted by the post-2007 financial and economic crisis, as well as the climate negotiations at Copenhagen in 2009, constituted the backdrop for the survey and no doubt coloured respondents' views. The interviews were transcribed and analysed. Each interview was given a number, to which quotations are attributed in the commentary below in order to preserve anonymity. As a piece of qualitative research, the survey aimed to generate insight into practices that are representative of a particular cross-section of NGOs, but did not seek to provide coverage of the entire sector.

2. Illustrating NGO Practices to Promote Public Engagement

To further operationalise the hermeneutic framework outlined above, commentary on fieldwork findings will be grouped into two subsections. The first sets out and inter-relates components 1, 2 and 3 which are primarily *cognitive* (that is to say, related to knowledge, ideas and values); the second discusses components 4 and 5 which are *performative* (that is, action-centred).

Framing, Information and Awareness

Four main framings of climate issues emerged from the literature review and field work in terms of (1) the environment per se, (2) the economy-energy axis, (3) social justice, and (4) a hybridised category based on issue linkage. Firstly, nature conservation NGOs leaned towards the environmental frame. One respondent commented: 'we didn't want to construct a contradiction between climate policies and nature conservation policies, but wanted to strengthen the argument that if we wanted to deal successfully with climate change we had to protect biodiversity and ecosystems' (source: NGO19). Secondly, the economy-energy axis is illustrated by the following comment: 'climate protection is dominating more than energy efficiency, although energy efficiency is becoming more and more important because of possible energy shortages' (source: NGO18). In this perspective - which pervades current public policy - decisions on energy sourcing and use are taken in dependence on economic goals. Thirdly, many NGOs hold a strong social justice remit, for which the following stands as an exemplar: 'the whole of society needs to be involved, and for that to happen you need to present the issues in a social justice perspective, social justice within northern countries, and social justice between the North and the South' (source: NGO20). A fourth category of framing emerged based on issue linkage: a number of groups made cross-links between issues of pollution, energy, transport or food, on the one hand, and climate on the other. This was sometimes based on a long-standing portfolio into which climate concerns had been introduced in the recent period. Stressing a particular category of framing allowed NGOs to provide a context, a rationale and a justification for their work on climate. This is important, because information provision can only occur in a defined universe of meaning, which is constructed on the basis of specific, contextually located, interpretative frames. Conversely, one of the failures of the information deficit model is to assume that knowledge circulates from speaker to hearer by unmediated and direct transmission and that the context of transmission remains constant and homogeneous. The framing approach alerts us to sites of possible communication breakdown: for example, members of the public who are responsive to the economy-energy axis may be unreceptive to the social justice frame, or vice versa. Individual NGOs tend to stress the frame(s) most strongly accepted by their target groups, thereby engaging with and growing a particular constituency (a membership base in some cases, or a network of partners in others).

These features condition their approaches to knowledge dissemination. Several NGOs interviewed had roots in the provision of educational materials for children, but had branched into adult services. NGO2 stated: 'our aim is to implement consumer education in schools to reach especially young people and help shape their consciousness towards more awareness to reduce emissions or support fair trade'. Another group provided the public with 'comprehensive information about how they can improve their personal CO_2 balance' (source: NGO1). NGO24 provided an on-line guide to GHG reduction at the individual/household levels (encouraging behaviour change using tools for energy savings), and invited citizens to sign a pledge to honour them. Several respondents pointed to the ambitious brief of their organisations. One interviewee commented that his NGO's 'principal aim is to engage people in active citizenship, and so we have produced citizenship education materials for teachers, and run conversations on topics of public interest' (source: NGO29). Another organisation saw itself 'as a mediator between science - natural or political science - and the public, including the media, to transmit knowledge, and present it in such a way as to make it

accessible for broader audiences and in that way is part of education of the general public' (source: NGO14).

These examples indicate the need for, and viability of, information provision on climate friendly behaviour. They may suggest that a larger-scale roll-out of such educational materials, facilitated perhaps by greater public subsidies, would solve the problem of limited public engagement with climate. Whilst such endeavours may highlight the issue of individual/household emissions, the reassuring interpretation that they would solve the problem would be misplaced. Interviewees were acutely aware of the limits to the information distribution approach. One respondent referred to 'a need to be conventional in order to communicate with the public and to speak their language (…) people don't ask for unconventional ideas' (source: NGO5). An obstacle to innovation appears to be the limited receptiveness of the public. Where energy savings receive the main emphasis, the motivation for many people is not saving energy but saving money. In contexts of rising electricity, gas and petrol prices, energy efficiency is motivated primarily by financial gain, rather than pro-environmental values. But reducing price inflation would also reduce this variety of citizen engagement. A more fundamental problem is that 'you can't convince somebody who is not aware' (source: NGO1). The members of the public who approach NGOs for information have a prior interest in seeking out materials on particular issues. Survey respondents pointed to the necessity to see people as autonomous, as making their minds up for themselves. But a healthy respect for personal freedoms can restrict NGO consultancy to merely supporting individual choice, or even encouraging consumption. These considerations raise further questions. One is the capacity to spread new values and influence motivations. The other is outreach capacity: in other words, whether the NGO is preaching to the converted or can recruit from a wider base. These difficult questions go to the heart of NGO action on climate change, forming the backdrop for discussion in a number of interviews.

Because NGOs are extremely diverse in their philosophies and strategies, it is unsurprising that the question of outreach capacity was approached from different angles. One respondent commented that NGOs have a tendency to use 'communication based on tacit agreement' (source: NGO10), in other words to use a jargon developed by and for a membership base. This can speed up communication within a particular constituency, but it can also raise barriers to the non-initiated. The need to overcome this split was addressed by the respondent who commented 'obviously our network is already committed, so we are *not* going to make an effort to explain, because these are environmental activists, but if we look more broadly, meaning 60 million French people, you have to make the effort' (source: NGO20). But how do you reach out to people who are *not* already interested?

A number of groups were clearly grappling with this problem. A strategy often associated with NGOs is mass campaigning, although in practice this is the preserve of the larger membership-based groups. Because the interviews took place in the period 2008 to 2011, the recurring point of reference for large-scale mobilisation was the international climate negotiation held in Copenhagen in December 2009. Many of the respondents commented on the perceived importance of the event, and the scale of the mobilisation effort mounted in relation to it. Another strategy is to look for 'multipliers', as expressed by the following interviewee: 'we have multipliers, information is presented in such a way that it can be used by other people, be it NGOs or unions, teachers, doing seminars for teachers, which act as multipliers' (source: NGO14). 'Multipliers' are then media and partner organisations. Yet voluntary NGO activity is based, by definition, on the freedom to choose, and the choice can be to abandon a fruitless pursuit. As one respondent commented: 'not everyone is convinced (…) but we are not going to use up our energy trying to convince people who are anti' (source: NGO24). On this view, climate change deniers are impervious and so not worth engaging, since NGOs must channel limited resources to best advantage. Here we identify a core tension in NGO activity between the need to expand the pool of the actively engaged and the social limits on receptiveness: in other words, to increase their outreach but not 'waste their breath'. Although this tension is very real, it should not be interpreted as a contradiction between idealism in principle and abnegation in practice. Many environmental NGOs *are* idealist, but do not consider that their role is to change society 'at one fell swoop'. Their approach is to form communities of value and practice, each NGO having a distinctive goal (or even niche) which gives it an identity and purpose. A second stage is to network and collaborate with cognate NGOs (or other partners), to push their joint agenda.

Public engagement can only operate where the underlying motivations exist. Hence the more radical organisations pointed to value change as the essential preliminary. One respondent declared himself 'sympathetic to the idea that leading with values rather than leading with self-interest is a more helpful way of approaching the cultural change we need' (source: NGO29). This comment emphasises the need for consciousness-raising, otherwise the information deficit and rational actor models become too restrictive. But opportunities for *action* must also exist.

Providing Practical Opportunities for Public Engagement and Building Communities of Action

Important as the cognitive dimensions are, a common characteristic of the NGOs surveyed was to be action-centred. The rapid shift from the cognitive to the performative dimension found among NGO activists is exemplified by the following comment: 'I would say that in general public support is wobbly because it is hard for people to identify with issues when they are presented in a climate frame, when they are presented in sort of the cost of fuel or the cost of food, then they may not make the link but you might get more action' (source: NGO30). Providing and/or enabling practical opportunities for public engagement came through as a key activity of many NGOs in the survey.

Food, transport and energy were the main domains of intervention. NGO9 focused on responsible consumption, in particular by developing a local, organic food distribution network. This NGO gave participants a performative option

for alternative food sourcing, whilst communicating on health concerns and environmental values, and offering a radical critique of mainstream consumerism. NGO6, a reformist group working in the field of transport, sought to tie together a number of messages on road use issues - the need to reduce speed limits, increase road safety, reduce pollution but also fight climate change - in order to increase their cumulative impact. (This provides an example of the category of hybrid framing identified above.) NGO3 likewise worked on road transport, but held the radical stance of encouraging people to abandon car use entirely: it sought to demonstrate that life without a car is not only possible, but more fulfilling. Although a nature conservation group, NGO19 briefly branched out into sponsorship of training sessions for car drivers wishing to reduce fuel consumption and associated emissions. NGO5 offered consultancy to the public in relation to energy efficiency and renewable energy. As a not-for-profit organisation, the absence of a commercial dimension to its work and the fact that it sought to give impartial, high-quality information put it in a unique position to build trust.

It is worth noting that most of these activities involved behaviour change for participants. However, behaviour change per se was understood as one part of a process, just one means to a higher end. The following statement pulls together the action-centred approach and the self-reflexive dimension of practice: 'what we are actually talking about there is campaigns which positively engage people in something practical, not every NGO can do that, depending on what they are focused on, but I think there is merit in that, because what we do changes us, at least as much as what we think' (source: NGO29). In this perspective, the *combination* of the performative with the cognitive is the essential mainspring that propels personal development, and perhaps leads to wider social change. The distinctive viewpoint expressed here is that 'doing conditions thinking' - in contrast to the more conventional view that 'thinking conditions doing'.

The provision of practical opportunities for personal carbon mitigation ties in with building communities of action. This need can form part of an organisation's brief, as illustrated by the following: 'we would describe ourselves as a local community organisation who wants to raise the awareness of climate change, encourage people to take action to combat it as much as they can' (source: NGO30). Yet the challenges are different for 'new' as compared to 'old' NGOs. The representative of a long-established nature organisation commented: 'we were looking for fields where we could say OK, we are doing nature conservation but also contributing to climate change mitigation. One issue where we could do that was where we protect carbon sinks like peat lands. This was really important, not only energy companies who build new facilities are part of the solution, but to say "you are also part of that solution". That was very important for the whole climate change issue. You have to break it down, because it is so large' (source: NGO19). Here an existing NGO constituency is mobilised towards a new goal, while respecting its original conservation brief. Young organisations are less constrained by path dependence in developing their remit, but must perforce build a new community. NGO29 provides an example with a campaign

entitled 'CHOOSEDAY', having the strapline 'Tuesdays without cars'. Its organiser commented 'so it was choose to leave your car at home one day a week, with the idea that if people could get their heads around changing their behaviour one day a week, that actually this could break a habit and could open up new possibilities for people about different ways of living' (source: NGO29). At one level, the aim is to create a tipping point in the lives of individuals. But at another level, the aim is to build up momentum for wider social change: 'what we need is a minimum number of people, a critical mass of people who can make things happen' (source: NGO24). This approach flags a resolution to the tension in NGO activity (identified above) between the need to expand the pool of the actively engaged and limited social receptiveness. NGOs look for tipping points within their own community that can propel wider social change, through identification and dissemination of successful experiments.

However, it goes (almost) with saying that making a difference by community building is probably the hardest challenge confronting climate action NGOs. This arises partly due to the intrinsic difficulties of collective mobilisation on climate, but also due to the organisational and situational characteristics of the NGOs surveyed. They are thematic groups, organised nationally (and sometimes internationally) in relation to cross-cutting issues, rather than communities of place, with a local footing and day-to-day interactions between members. Some recent research suggests that the latter may lead to more immediate impacts on emissions (Centre for Sustainable Energy, 2007; Heiskanen, 2010; Peters *et al*., 2011). However, the two types of constituency are probably complementary. Hence each needs to be consolidated, if individual and household emissions are to decrease.

3. Discussing NGO Practices to Promote Public Engagement

The survey revealed that whilst many NGOs embrace a knowledge dissemination role, their enactment of it goes beyond the information deficit model. Conceptual understanding of the processes and consequences of climate change was held by respondents to be necessary for at least *some* segments of the population. However, not all respondents believed that the public in its totality needed to understand. Some considered that seeking to persuade the hostile was a waste of scarce resources. Further, conceptual understanding was held to be insufficient to result in practical involvement. An important insight is that the relationship may even be the inverse. For some individuals, hands-on action can be the precondition and means to achieve cognitive engagement. Doing leads to understanding - it is probable that this point is insufficiently recognised (particularly by intellectuals whose cognitive bias is to stress the reverse). It deserves to be aired more in public debate and have a greater place in climate mobilisation repertoires. Without diluting the latter point, the relationship between the cognitive and the performative can nevertheless be envisaged as a two-way street. Thus movements between understanding and action raise questions related to motivations, values and social norms, on the one hand, and the existence, accessibility and attractiveness of practical means, on the other.

These findings help explain why the survey identified little confidence in the rational actor frame. It is useful to probe for reasons why. Firstly, the majority of NGOs surveyed did not engage the public in the kind of consumption or investment decisions which are driven by self-interest. Secondly, even with the minority who did, the nature of their independent consultancy provision put them at a remove from questions of financial gain per se. A respondent having a consumer advice remit characterised this positioning by referring to the notion of developing 'competence' (source: NGO3): the aim was to enable members of the public to take their own decisions, inter alia based on criteria related to climate protection. Thirdly, the NGO operates in a zone of neutrality where it makes no judgement on what swings the client's decision. Nevertheless, it has communicated on factors - and probably on values - associated with climate and sustainability. The rational actor frame does not totally disappear, but is bracketed out of the interchange between NGOs and public because the stress falls elsewhere.

A comparable process occurs in relation to behaviour change. In section two, a number of examples were given of activities which involved behaviour change. However, the change is part of a process to which the public is invited and voluntarily participates. Further, the NGOs involved do not target the change explicitly. On the contrary, they concentrate their communication - and the recipient's attention - on the broader goal. Examples included sourcing healthy food, working towards a less polluted and congested urban environment, and encouraging biodiversity by hands-on preservation of peat bogs. Metaphorically speaking, the goal is placed directly in the line of vision, whilst the behaviour change placed behind it. Policy interventions which seek to regulate the behaviour of the public tend to do the opposite: they place the required behaviour up front, with the larger goal being less visible. As an example, in the UK the speed limit on a number of country roads was reduced in 2010 from 60 to 50 miles per hour: the behaviour change required is clear, the benefit less so. Evaluation of the impacts of this difference in approach is needed, but is beyond the scope of this paper. Further research is required to improve our understanding of the relative effectiveness of these contrasting strategies.

The reasons behind particular NGO strategies and practices are complex and varied, depending on the NGO itself (its history, remit, constituency, etc.) and its contexts of intervention. However, an important commonality for environmental NGOs is a stress on questions of responsibility. Responsibility for GHG emissions can be conceptualised as individual and/or collective, as consumer-related and/or producer-related, as arising from domestic activities and/or embedded in imports, or as a private sphere and/or a public sphere issue. NGO positioning regarding attribution of responsibility reflects a particular emphasis which Gough and Shackley (2001: 330) summarised as follows: 'history suggests that identifying a small number of powerful forces that can be portrayed as acting out of selfish motivation, such as large multinational firms or politically corrupt administrations, is a far more successful storyline for NGOs to promote, than a "we are all to blame" message'. Thus NGOs tend to have a double strategy. In relation to

environmental damage for which governments and corporations are held responsible, NGO campaign policy is to 'blame and shame'. In relation to the public, NGOs avoid placing a burden of guilt. Instead, they stress the positive contribution individuals can make - whether to the environment, the polity, society, or just their own lives. This distinctive approach to climate advocacy is the subject of a separate article (Szarka, 2013).

Choices of strategy correspond, broadly speaking, to the state-facing versus society-facing dichotomy previously identified. However, NGO strategy is not two-faced in the derogatory sense. It connects with the long-standing 'structure versus agency' debate in the social sciences over availability of choice, locus of decision-making and attribution of responsibility. In relation to UK climate policy, Fudge and Peters (2011: 806) argued that 'an over-emphasis on the rational agency of individuals in the development of these policies draws attention to some of the limitations of behaviour change in isolation from the wider, structural influences on individual decision-making'. The limitations - sometime labelled as 'barriers to change' - include economic structures and social norms. In this vein, Ockwell *et al*. (2009: 308) observed that 'efforts to promote low carbon behaviour change are constrained by the high carbon infrastructure and institutions within which we live, travel, and work'. A government decision to frame policy in terms of individual responsibility indicates that 'real political interests at stake' (Shove, 2010: 1282). Further, research has revealed that the public is resistant to what is seen as an unfair transfer of responsibility. Analysing public views on climate change, Lorenzoni and Pidgeon (2006: 85) found that 'personal action was seen to be pointless in isolation; a responsible government was called for to lay the foundations to meet the collective interests of society through policy and by enabling individual duties. Yet political institutions were said to be absolving themselves of that role and responsibility. The widely observed public ambivalence towards climate change may well reflect an expression of frustration fuelled by disempowerment'. This concoction of mixed messages and contradictory pressures was tellingly summarised by Jackson (2009: 153): 'Urging people to *Act on CO$_2$*, to insulate their homes, turn down the thermostat, put on a jumper, drive a little less, walk a little more, holiday at home, buy locally produced goods (and so on) will either go unheard or be rejected as manipulation for as long as all the messages about high-street consumption point in the opposite direction'. NGO calls for citizen agency are modulated by recognition of these structural constraints. Some NGOs engage in radical critique, whilst others pursue a reformist agenda, but probably none can escape the deeply entrenched contradictions prevalent in consumerist social practices and neoliberal policy measures. Arguably, these contradictions have only worsened as a consequence of the financial and sovereign debt crises.

Value change is sometimes presented as the way to resolve the dilemmas. Thus Willetts (2011: 143) proposed that 'NGOs act as norm entrepreneurs and persuade other actors to adopt their values and norms'. They can seek to exercise influence at different levels: the international level with global climate agreements, the domestic level in relation to legislation, at the societal and individual level in

relation to values, norms and behaviour. The challenge was mapped by Crompton (2010: 9):

> civil society organisations *(...have)* focused mainly on examining the factual basis for addressing bigger-than-self problems, and engaging in debate about the best practical approaches to achieving this. Now it can be seen that civil society organisations must also develop expertise in examining and laying bare the values that particular communications promote: starting with their own, and then moving on to begin to examine the values implicit in the communications of a range of participants in public debate - including those of vested interest groups.

In summary, NGOs respond to the structural preconditions of a society that is a long way from integrating the causes and consequences of climate change into economic models and political institutions. Their agency - through the strategies and practices outlined above - seeks to resolve the ensuing contradictions, but is also heavily constrained by them.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has investigated the nature of NGO society facing strategies to encourage citizen action on climate protection, particularly with regards to (a) the information deficit model (b) the rational actor model, and (c) the challenge of leading on values. The NGOs in the three country survey were generally working with an extended understanding of public engagement which is markedly more emancipative than the stimulus-response mode found in either the information deficit or rational actor models. Whilst NGOs viewed information dissemination as a necessary but insufficient practice to trigger climate friendly behaviour, they were wary (and sometimes defiant) in relation to rational actor approaches, having a preference for broader societal solutions, including value change. This was because messages on self-interest do not elicit - and may even block - the structural changes that climate action is considered to require.

In terms of their everyday practices, NGOs have evolved methods to move quickly and seamlessly between knowledge and action, between the cognitive and the performative (sometimes treating the relationship as a two-way street). However, for investigative purposes, a five point hermeneutic framework was developed to identify what steps were entailed in that movement, namely: (1) producing interpretative frames (2) disseminating knowledge (3) consciousness-raising (4) enabling and providing practical opportunities for citizen action, and (5) building communities of action. The framework has served the purposes of making sense of the diverse worlds of ideas, values and practices inhabited by NGOs, and organising analysis thereof. But on a note of self-reflective criticism, it may not fully communicate the distinctiveness, and sometimes originality, of the perspectives expressed during the interviews. It is hoped that the provision of direct quotations surmounted this problem, at least to a degree.

In concluding, it is worth stressing that these elements of original thinking stem from a growing swell of value change. This includes placing a different slant on the attribution of responsibility problem as regards climate change. NGOs tend to avoid placing a burden of guilt on the public and would rather stress opportunities for emancipation. They prefer to focus on the positive benefits of citizen action, rather than on compelling behaviour change (whether by regulatory enforcement or moral coercion). This stress on the co-benefits of climate protection - and on the need to communicate on those co-benefits, particularly in the current period of economic adversity - has been endorsed by other strands of social science research on climate (see, for example, Bailey and Compston, 2012; Harrison and Sundstrom, 2010).

Moreover, the range of expected benefits extends beyond the material and financial to embrace spheres such as enjoyment and well-being, personal development and community building, as well as the intrinsic value of protecting the environment. These substantive findings, together with the methodological contribution of the five point model, are advanced as the key contributions to knowledge of this research project. However, it has not proved feasible to establish the superiority or otherwise of NGO approaches as compared to mainstream public policy initiatives. Hence more research should be conducted to evaluate the outcomes and achievements of NGO practices to engage the public on climate protection.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author confirms that this article content has no conflicts of interest.

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