Enhancing community involvement in low-carbon projects: a study of northwest Wales climate assemblies

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Key findings

- Expert facilitation as fundamental to achieving constructive outcomes
- Setting principles and agreeing to them at the beginning of the process as means of avoiding heated arguments or debates, and respecting different perspectives, languages and conceptual backgrounds
- While those that engage are concerned about climate matters they may be more concerned about other matters, in this case the Welsh language.
- Climate engagement can be improved by tapping into localised community discourses and cultural heritage, weaving climate action into broader community narratives
- Engaging communities in climate action can be enhanced by framing communications through place attachment and asking people to deliberate climate change from the perspective of their 'home patch'

Future research

- There is no best practice toolkit currently available for grassroots participatory democracies and no known guide for the delivery of multilingual assemblies
- To assess the long-term impacts of attending deliberative democracies and the ways in which participatory democracy can result in positive actions and foster attitudinal change
- There is no known research on the correlation between the climate emergency and language emergency
- Research and practical evidence stress the importance of 'the right message' – further research is required to prove or disprove sense of place notions as engagement strategy
- Community perceptions of change and the acceptability of messages delivered via local mouthpieces versus top-down interventions

Introduction

This report investigates community engagement with climate action. It uses the GwyrddNi Community Assemblies on the Climate as case study to identify the ways in which particular communities respond to attempts at addressing climate change locally. This report stems from the hypothesis that although climate change is a global issue it must be addressed locally, by people within their local places. Climate change is exceptionally challenging for people and places to act on and there is no consensus on how government targets can be met, or whether such targets are indeed enough. Furthermore, evidence suggests that while people want governments to act, they are sceptical of government interventions and that such top-down decisions are made in the metropolis which is often far removed (geographically and in aspirations) from ordinary people – that 'how life is lived' is determined miles away by those that have no experience or understanding of particular communities, and that communities and people would rather define themselves than be defined.

This research stems from three key questions based on GwyrddNi's Community Assemblies to identify the known issues surrounding engagement and the known attempts to solve them, to build on that – to use what is known for the best outcomes – as well as finding true gaps that are yet to be considered. This report investigated the assemblies to identify the phenomena and what stayed the same across the five different communities invited to partake in the assembly process. The research questions identified at the beginning of this enquiry were:

1) How to achieve representative membership, including marginalised groups that are reluctant to engage – ensuring a joint sense of ownership for the agreed project.

2) Conducting assembly meetings such that all voices get heard while avoiding heated arguments without constructive outcomes, recognising different perspectives, languages and conceptual backgrounds.

3) Capitalising on an area's specific features and people's place attachment. Each place offers different ecosystem services and localised histories, affecting people's place connections and community discourses. What works for one community may not work elsewhere. This project will examine these dynamics specifically for Wales

This report identifies the research gaps and points at areas for further study, as well as responding to research needs as identified by others. Its aim is to inform future avenues of research and form the background for subsequent funding calls. This report argues that in

accordance with other types of civic engagement, climate action does not engage everyone within communities, and while it is a problem for the whole of humanity those from certain groups or conceptual background are overwhelmingly more likely to engage in climate discussions. This report, through analysis of academic and grey literature, as well as communications with the GwyrddNi team, stakeholders, participants and non-participants, identifies place attachment and heritage (underpinned by and developed through discourse analysis) as means of widening engagement. It will demonstrate the new possibilities of framing climate action in a way which may resonate with communities more widely. While not everyone is interested in climate action, politics or deliberative democracies, many people have an affection for their home patch and indeed in a Wales-context there is the well-known sense of *hiraeth* for our ancestral home, a spiritual connection to the landscape and Welsh language that can help us make sense who we are and of our past – can it therefore aid communications to make sense of our future?

The GwyrddNi Project

GwyrddNi is a collaboration of community-led social enterprises and community energy groups in Gwynedd working together to tackle climate change from the ground up. GwyrddNi is led by Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig (DEG) with project partners formed from social enterprises based across five areas of Gwynedd: Ynni Llŷn (Pen Llŷn), Cwmni Bro (Bro Ffestiniog), Yr Orsaf/ Siop Griffiths (Dyffryn Nantlle), Cyd Ynni (Dyffryn Peris) and Partneriaeth Ogwen (Dyffryn Ogwen). Traditionally environmental projects, interventions or initiatives tend to be 'done to' communities but the GwyrddNi consortium is a clear demonstration of communities taking ownership of the climate change agenda. The objective of GwyrddNi is to enable and empower individuals and communities to deliver the actions needed to tackle the climate emergency. Phase 1 of the project (2021–2023), funded by the Lottery Climate Action Fund, sets a solid foundation for future community-led action on climate change. It does so by organising and facilitating Community Assemblies on the Climate to bring people together in five areas of Gwynedd to discuss, share and act locally to tackle climate change. The climate assemblies were scheduled over a twelve-month period in 2022/23 with each assembly meeting four times to develop their action plans. Phase I of GwyrddNi focussed on building robust, locally developed, actionable Community Climate Manifestos to mitigate the local impacts of climate change whilst facilitating behavioural change and education. At the end of Phase I, GwyrddNi will have an action plan including key priorities, as decided by and reflective of the communal vision of each community, to

guide future action. At the time of writing, GwyrddNi's assemblies are still on-going and manifestos are yet to be finalised: each community action plan will be publicly available and members of each community are invited to sign the GwyrddNi Pledge whereby they voluntarily agree to read and support the plan when published.

In addition to the assemblies GwyrddNi engage with the wider community (both adults and children) delivering an educational, empowerment and behavioural change programme. For young people the Education Programme includes a variety of sessions on climate change and local climate solutions, along with an opportunity to visit a range of climate solutions in each community. Following this, schools host a Climate Assembly giving learners the opportunity to discuss and prioritise their own local community climate solutions. They then share their priorities with the Community Assembly on the Climate within their area. This not only fosters a joint sense of ownership for the forthcoming action plans as the children's ideas are considered for inclusion, but also offers opportunity for intergenerational working as well as familiarising the next generation with systems of participatory democracy, grassroots community action and localised climate solutions. For the wider community, GwyrddNi Talks were conducted (in the evenings, online) on topics such as sustainable transport or community energy schemes. These events fostered engagement with the project and further identified community members that would be part of the wider movement and community discourses on climate action. Both strands of the Education Programme were well-attended and well-received, demonstrative of community appetite for such localised interventions. This report will consider barriers to engagement – why the offer was not taken up by other members of these communities – to identify additional methods of engagement and communication strategies that can facilitate future initiatives and potentially accelerate behavioural (at individual and community level) change.

Assembly Best Practice

There is no best practice toolkit currently available for grassroots participatory democracies and no known guide for the delivery of multilingual assemblies.[1] The GwyrddNi team developed their own best practice and aspire to produce a toolkit for bottom-up community-led assemblies. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) want to share GwyrddNi's approach with local authorities and NatCEN Social Research are to deliver with Natural Resources Wales based on GwyrddNi's bilingual assemblies. This report will

[1] See Cherry et al. (2021) and Renwick & Hazell (2017) on best practice for policy-driven assemblies.

give further information that can inform such best practice by identifying appropriate methodologies that could support or even systemise communications. Broad et al (2013) state how community-based research collaborations have been shown to yield insightful findings that can both advance scholarly knowledge and facilitate community-level outcomes. Tan (2021) identifies the barrier between theorists and practitioners as regards the idealisation and practical application of deliberative democracy and how best outcomes can be achieved. This report aims to add to this knowledge base as well as identifying future areas of meaningful and impactful collaboration.

Background information and details of Community Assemblies

There is much research into deliberative processes involving a group of citizens (usually referred to as Citizens' Assemblies, Citizens' Juries, or Community Assemblies) with the purpose of reaching consensus on policymaking or action planning, or a set of recommendations (Goodin & Dryzek 2006; Hendriks, C. 2006). Manon de Jongh (2013) identifies that advocates of deliberative democracy reason that a systemised process of deliberation, and consensus seeking citizen involvement in decision-making increases the quality of policymaking, as well as political trust.[2] Tan (2021) expands, by underscoring that collective deliberation and discussion between citizens produces better decisions: that personal interest can lead to public interest. Given this context as a starting point, examination of the GwyrddNi Community Assemblies as case study elucidates new insights into such deliberative democracies – of grassroots bottom-up deliberation not affiliated with any government or agency. This report does not compare and contrast the bottom-up approach with the traditional top-down deliberative processes (although this would be a valuable future study), rather it examines the GwyrddNi assemblies through a lens of community engagement, in order to identify new approaches to maximise participation.

The GwyrddNi assembly model is in accordance with other deliberative democracies organised to reach consensus on climate action. All adults within the defined geography were invited to participate (with a view of selecting fifty to represent each area's demographics) and the process involved facilitated learning, deliberation and decision-making including opportunity for all voices to be heard in ways in which were comfortable for the participant (orally, via facilitator, written).[3] GwyrddNi's processes were in keeping with best practices

[2] C.f. Parkinson & Mansbridge (2012) who discuss the potential to systemise deliberation.
[3] See Involve.org for a brief summary of the characteristics of an assembly: https://involve.org.uk/resources/methods/citizens-assembly

identified in research. Fishkin (2009) argues that there are five conditions on the quality of deliberative discussions: 1) information; 2) substantive balance; 3) diversity; 4) conscientiousness; 5) equal consideration, which GwyrddNi's assemblies followed. As regards one of this report's key questions ('conducting assembly meetings such that all voices get heard while avoiding heated arguments without constructive outcomes, recognising different perspectives, languages and conceptual backgrounds') GwyrddNi's methods were in accordance with best practice and during the assemblies that occurred within the timeframe of this research, expert, trained facilitation ensured avoidance of heated arguments.[4] GwyrddNi set out mutually agreed principles in the first assemblies and in so doing when controversies emerged they were easily diffused by reminder of the principles that all members had agreed to. Furthermore, facilitation also ensured that all voices were heard by taking time to encourage all members to speak or write their comments, with written outputs shared with the wider group. The assemblies were conducted primarily in the Welsh language with simultaneous translation, inviting participants to speak in their preferred language. One assembly member (Dyffryn Nantlle Assembly 3) stated:

> I really appreciate being able to do this in Welsh. Because there's a translator you can just speak naturally, in the way that comes naturally, just in the way that my brain works, so it is a great thing

This bilingualism was essential in order to engage these Welsh communities which are comprised of both bilinguals and monolinguals, and there were no witnessed concerns raised by non-Welsh speakers about the proceedings. Some Welsh speakers did raise issue with the ways in which bilingual table settings resulted in conversations switching to English, which will be discussed somewhat further in this report (but not in detail as another study will focus on language through a forthcoming PhD studentship). As regards the question set out in this report of how to conduct assemblies so that all voices are heard, expert facilitation has been underscored in various grey and academic papers as what is understood to achieve best outcomes (de Jongh, 2013; Cherry et al. 2021, and others). Elstub et al. (2022) report on the issues of inclusion in the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland (2019/20) noting the recurring issue of 'dominant voices' in some groups with facilitators struggling to respond to it. They continue that some discussions were dominated by a few participants resulting in other members making no verbal contributions (p. 56). Alongside expert facilitation, the principles

[4] Dyffryn Nantlle Assembly 3 in December 2022; Dyffryn Peris Assembly 4 in February 2023.

set out by GwyrddNi ensured that all voices were heard, with participants respecting and adhering to this agreement.

The GwyrddNi assemblies, similarly to other recent UK-based climate assemblies (Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly 2021; Scotland's Climate Assembly 2020–21) followed the tripartite stages of *learning*, *deliberating*, and *decision making*, supported through facilitation.[5] This three-step process can be aligned Kurt Lewin's Three-Step Model of Change; that organisational change is achieved through 1) Unfreezing: that old behaviours are unlearnt and new ones *learned*, 2) Moving: a process of trial and error, identification and evaluation of available option (thus, *deliberation*) of planned change, and 3) Refreezing: to stabilise the new behaviour, with successful change a group activity as unless group norms and routines are also transformed, changes to individual behaviour will not be sustained (thus, reaching a consensus, agreed *decision making*) (Lewin 1947). GwyrddNi reported that the team considered established group and team processed during the project's planning phase, citing Bruce Tuckman's Stages of Group Development (1965). The correlation between the three-step process of deliberative democracies and Lewinian theorem of group dynamics and change is currently an understudied area: a recent Involve Report (Allen 2023) identified that assembly processes *did* lead to long-term impact of attitudinal change, with members of the Climate Assembly UK (2020) reporting an increased concern of climate change and making changes in their own lives two years post-assembly. Future research would be valuable to further assess the long-term impacts of attendance of deliberative democracies and the ways in which participatory democracy can result in wide-ranging positive actions and outputs. This will be discussed in the report's conclusion.

The GwyrddNi project aimed to achieve representative membership to ensure a joint sense of ownership by the communities to inform the assembly output of an agreed Community Action Plan. The GwyrddNi participant selection process was not a full sortition, such as conducted by the Sortition Foundation, but was completed in-house based on 2011 Census data and participants' information. This process was limited given the small samples of applications received, including not reaching the target of fifty in one area and so all participants were selected. Significantly, despite extensive and varied communications and engagement strategies emphasising inclusivity, marginalised groups were underrepresented. The majority of participants were already interested in climate and/or community action,

[5] See https://involve.org.uk/resources/methods/citizens-assembly which details the features of Citizens' Assemblies.

which points at the possibility that certain groups of the community engage, whereas others do not. There are known issues in terms of engagement and it is reasonable to say that it is impossible to engage everybody. Renwick & Hazell (2017), in development of a blueprint for Citizens' Assemblies, argue that the hardest challenge is achieving representativeness. They note the difficulty to make an assembly representative of the entire population even when engineered in terms of criteria such as age and gender, as "people who accept the invitation are by definition unrepresentative of people who do not accept the invitation" (p. 21). The authors underscore the importance of 'reaching out' to those who are "disengaged from conventional politics" (p. 31) but their report does not offer a guide as to how to engage. In the following sections this report will focus on exploring what is known to achieve the best outcomes, bring research together to build on known communicative strategies, and identify research gaps. It will do so by turning to the initial research questions in more detail and exploring the ways in with academic methodologies and theories can support engagement.

'How to achieve representative membership, including marginalised groups that are reluctant to engage – ensuring a joint sense of ownership for the agreed project'.

In order to achieve representative membership GwyrddNi staff had to promote the offer, by means of communications and marketing strategies and community engagement. This engagement was in order to capture the Expressions of Interest (EOIs) to later sort the applicants according to representativeness of each area's demographics. In line with other reports of such assemblies, achieving representative membership was difficult. GwyrddNi deployed a variety of strategies to share the news of the upcoming assemblies, including: the GwyrddNi website and social media, print media such as posters in shop windows and articles in local 'papurau bro' (community newspapers), radio and television coverage, face-to-face engagement through community-based Facilitators, including one-to-ones and at group settings such as community events and leveraging local mouthpieces, and a postal campaign to twenty-two thousand households in the region. The extensive engagement resulted in 380 EOIs (1.73% of the regions' households). This is slightly lower than Blaenau Gwent's Climate Assembly in 2021, which returned a 2.64% invitation interest rate but cannot be directly compared as Blaenau Gwent's assembly was held online during the Coronavirus pandemic and the invitation detailed the cash incentive for attendance (£250) whereas GwyrddNi's remuneration was not communicated until later.

There are two consistent phenomena that emerge from analysis of engagement with GwyrddNi's assemblies: that what worked for one community did not work elsewhere and that the majority of those who expressed an interest were already engaged in climate action or worked in relevant sectors. There is a well-documented research need to establish reasons why people do not engage, especially in relation to climate projects where the public overwhelmingly accept that climate change is real and actions must be taken (Barasi 2019; Crawley, Coffé & Chapman 2020). GwyrddNi's experience highlighted that each of the five communities had different ecosystem, services and localised histories, affecting community discourses – significant given that some of the communities are less than ten miles from each other. For example, recruitment was relatively easy in one community, with many registering interest without much persuasion, from seeing posts on social media or the postal campaign. However, in another community one-to-one engagement was crucial, with the postal and social media campaigns having little impact on numbers. The project also revealed that communication and engagement must be tailored to each community. For example, one area appreciated data and statistics, another was more interested in the themes of food and farming. This reveals two findings: firstly, the importance of understanding individual community discourses and secondly that such community discourse could be leveraged to increase engagement. The importance of framing will be discussed later.

Participation

The GwyrddNi assemblies revealed that the individuals selected via the sampling process were representative to a degree, but there were clear skews. For all the areas there was a good geographical spread of people from the neighbouring villages, and gender, income and ethnicity were broadly representative of the communities. However, the clear outliers were in language proficiency and education/vocation. Across all but one assembly (Dyffryn Nantlle) most of the participants in each community possessed undergraduate degrees or higher, and/or worked in relevant sectors (low carbon/environment), and in three of the five Assemblies the language split of Welsh speakers (including learners) and English speakers was equal, despite the communities being comprised of 60–70 percent Welsh speakers. This reveals the idea of a sense of 'the usual suspects' signing up during the EOI stage of the process (that those who take part are usually those who are already active in their community or interested in climate action) which raises the question of how to motivate engagement.

The GwyrddNi assemblies are not unusual as regards education. In analysis of three Scottish Citizens' Juries, Roberts and Escobar (2015) found that those with higher education (university and upwards) were more likely to get involved than those without, with just under half of their participants holding a university qualification (p. 39). Han, Schenck-Hamlin & Schenck-Hamlin (2015) similarly report that those with a college degree were more likely to participate over those without. Not only were the GwyrddNi participants largely with higher education qualifications, but also they were more motivated towards climate action that the UK average. The Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST) were commissioned to evaluate the GwyrddNi assemblies, and to conduct pre- and post- assembly participant surveys. The pre-assembly evaluation questionnaire identified that sixty-five percent of respondents said that the issue of climate change was 'extremely important' to them and a further twenty-six percent noting it was 'very important' (D. Thorman, personal communication, February 13 2022). A BEIS (Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) survey (2020) identified that eighty-one percent of the UK population are concerned about climate change, and an IPSOS survey (2022) similarly reported eighty percent were concerned and fifty-four percent of the UK population very concerned about climate change. The GwyrddNi participants therefore showed higher concern pre-assembly than the UK average, which points at the motivation for engagement. The demographics data and questionnaire results reveal that those who engaged were those from particular social groups and/or with particular social values, and that those from outside the particular social groups or those who were less interested in climate action did not return the invitation. This is of course not unusual. The next section will discuss the existing research of what motivates engagement and applicable phenomena as regards what groups traditionally engage, before turning to further examination of the hard-to-reach groups.

What motivates engagement?

The study conducted by Dallimore et al. is valuable as researchers explored volunteering and their findings shed light on the experience of GwyrddNi. Whilst being part of participatory democracy is not directly comparable with regular volunteering, the assembly participants' attendance originated from a position of freely giving their time for community service and the cash incentive was not communicated ahead of most submissions of interest. In their study, Dallimore et al. found that volunteers were often from a particular section of the community, which promoted engagement from others of a similar socio-economic or

cultural background and, more significantly, could restrict engagement from those outside this social group. They reported that:

> in both Overton and Rhos, leaders of voluntary groups were drawn more commonly than not from similar occupational groups […]. We observe that formal volunteering in both locations is done by those who have ample resources, and that voluntary groups are looking for members of this dominant status group to join them as volunteers. It is predictable therefore that members of lower socioeconomic groups will be marginalized, and as suggested by Hustinx, Cnaan and Handy (2010), will therefore be deprived of opportunities for enhancing the human and social capital that might gain them invitations to participate (2018, pp. 17–18).

While the Community Assemblies did not target a particular section of the community, and indeed worked to engage with the harder to reach groups, this finding demonstrates that those from certain backgrounds are more likely than others to engage with voluntary activity. Smith (1994) explains that while volunteering is not only carried out by those with higher statuses, but they also volunteer in greater numbers, give more time, fulfil more prestigious positions and undertake more meaningful tasks. This reveals that the GwyrddNi assembly members followed established patterns of participation, underscoring the need to find new ways of broadening engagement.

A significant feature raised by the study conducted by Dallimore et al. is that most of the local leaders of voluntary organisations are incomers and not the local or Welsh-born members of the community (p. 12). The authors continue by stating that this is not uncommon and:

> Such patterns have been identified in other studies ranging from Pahl's (1968) seminal work on villages to more recent work by Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005) and Benson and Jackson (2013). As in such studies, we find that not only do the middle class adopt places, they actively make and maintain them (pp. 12–13).

This finding relates to GwyrddNi's experiences, with many assembly members being such incomers that have settled in the community. GwyrddNi's Bro Ffestiniog Community Facilitator, who herself relocated from London, described how she volunteered as litter picker after moving to Blaenau Ffestiniog and that many of the fellow volunteers were also incomers. One of Dyffryn Nantlle's assembly members stated:

> I haven't really done anything community-wise since I've been living in Wales, so the assembly is quite important for me in that way. Climate change is one of the most important things that humanity has to deal with at the moment and I haven't really done anything about it so for me it feels important to be part of this. […] Everyone here is new to me too so that's really nice.

This reveals that having an 'incomer status' seems to motivate engagement. Dallimore et al. state that "having friends already in a group, receiving services from an organisation, or ascribing status to membership, have all been shown to increase volunteering rates" (p. 4), which for incomers that are seeking to grow connections, voluntary activity could be argued as means of integration and developing a rootedness within the new community. Literature and the experiences of GwyrddNi point at motivation as originating either from a participant's social status (occupation or cultural standing and belonging) or as incomers that engage as means of embedding themselves within their new community. This is not a new finding, however this investigation found another less known motivator for engagement: heritage.

Heritage: The Welsh Language

As previously discussed, the GwyrddNi assemblies were conducted bilingually and Welsh speakers appreciated the opportunity to attend such events and speak in their chosen language, but also noted dissatisfaction in small group unfacilitated discussions that turned to English. There is a decisive research gap in multilingual assemblies, and GwyrddNi staff reported that they could find no evidence of previous bilingual assemblies and therefore no information to support their planning and delivery. Dallimore et al. identify that "the role that language plays in volunteering within multilingual locales has not been widely studied" (2018, p. 16) which can be extended to multilingual deliberative processes which are also understudied. Analysis on the energy-focussed citizen's assembly in Lebanon by Shehabi and Al-Masri (2022) identified that non-Arab speakers were not catered for which led to low participation from the migrant population within the community. Verhasselt (2022) tackles the question of language divide in deliberative assemblies in the case of Luxembourg and argues that unlike the assumption that linguistic divides impede deliberation she offers a counterargument that multilingualism fosters inclusivity. Both these examples (Lebanon, Luxembourg) are distinctive from the Wales-based GwyrddNi assemblies: in Lebanon the non-speakers of the dominant language were excluded and in Luxembourg participants were multilingual (although the language abilities of each assembly member are not noted by Verhasselt). Further research is required in the Wales context and/or parallels with similar countries or regions: in recognised bilingual countries/regions where citizens are a mix of monolinguals and bilinguals in order to gain insights as to how to achieve real world and practical multilingual inclusivity.

Most significant in analysis of the GwyrddNi Assemblies is the ways in which the Welsh language was prominent across discussions in each of the five areas. It is reasonable to suppose that the offer to attend a bilingual assembly organised in partnership with local social enterprises may motivate engagement with the local Welsh speakers (as highlighted previously by a participant's appreciation of the opportunity to discuss in his first language). This is in accordance with the conclusions reached Dallimore et al. that people participate because of their strong sense of belonging, in this case fostered through the shared language (Welsh). In addition, an English-medium assembly, planned and delivered by an organisation outside of the communities, may have been demotivating as it would be perceived in accordance with top-down interventions and decision generated by those without understanding of community discourses and priorities. However, assembly discussions pointed at not only the motivation of being able to conduct deliberation in Welsh, but that deliberation included Welsh language matters. The need to protect Welsh was consistently emphasised which points at the love of the language, and of Welsh cultural and linguistic heritage, as motivation for engagement. During the meetings the Welsh language was raised alongside climate action with climate conversations also vehicles to leverage language preservation issues. Discussion included the desire for the Community Action Plans to include Welsh language matters, such as that each action should have a positive effect on the Welsh language and participants spoke at length about the language emergency as well as that of the climate.

Most significant is the findings from the CAST pre-Assembly questionnaire (D. Thorman, personal communication, February 13 2022). The survey asked, "how important are the following issues to you personally"? and listed a range of options. The Welsh language scored highest for those who completed the Welsh language version of the survey with ninety percent stating it was extremely important. This is ahead of climate change, the destruction of nature, wildlife and biodiversity, which were equal with sixty-six percent stating it was extremely important, and twenty-two and twenty-five percent respectively selecting it is important. For the English language respondents climate change was selected as most important. There was little difference in either group's feelings of climate change's importance, as in both surveys the question about the urgency to address the climate emergency returned high results (ninety-four percent Welsh and ninety-two percent English surveys selecting that it is extremely or very important). This suggests that while climate change was very important to (almost all) participants, the Welsh language was more important to a significant portion of the group. This is a new finding, there is no known

research on the correlation between the climate emergency and language emergency and could aide engagement strategies. This report suggests therefore that climate engagement can be improved and expanded by alignment with the other issues that matter to people, wider community discourses and by tapping into the fabric of such communities so that climate action weaves into broader community narratives.

Heritage: the natural environment

The significance of language was not the only motivator outside climate action. In Pen Llŷn the Facilitator stated that one group accepted the invitation based on their opposition of windfarms. This is interesting as current research (Sherren, in press) suggests that while windfarms are the most contentious renewable energy sources given their visual impact on the local landscape, there is less opposition to a community turbine rather than a conglomerate turbine. Williams (2022) found that in post-industrial Welsh slate or coal communities, people accepted community renewable energy schemes. She identified that the schemes fitted the industrialised and natural landscapes and people accepted change as part of the change in industry and community energy fitted into and was acceptable for the sense and history of place. Pen Llŷn is an outlier in the five GwyrddNi communities as a rural agricultural community without an industrious past. The group's motivation to attend the assemblies to ensure their voices against community wind energy were heard points at a sense of not only place attachment but also 'Climax Thinking', a term Sherren (in press) uses to underscore how people's place attachment as thinking that the landscape we currently have is the intended end point within our context, and is to be maintained as is. This again correlates with the idea of the need to truly understand the fabric of each community and their attachment to (and to a degree construction of) their home patch, to tailor climate responses and actions to each individual community ecosystem.

What hinders engagement?

It is notoriously difficult to pinpoint specific factors that hinder engagement as those who do not accept invitations to take part do not normally provide a reason and even if they did this may not be their real reason but rather their perception of a legitimate and reasonable excuse to avoid engagement. GwyrddNi reported that 'hard to reach' groups were underrepresented in the assemblies. This could be attributed to the fact that time off work or caring responsibilities made attending difficult, especially given that the financial incentive of attendance was not known during the early recruitment phase. One GwyrddNi Facilitator

noted that if all dates and times of the assemblies (the 'commitment') was known at the start this could have helped, by cementing the ask early in the process, but also underscored that during a cost of living crisis those who are facing difficulties are unlikely to have capacity (time, resource, energy) to take part. Another Facilitator underscored that defining hard to reach groups is complex and potentially contentious. This unsureness about what constitutes 'hard to reach' was echoed by other facilitators and the community social enterprises, with other projects also reporting difficulty in engaging beyond the 'usual suspects'.

Lightbody (2017) argues that the 'hard to reach' are now being referred to as 'easy to ignore' given the complexity of getting to the root of the issues surrounding engagement. The author states that "people in low earning households, who have lower levels of education or live in deprived areas are consistently less likely to participate in civic activities" and explores some of the causes (p. 7). Drawing on Blake et al. (2008) she identifies four key barriers to engagement: 1) practical. Lack of resources including information and understanding of the process, transportation or childcare; 2) personal. Lack of confidence or language issues; 3) socio-economic. Precarious workers or those that work several jobs and have not the time and/or unstable position within the community; 4) motivational. Scepticism that taking part will make a difference (ibid). Overcoming some of these barriers are impossible for a Community Assembly, given the rigidity of the process and its time commitment. In a health and social care context, Cortis (2012) identifies four actions which can promote engagement: 1) overcoming access barriers, for example using everyday environments; 2) building relationships with vulnerable groups; 3) developing networks and partnerships; 4) ensuring staff appropriateness (p. 358). Cortis discusses the long lead in times required to form relationships, which short-term projects cannot do and emphasises that this local knowledge can be lost through temporary contracts. Certain hard-to-reach groups can take a long time to form bonds and trust (including young people) and are prone to feel criticised. The author concludes that "thinking needs to shift to consider not what makes individuals 'hard-to-reach' but what makes the assistance on offer hard for some groups to accept" (p. 353). This is key and ties in with GwyrddNi's pitch of 'making the green choice the easy choice'. Making the offer easy to accept could facilitate wider engagement and communicative strategies can simplify or normalise the offer, by tapping into existing community discourses and individuals' place attachments.

Evidence and how framing could help

Due to the short, four-month period of this project, extensive communications with those who did not engage was not feasible as there was no realistic time to create, conduct and analyse a survey of those who did not take up the offer of invitation. However conversations with local contacts (all within the Dyffryn Peris community) identified some insights. Four residents were informally asked whether they had heard of GwyrddNi and if they would take part in a local climate assembly. Of the four people spoken to (three male and one female, three middle-class young with university education, and one retiree with no higher education) none said that they had heard of the movement and could not recall receiving a postal invitation. They were then given information about what the assembly involved in brief and asked whether they would have attended should they have received the information. Two declined without stating explicit reasons. One stated that they 'did not go to meetings' but perhaps could be persuaded by the cash incentive and if the meetings were conducted via Zoom outside of working hours. The other (middle-class young male) gave some interesting responses. He stated that while climate action is not on his list of priorities (explaining that although it sounds selfish [pointing at the social stigmatism of avoiding climate action], but as he has no intention of having children the future will not impact him), he would definitely attend with his neighbours. Further discussion interestingly highlighted that if the assembly had been for the people of Bethel (his home village) he would have certainly attended, but as it was a randomised selection of people of Dyffryn Peris, he likely would not, stating that the cash incentive would not persuade him otherwise. Although this is just one example, it points at the person's place attachment and how the love of the home patch and this hyper-local sense of community fostered interest in attending a climate action event. Research suggests that the way climate messages are framed can improve engagement, but to date there is no existing research that has considered anchoring climate communications in place attachment.

The importance of Framing

Broad et al. underscore the importance of framing in a community engagement setting and the ways in which Community Workers must 'look for the right message'. The authors continue by stating that engagement is also about identifying the self-interest, what moves people, and shaping what is said to fit the person (2013: 334). The 'right message' has also been underscored in climate communications. Such framing takes several forms including motivating participation, the assembly questions and has a stake in assembly outcomes. The

Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA) published a report in 2021 on the framing of climate change and stated that people make sense of climate change from the position of their values and "the framing of climate information in the assembly should attend to this fact" (Shaw, Wang & Latter 2021, p.7). Rovers & Dejaeghere (2022) argue that climate assemblies generally focus on climate mitigation and sustainability, but that attention should also be paid to more personal or egotistical benefits. They state that while the altruistic future generations rhetoric can foster the engagement of others that are less convinced on climate change, personal growth and financial benefits may engage others. These statements align with the conversation held with one of the non-participants who gave some details on what would have motivated them to do so; one may have been persuaded by financial incentives as the cash remuneration piqued their interest. The other, who stated that he would only attend a hyper-local village-level event, points at the idea that his values were of attachment to his local area and the discussion indicated willingness to engage with activity that would be of benefit to the village.

Britain Talks Climate, an evidence-based toolkit developed by Climate Outreach, outlines different engagement strategies to reach different segments of the British population. It builds on the idea that public opinion can be categorised into 'Seven Segments', and by tailoring key messages into a person's beliefs and social identity meaningful and impactful engagement about climate change can be achieved, as all segments can be persuaded on climate if campaigns are communicated effectively (Wang, Corner & Nicholls, 2020). The authors continue by explaining that Progressive Activists are the only segment that say they regularly talk about climate change. [6] Conversely Disengaged Traditionalists, Disengaged Battlers and Backbone Conservatives are consistently the least worried about any environmental issues.[7] The two 'Disengaged' segments are the least likely to engage in low-carbon behaviours: they tend to feel less pride in 'doing their bit' and are more likely to say they are busy enough surviving from day to day without having to worry about climate

[6] Progressive Activists are described as vocal and passionate with climate change central to their identity and politics. They are despairing about governments' moral failings on the issue, which they believe will make all other challenges and inequalities worse (Wang, Corner & Nicholls 2020, p. 7).

[7] Disengaged Traditionalists are described as disillusioned and sceptical and are not convinced on the need for action on climate. Disengaged Battlers feel unheard and unrepresented but are nevertheless broadly convinced of the need to take action on climate change. However, they do not yet believe the transition will benefit them. Backbone Conservatives are conservative, patriotic and optimistic, taking pride in tangible success stories about British environmental achievements and care deeply about food, farming and the rural economy. They are more sceptical of (what they sometimes see as) symbolic lifestyle changes (Wang, Corner & Nicholls 2020, p. 7).

change (p. 28). Wang, Corner and Nicholls continue by offering effective means to tailor climate messages to different segments, and importantly state what methods do not work. For example, engaging Progressive Activists might involve channelling their desire for radical action by encouraging them to build the societal mandate, and facilitation can help them begin the conversation from where the other person is. Significantly, this segment is turned off by arguments about incremental improvements as they want urgent, revolutionary change (pp. 46–7). A participant from Dyffryn Ogwen left the GwyrddNi process after the second assembly. They wrote that during the *learning stage* they were given the scale and urgency of the climate crisis but felt that the subsequent *deliberation stage* fell short of the necessary action, arguing that the issues discussed were too modest and questioned how this local action could translate into lobbying lever for large-scale change. Through understanding of the Seven Segments, this participant aligns with the description of a progressive activist, who became disengaged with the perceived low level climate mitigation discussed in the meetings. If they had been persuaded that bringing the population along with them would speed up (and significantly not slow down) the transformations they want to see, the outcome could be different.

The other 'engaged' segment are Civic Pragmatists, who are defined as community-oriented and share the socially left beliefs of Progressive Activists. The GwyrddNi Assemblies take place in Plaid Cymru strongholds, with Dwyfor Meirionydd (Pen Llŷn and Bro Ffestiniog) and Arfon (Dyffryn Peris, Dyffryn Nantlle, Dyffryn Ogwen) returning Plaid Cymru majorities since 2010 (and have always returned Plaid Cymru Assembly Members since the Senedd's creation in 1999). Plaid Cymru is a left-of-centre political party which emphasises social justice. This report does not assume the communities' political preferences nor draw conclusion based on political views, but it is reasonable to believe that several residents within the catchment areas would likely be of this Segment. Wang, Corner and Nicholls argue that for this segment their attention requires holding as they are busy or involved in other issues and so climate is not always the priority. They continue by emphasising this Segment's community ties and the value of local-area involvement. Significantly they note that this Segment feel difficulty in following a sustainable lifestyle and could be alienated by a belief that the commitment to the cause means "passing some kind of green 'purity' test" (p. 66). This report hypothesises that, given this segment is known to be interested in community and their local patch, would their attention be kept longer, and engagement fostered if the climate message was delivered by emphasis of community and locality: through leveraging place attachment?

Capitalising on an area's specific features and people's place attachment. Each place offers different ecosystem services and localised histories, affecting people's place connections and community discourses. What works for one community may not work elsewhere. This project will examine these dynamics specifically for Wales

The GwyrddNi facilitators' experiences of community engagement highlighted that what worked for one community did not work elsewhere; as previously mentioned some communities signed up without any face-to-face contact, whereas in others meetings were crucial to convey the message to individuals and groups. Research suggests that engagement in relation to climate change is most effective when communicated by trusted leaders and local voices within communities, especially in relation to more sceptical groups (House of Commons 2022, p. 79). In their research of North East Wales communities, Dallimore et al. argued that local connection was a fundamental tenet of community engagement, with "prior knowledge" and "personal contacts" providing "essential gateways into each community" (2018, p. 7). These findings are interesting, however the relationship between 'local connection' and engagement is not clear-cut, and this report suggest that in addition to valuable local knowledge the social fabric of each community is also a key driver. For GwyrddNi two of the Facilitators lived within their community (one local born, one migrant), and three worked outside their home community. The lowest engagement was in the community with the locally based non-Welsh Facilitator, but highest numbers were seen in the communities where engagement was driven by the non-resident Facilitators. This suggests that there are more factors at play as regards community engagement.

This report suggests that 'prior knowledge' and 'personal contacts' are not fully representative of community's appetite for engagement. Furthermore, the concept of community "Connectors" (Russell 2021), which are described as highly connected individuals within a community that can motivate action, did not translate into sign ups in some areas. For the Community Assemblies in some areas such 'connectors' received the message but did not engage with the process and despite the lack of 'connectors' there was good engagement. In the GwyrddNi experience there is no definite linkage between engagement and a 'trusted local voice' (as some participants signed up without any face-to-face contact). Rather, this report suggests that engagement is more closely connected to the individual ecosystem of each place and the communities they sustain.

Local Ecosystems

While much research and practice points at the necessity to appreciate local ecosystems in order to foster engagement, oftentimes deliberative democracies are conducted by governments or national agencies that do not possess relevant local knowledge to understand the fabrics of communities. GwyrddNi as a movement is already grounded within the local area, and the furthermore the project undertook mapping exercises to understand the social make-up of the communities, to scope what is already happening locally, through whom, and to understand how to engage through their channels. This was a fundamental tenet of engagement, with the Bro Ffestiniog Facilitator stating that engagement could have been hampered in this area by not utilising Cwmni Bro's networks as much as was possibly required. However, engagement through existing local networks did not reach all sections of the communities, with some villages within the valleys not engaging at all with GwyrddNi and no EOIs received for attendance.

Across the GwyrddNi assemblies there were pockets of regions within the geographical areas that did not engage and this is reflective of the hyper-local ecosystems of these places: the Facilitators working within these areas stated that the villages that did not engage either did not have an engaged local counsellor, or that non-engagement was typical of these villages, as places that generally do not engage with wider civic action. This points at the possibility that the wider geography of the assemblies did not work across all areas. While some areas are fairly cohesive, others are more self-contained/self-identifying hamlets, with the communities identifying as people of that place, rather than people of the wider place, suggesting the place attachment is specifically for their area (the 'home patch') and not valley wide. This was evidenced by the non-participant from Bethel who would have only attended if discussions were solely about the village. This phenomenon is not unique as Natural Resources Wales are recently also prioritising hyper-local projects. This finding corroborates the notion of place attachment, the connection that people feel towards their home patch – which leads to the question of whether more people would engage if the message was communicated differently and whether mini-publics that fed into wider assemblies would have engaged the 'less engaged' villages.

An example of effective community engagement was identified by GwyrddNi staff by Y Dref Werdd ('The Green Town'), a social enterprise in Blaenau Ffestiniog which works to benefit the local environment and community in the town and its surrounding areas. Y Dref Werdd has successfully engaged with groups across the community and their experience highlights some methods of engagement that worked, including:

- people did not have to step outside who they are and what they are comfortable with in order to take part
- plan and design activity based on people's motivations. For example, removing rubbish from the river because it is an eyesore, as opposed to communicating the harm and pollution the rubbish causes
- go to the people rather than asking them to come along. For example, engage at coffee mornings and feed -back and -forward as opposed to recruitment to set events.

Y Dref Werdd's experiences are important for this study. It highlights not only some of the practical examples of what worked (which, not unrelatedly, points at the difficulties in attracting assembly members as people had to go to it rather than it coming to them), but also the experiences relate to what has also been identified to work in research. Broad et al (2013) discuss 'what works' in community engagement, emphasising trust and accessibility as crucial. Most significantly they suggest that in order to build relationships and rapport, organisers must spend time to listen to what community members had to say about their own experiences and their words echo Y Dref Werdd in stating "meeting them where they are at and not always calling them to where you are at. Getting knee deep in the community, getting to know the people and what the issues are" (p. 334). The authors continue by underscoring that practitioners consistently pointed to the diversity of residents, and approaches must be tailored to the lived experience of specific audiences, as they were "always looking for the right messages" (ibid). Research and practical evidence consistently stress the importance of 'the right space' and 'the right message'. An appropriate space can be fairly straightforward, as there is consensus that the space must enable people to feel free and be themselves, however there is less consensus on what the right message might be and how to construct it.

The social enterprises working as part of the GwyrddNi consortium underscored using the right language and said that the language of politics does not translate to communities, giving example that those who experience fuel poverty would not respond well to attending a place labelled as a 'warm hub'. Rather the social enterprises used language that resonated with their *specific* community: Partneriaeth Ogwen launched 'Swpar Chwaral', a weekly community meal event that people can attend to eat and socialise together, free of charge. 'Swpar Chwaral' (loosely translated as 'quarry supper') ties in with the history of place, the communitarian spirit of the quarrymen and community discourse, but additionally is purposefully misspelt to denote the natural orality of the term and the ways in which a 'swper

chwarel' would be part of the area's local oral history (and working class industrial past) as opposed to more formal recorded history. Bro Ffestiniog's 'Dim yn DWP' (not the DWP) is another example: a job vacancy service. This term emphasises the area's separateness from and distrust of formal government agencies, but 'dim yn DWP' also means 'not stupid' which again relates to the community's ability to take actions into their own hands as well as a desire to define itself rather than be defined (as a deprived community). These examples demonstrate the effectiveness of community initiatives that originate from the community, of bottom-up approaches that tap into community discourses (and not unrelatedly done so through the Welsh language) and offer specific solutions to specific communities. This report suggests that approach could be extended to climate action and communications, and the next section with detail methodologies that could help.

Methodologies best suited to address the research needs

So far this report has demonstrated, through the GwyrddNi case study and related literature, that engaging the public on climate action is difficult and that while certain segments of the community are easy to engage with, as they are either already involved in their community or interested in the climate cause, there is a large proportion of the population that does not take part. It is impossible to engage everyone, in particular through a fairly rigid process such as an assembly which requires a considerable time commitment on the part of the individual as well as the capacity and confidence to attend and contribute. Literature underscores the need to engage people through channels that are relatable and in ways that make engagement easy and natural, by 'meeting people where they are at' and discussing the things that matter in accordance with their personal values. This report now turns to methodologies that relate to the evidence discussed in the previous section that may offer theoretical underpinning to the phenomena identified. These methodologies will then form the basis of future research, arguing that by framing the question differently ('how can we respond locally to climate change') engagement can be more wide-reaching.

Primary Theories

Communication Infrastructure Theory

The above discussion of the ways in which social enterprises communicate with their communities can be understood as what Broad et al (2013) define as 'communication ecologies', which are networks of communication connections that strengthen an area's communication infrastructure. The authors argue that an "understanding the communication

ecologies of community-based practitioners is also essential to the design of engaged scholarship initiatives" (p. 327). Communication Infrastructure Theory (CIT) underscores the storytelling element of community discourse, and through it a community-level identity can be forged, and community-level action can be encouraged and realized (Kim & Ball-Rokeach 2006). In Bro Ffestiniog the community discourse reflects a social cohesion between residents and community organisations such as Cwmni Bro and local media outlets. The storytelling across all comes from a collective (arguably somewhat socialist in this area) identity and can be understood in terms of CIT as 'sharing the same neighbourhood story' as local voices (individuals, groups, media) are not isolated and are involved in a dynamic, networked conversation that collectively forms the communicative foundation of community, resulting in higher levels of belonging (Broad et al 2013). Wilkin (2013) similarly points at the benefits of CIT, arguing that in a health and social care context, tailored information to subsets of the community works well and CIT has the potential to provide a theoretically grounded approach for community-based communications (p. 182). If Wilkin can expand CIT to a health context, it is arguable that it can be expanded also to a climate action context, given that such communication ecologies lead to more civic participation. According to Wilkin, awareness and understanding of local communication ecologies also provide means to learn more of local health issues, which can also be applied to a climate context. Grassroots climate action can respond locally to climate concerns, which was the cornerstone of GwyrddNi's Assemblies. More could be investigated as to whether positioning the climate narrative within the local CIT would widen participation, that is, not only 'how can each area respond locally to climate change' but possibly 'how can each area respond to local climate issues'?

Place Attachment

Place attachment is generally agreed as the emotional bond between a person and place, which can vary from individual- to community-level attachments, at varying scales of place including from neighbourhood to cities, regional or even global attachment (Manzo & Devine-Wright 2018). In Dallimore et al.'s study place attachment was a key motivator for volunteers whether they were the area's 'locals' or incomers. They argue that

> there is plenty of evidence to show the extent to which volunteering remains embedded in place through local association. We see through our collected narratives that biographies can define the relationship that an individual has with a place and how this affects patterns of volunteering through formations and constructions of identity and belonging (2018, p. 21).

This reveals that volunteers do so because of their place attachment firstly which points at the possibility that the type of activity is a secondary consideration and more flexible. This is in accordance with a study on community energy projects in Wales, in which a community member stated that they did not care what technology was selected, so long as the community got it and benefitted from it (Williams 2022). Place attachment is seen in the GwyrddNi project. In most assemblies, the theme of local is consistent, with deliberation surrounded local food, local energy, and the local economy. In the Dyffryn Peris assemblies, place attachment was evident in discussion, including the sense of pride in the community and sustainable tourism and of how to share and protect the area. The Dyffryn Peris Facilitator reported that (broadly) the assembly members could be split into two main groups, the Welsh-speaking 'locals' and the 'Outdoorsy English incomers'. Both groups expressed their love for their area and came together through GwyrddNi, with individuals who did not know each other before the assembly developing a connection through the group work and collaboration. Place attachment here bridged communication and engagement, through the project.

Place attachment is valuable in the climate action context as it is argued that while climate change is a global issue it is felt (and its effects are seen) locally. In the CAST pre-Assembly survey sent to participants the question surrounding their area and community demonstrated people's place attachment. Of the 179 respondents, ninety-three percent strongly agreed with the statement that the landscape and countryside of their area is special to them (2.2 percent strongly disagreed), and seventy-nine percent strongly agreed with the statement that the area in which they live is unique and distinctive (1.7 percent strongly disagreed). Place attachment scored higher than people attachment as only thirty-eight percent strongly agreed that they felt connected to the people in their local community and under half of respondents (46.7 percent) strongly agreeing that there is a strong sense of community feeling where they live. This supports the connection between local climate action and place attachment as those surveyed by CAST responded strongly to both addressing climate change and their connection to their local area. Place attachment could become motivator to engage those that are generally less concerned about climate change – would more people engage in actions to protect their home patch if it were framed in a different way?

Cognitive Discourse Analysis (CODA)

In conversation, a mutual ground is essential for understanding; speakers align to each other (almost automatically) to make it easy to communicate (Garrod & Pickering, 2004) and thus less work for their minds to do (Tenbrink, 2020). Tenbrink underscores that speakers will either *accommodate* by alignment, which shows solidarity, or *dissociate* from their interaction partner. Drawing on Clark (1996), that conversations are grounded by negotiating a common ground, Tenbrink argues that when speakers start talking, they normally already share a certain amount of common ground, often sharing the same or similar culture or aspects of everyday life. However, in Community Assemblies the common ground is precarious given the aim of achieving a representative sample of the population. GwyrddNi's Assemblies not only contained a mix of characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity) but also socio-economic differences (education levels and profession) as well as cultural and linguistic differences between the 'locals' and migrants. Language is a fundamental tenet of culture and identity, which poses significant question to the group's ability to 'negotiate a common ground' when faced with a language barrier.

CODA is a research methodology that positions language as a representation of thought. This is significant for GwyrddNi's bilingual assemblies. Conversations were facilitated so that Welsh speakers spoke (in)directly with English speakers through simultaneous translation, with the English speaker responding in untranslated English and the Welsh speaker again responding in their native language. This opens the question of whether this facilitated engagement as both speakers could converse in their native tongues, or whether it impeded deliberation given the additional work the speakers had to do in order to receive each other's messages (the Welsh speaker had to switch languages, listening and processing in English to respond in Welsh; the English speaker had to wait for the translation as well as try and connect with the Welsh speaker indirectly via translation). Furthermore, CODA is a research method that has dual significance in this study. Firstly, it is means to address the discussion above, and whether simultaneous translation facilitated Welsh speakers to utter their thoughts more freely than in untranslated 'water cooler' type exchanges. Secondly, CODA can be used to better understand engagement and whether choice of words and communication can lead to more or less engagement and attitudinal change: to understand when GwyrddNi's communications is, to use the idiom, 'speaking someone's language', and when it is not. This could be analysed by taking GwyrddNi's Assembly question, communicated during the Expression of Interest stage "how can we in

Dyffryn Peris respond locally to climate change?" [8] This question emphasises the people of Dyffryn Peris – 'we' – not the place. If this central question was rewritten to make it about the place which people are attached to, for instance as 'protecting Dyffryn Peris from the effects of climate change' would this have an effect and negotiate common ground through place attachment? A secondary question here is whether people identify with 'Dyffryn Peris' at all, and whether further understanding of each community's CIT can be explored through CODA.

Secondary Methodologies

Social Identity Theory

Understanding of 'hard to reach' groups can be supported by Social Identity Theory. Tajfel (1972) defines social identity as an individual's knowledge that they belong to certain social groups with some value and/or significance attached to its membership. Abrams & Hogg (1990) argue that:

> …a sense of involvement, concern and pride can be derived from one's knowledge of sharing a social category membership with others, even without necessarily having close personal relationships with, knowing or having any material personal interest in their outcomes (p. 3).

This sense of involvement and belonging can be argued as motivational for engagement, that the individual is joining similar individuals to form groups. This aligns with Dallimore et al.'s analyses of certain groups that are more motivated to volunteer, as well as a theoretical underpinning of the *birds of a feather* idiom. However this theory also opens up understanding of the converse, either of those that perceive themselves as not belonging, or those with an 'undesirable social identity' in relation to social norms or dominant groups, perhaps those that do not care about climate change either from a point of view that they do not believe in it or its severity, or that it won't affect them in their lifetime. Parry and Hassan (2019) discuss the ways in which smoking has become an undesirable social identity, with smokers feeling stigmatised, criticised or as social pariahs, leading to them constructing bonds with fellow-smokers and avoiding smoking in view of the wider public. That is, they can form bonds in accordance with Abrams and Hogg's discussion, but equally that they possess the understanding that they (as minority in wider society) do not belong to the dominant social group and therefore smoke either in private or seclusion, or in places of acceptance (such as pub smoking areas, designated smoking sites at the workplace).

[8] Dyffryn Peris is interchangeable with each of the other four communities.

For climate action and community assemblies, social identity theory plays a part. Individuals are engaged by staff members or activists that belong to a certain social group, that is, those that are passionate about inciting positive action. Evidence points that those who take up the invitation are also of a similar social group, with a higher proportion concerned about climate change than representative of the wider community. Bro Ffestiniog for example, refused to take part in the BBC coverage of GwyrddNi's campaign due to the community's views and distrust of the broadcasters. Alignment with the BBC thus could alienate engagement by associating GwyrddNi's climate action indirectly with this type of mainstream media and the potential political undertones. There is also the role of stigmatism, in that it is not a social norm to deny climate change or state contentment with or inability to make personal changes to the status quo. Those who are concerned about climate change can also feel outside the group, as they are less active or knowledgeable, or they are not environmentalists and feel that they cannot make big personal changes. They might feel criticised about their differing opinions: that they personally could not give up their petrol/diesel cars, have no desire nor funds to retrofit their homes, nor afford the time or money to source and purchase greener food choices.

Future Research

This report forms the backdrop to a recommended future research bid to further investigate the findings of this initial small-scale study. This report's hypothesis is that engaging communities in climate action can be enhanced by framing communications through place attachment: that asking people to deliberate climate change from the perspective of their home patch may foster wider engagement with climate action, across all levels. This framing would then by analysed through CODA, to identify what communicative patterns emerge and which messages are most positively or negatively received. This future research idea also responds to other gaps in knowledge identified by other researchers. Lightbody (2017) highlights that more could be done to understand the long-term implications of participation or non-participation, investigating how people feel about being held accountable for, or left out of, decision-making (p. 4). Allen (2023) identified the positive long-term effects of participation and the ways in which post-assembly the Climate Assembly UK members reported increased concerns about climate and that they had undertaken individual climate-positive actions, but discussions with those that have not participated remain unaccounted for. Shaw, Wang & Latter (2021) identify the gap in relation to the impact of framing for climate assemblies, and how the question presented is

experienced by participants. This question can be further expanded by consideration of the question posed during the EOI stage of participant recruitment, to assess whether the ways in which members *understood* the question had an effect on signing up. This question is in accordance with a gap identified by Romsdhal (2020) of scrutinising climate framing and the associated messages.

This report suggests the following method of enquiry, grounded in academic theory:

To conduct surveys to identify whether place attachment can foster wider engagement with localised climate action. It would utilise place attachment through incorporation of the Homophily Principle. The homophily principle suggests that homophily limits people's social worlds in a way that has powerful implications for the information they receive, the attitudes they form, and the interactions they experience. As a result of homophily, ties between nonsimilar individuals tend to dissolve at a higher rate (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001). This research would serve a dual purpose: it would firstly respond to the gaps in knowledge identified by Allen and Lightbody as regards long-term impacts of participation or non-participation, but it would also open a new line of enquiry into motivation for participation and whether place attachment can increase motivation. Place attachment was identified as important for those who self-selected to take part in the GwyrddNi Assemblies – more important than attachment to people and the community – and so it is reasonable to suggest that this phenomenon can be expanded to those who did not select to join a climate event, and whether they might be persuaded by framing the event as one of benefit to the places that they love.

There are many elements that these surveys could cover – which will be further investigated if such a project is successful in securing funding – but they could include:

- Questions that anchor place attachment in communications, reframing the climate action message as localised action to benefit the area
- Asking people environmental questions in different ways and although the central concern (climate change) would remain the same there may be different responses through alternative framings
- Asking community participants and non-participants the same questions, or asking them to respond to climate facts to establish CIT and whether the CIT

remains consistent or whether participants form new CIT through cross-assembly learning

The survey would be designed and analysed through CODA. This methodology can help to understand how language use can improve engagement, through examination of whether language and a choice of words has an impact on engagement as well as outputs from group work and whether the message delivered by facilitators were appropriately received by participants – especially when the message was translated which affects what was said and what was heard. CODA can be used in conjunction with place attachment theory by examining whether engagement increases when place is emphasised in the message. This can be tailored to 'incomers', who Dallimore et al. argue are often the ones who actively maintain places, and to the Welsh speaking 'locals' through use of specifically Welsh terminology relating to place and belonging, e.g., 'cynefin', 'plwyf'.

These surveys would be underpinned by social network analysis theory and social identity theory. This methodology can be combined with practical evidence of the different types of peoples (based on their values and belief systems), to understand more about those who engage or do not engage, as well as those who leave the process. This can be related to language and what types of communication work best for different people through a lens of examining similar and non-similar individuals, in combination with CODA. This would improve understanding of how social identity affects engagement. While it can be positive to bring likeminded individuals together, it poses a challenge to engage the 'hard to reach' groups or indeed any of the other groups (including young people or those who are busy with other important concerns) that are outside of the dominant category of those that are organising and typically taking part in climate action. Social Identity Theory can be applied in conjunction with CODA and appreciation of the 'Seven Segments'. CIT can further underpin this study as a wider lens of locality-based community discourses. While social network analysis can account for the groups of people that are actively involved and the ones that initiate change and civic action, CIT can take a longer perspective and understanding of the communication ecology of a place, e.g. through inclusion of posters within a neighbourhood ('no more second homes' for example) which says much about the community even without a formal network of active citizens doing something about it. These surveys would identify not only whether place attachment can reach groups that are reluctant to engage with climate action but also what discourses (community level and individual) matter to people and how framing the question or discussion can lead to different results. This

would inform best practice for future grassroots climate movements, especially in Wales through consideration of a bilingual and monolingual cultural landscape and that engagement with Welsh speakers may be fundamentally different and not a direct translation of English language engagement tools and methodologies.

A second strand of this investigation would be to analyse the outputs of the GwyrddNi Assemblies. This would track engagement beyond the project life cycle (post-June 2023) and respond to Lightbody and Allen's avenues for further study. This strand would examine how the assembly members kept their interest in local action by examination of the legacy of the assemblies, future cross-assembly working and relationships, and the implementation of each community's Action Plans. In addition, CAST's post-assembly surveys could provide valuable insights into whether engagement and motivation changed, in particular whether the Welsh language remained a top priority and if climate action moved up or down in ranking. This could draw linkages to the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities (report due 2024). Furthermore, this examination would include participation from the wider community; those that were not selected or did not volunteer to join the participatory democracies but have later become involved either by direct invitation (through social networks and known social capital) or whether the movement has become increasingly engrained in an area's communications ecology.

The outputs of the Action Plans are of further interest – initial findings point at the theme of local with much deliberation focused on local solutions and bringing resources back into, or developing resources from within, each community. This is in accordance with the aims of Partneriaeth Ogwen (as well as the other social enterprises), which stated that their objective is to decentralise – to renew vital resources that were taken away by austerity measures that hollowed out communities. This relates to current multinational discourses around the 15-minute cities or 20-minute towns – a concept in which everything that a community might need on a day-to-day basis can be accessed without the need to travel long distances by car. Such urban planning discourse (which should be positive for communities) has attracted much negative backlash by citizens who view these top-down approaches as draconian measures to remove individual freedoms. The hypothesis is that the GwyrddNi Action Plans will in fact be very similar to the ideas of the 15-minute cities which opens a new line of enquiry into community perceptions of interventions. If it can be accepted that climate change is a global issue that must be addressed locally, can it also be argued that local solutions are widely accepted because they are communicated via local mouthpieces as part of neighbourhood storytelling, and if top-down solutions are the same or similar they are not

perceived that way? This could also inform future initiatives or be a measure of evaluating Welsh Government's 'Team Wales' approach to communal climate action. This could also be compared to the Well-Being of Future Generations Act (2015), whether community action plans draw on the Act's pillars and interconnectedness of actions, consciously or subconsciously. If so, it raises further questions: how do communities seem to 'get it' and provide solutions, but meeting the Act's obligations is difficult or undesirable for the public and private sectors? There is consensus that citizen involvement in decision-making increases the quality of policymaking (in a traditional top-down approach) – should there now be consideration that citizens and communities could steer meaningful discussions and inform policy from the bottom-up?

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