

# Sustainable Living

myths, meanings and realities



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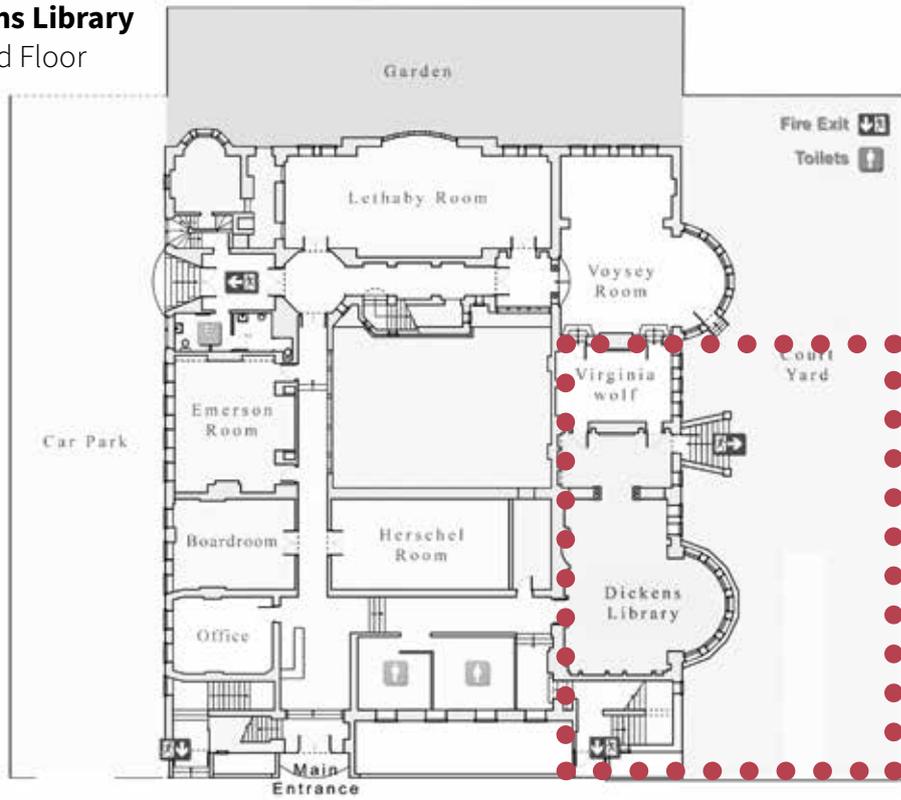
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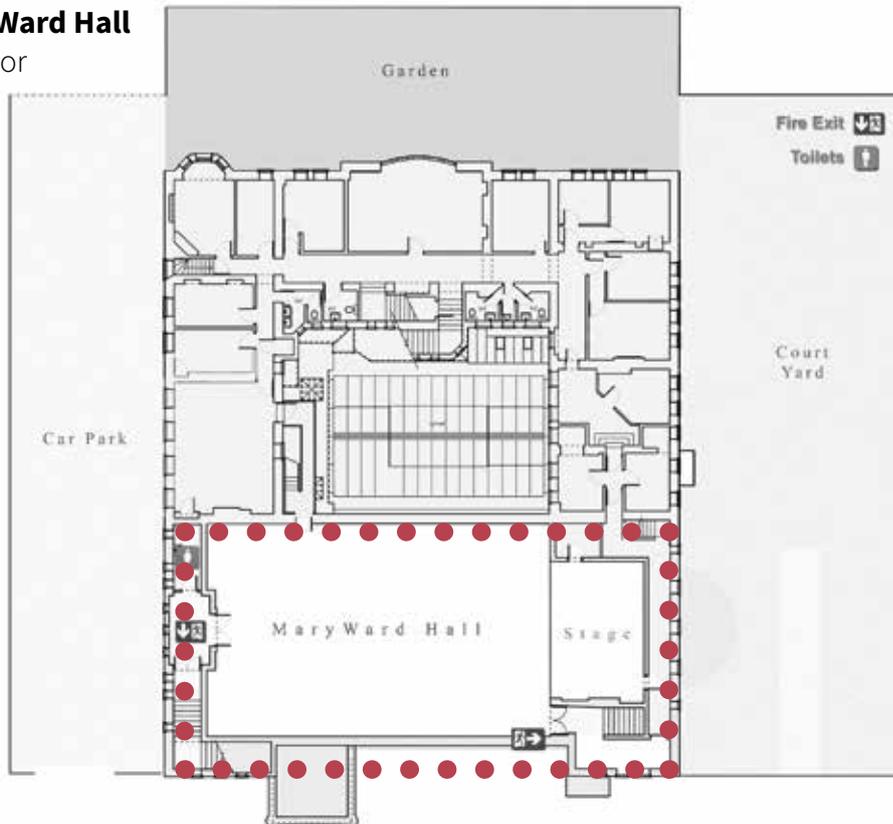
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Refreshments  
**Dickens Library**  
Ground Floor



Speaker sessions  
**Mary Ward Hall**  
1st Floor



# Conference Agenda

08.30	Registrations and refreshments   Dickens Library
09.30	<p><b>Welcome and introduction</b>          Tim Jackson, Director SLRG          Zoe Donkin, Defra</p>
09.45	<p><b>Exploring transition</b>  <b>Habits, Attitudes and Behaviours in Transition (HABiT)</b>          Bas Verplanken, University of Bath  <b>Exploring Lifestyle Changes in Transition (ELiCiT)</b>          Kate Burningham, University of Surrey</p>
11.00	Coffee/Tea   Dickens Library
11.20	<p><b>The role of community</b>  <b>Sustainable living in remote rural Scotland</b>          Emily Creamer, University of Edinburgh  <b>Civil society roles in transition</b>          Rachael Durrant, University of Sussex  <b>Resilience in sustainable food strategies</b>          Rebecca White, University of Sussex  <b>Control and transformation in sustainable lifestyles</b>          Andy Stirling, University of Sussex</p>
12.40	Lunch   Dickens Library
13.40	<p><b>Challenges and opportunities</b>  <b>The limits of materialism: impacts on wellbeing and the environment</b>          Helga Dittmar (invited keynote speaker), University of Sussex  <b>The rebound effect: measurement and response</b>          Steve Sorrell, University of Sussex  <b>Policy dialogues in sustainable living</b>          Ian Christie, University of Surrey</p>
15.10	Tea/Coffee   Dickens Library
15.40	<p><b>Synthesis</b>  <b>Sustainable living: myths, meanings and realities</b>          Tim Jackson, University of Surrey  <b>Foundations for sustainable living: a panel discussion</b>          Helga Dittmar, Mike Barry, Jan Bebbington, Lee Davies, Graham Smith</p>
17.20	<p><b>Closing remarks</b>          Jonathan Tillson, Defra</p>
17.30	Drinks Reception   Dickens Library



## Sustainable living in remote rural Scotland

Employing a qualitative approach, this PhD research investigated the role of Scottish Government funded community-led initiatives in encouraging more sustainable lifestyles in remote rural Scotland.

A critical analysis of the rhetoric and reality of the role that community plays in sustainability policy revealed that the notion of ‘the community’ as a fixed, place-based entity is at odds with the inconsistent, multi-layered, heterogeneous reality of community encountered in this study. During participant observation with two community-led groups, it was observed that only a small minority of the members of the geographically-defined communities were actively involved in the groups’ activities or objectives. Whilst the members of each group displayed many features of ‘a community’, they were only a sub-community of the geographically-defined community they ostensibly intended to represent. An observed consequence was that, whilst the initiatives had successfully implemented low carbon projects at a community scale, there was a lack of evidence that these initiatives were strengthening or empowering the geographically-defined communities. It was observed that, if any form of community was being empowered by the funding, it was the sub-community formed by the active members of each group. Existing literature suggests that this creation of ‘pockets of social capital’ may even have the potential to be a divisive element within the wider community.

Further to this, it was also observed that the receipt of grant funding for community projects weakened the groups’ ability to engage with the wider geographic community in several ways. First, the timescales within which many funding bodies require tangible outcomes from individual projects were seen to be discordant with the long-term sustainability goals of the community-led groups. Second, the administrative requirements that accompany funding mean that groups must spend a large proportion of their time completing audits, progress reports, and other paperwork. This reduces the time and resources available for more ‘hands on’ community participation activities and lessens the visibility of the group within the community. Third, competition to secure funding was observed to cause rifts and rivalries between the case study groups and other local community groups which resulted in less open and inclusive attitudes, stifling local collaboration and leading to duplication of efforts.

These observations raise questions about the intended purpose and ambitions of policy to encourage community-led initiatives, a key cornerstone of which is often building social capital and empowering communities. It is argued that there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the way in which ‘community’ is invoked within sustainability policy. If policy is to effectively encourage more sustainable lifestyles, there is a need to design initiatives which go beyond those that simply employ communities as the means by which to deliver carbon emissions reductions, and emphasise the importance of building a sense of community as a policy end in itself.



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Communal food growing – the focus of this research – is one of many examples of civil society based grassroots-level experimentation. In a range of ways these activities can influence transitions to sustainability. However, due to a variety of factors including stop-start funding, voluntarism, insecurity of tenure, group tensions, the need to cater for a range of needs and demands, these initiatives can struggle to survive. Ascertaining how communal food growing can be ‘resilient’ is therefore important; this was one aim of the research.

A second aim was to explore the ‘politics’ of resilience-building given the often different notions of means and ends that can coexist within any grassroots experiment, raising questions such as ‘what are we sustaining, in relation to which pressures, and for what ends?’ The politics of sustaining becomes particularly relevant when we consider the – often contested – role(s) we wish to see civil society playing. Civil society organisations can be heavily involved in delivering outcomes for government and other non-civil society organisations, which casts it in an instrumental light and working with the grain of

existing power structures. Civil society can also agitate for change according to what members wish to transform; working against the grain.

This research focussed on communal food growing in East Sussex, and particularly Brighton. Forty people were interviewed from communal growing initiatives and their networks. Two interviewing techniques were used: semi-structured interviews and multi-criteria mapping (MCM).

We found that communal food-growing faces multiple pressures, but the potential for communal food-growing to offer different things to different people (wellbeing, food, community, skills development, a means to reduce inequalities) has enabled it to thrive as an activity in Brighton and East Sussex.

A second key factor has been the interdependence between gardens and intermediary organisations that helps foster longevity of this activity. This in turn enables broader scale change in food systems at a local level. Through this network of affiliated organisations with multiple roles, instrumental forms of funding that are not directly related to sustainability can nevertheless



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contribute towards local transitions in certain circumstances.

All of this has implications for policy and further research. Firstly, funding for communal growing spaces, and associated evaluation methods, that recognise and value diversity in process as well as outcome is important. Secondly, Government and funding organisations, and associated policy, needs to be supportive of intermediary organisations with multiple roles, rather than pushing specialisation.

Finally, intermediary organisations with a broad remit, but working at the local scale, can be an important part of civil society-based innovation systems working towards sustainable food. Support for this medium-scale organisation is needed.



Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the UK are currently engaged in attempts to make food systems more sustainable. These efforts have been maintained over several decades, but more sustainable food systems remain marginal. Thus, the SLRG has undertaken research that aims to improve understanding of the important roles that CSOs can and do play within processes of large-scale social change (or ‘transitions’). This research was based on a mixture of field observations, documentary analysis and in-depth interviewing in connection to 18 UK-based CSOs.

The research found that there are at least four important roles that CSOs play in transitions to sustainable food systems, stemming from their collective efforts to innovate new modes of food production and consumption:

*Grassroots innovation*, i.e. experimentation with novel, more sustainable configurations of food provisioning that respond to local situations and the interests and values of the communities involved.

*Niche development*, i.e. facilitation of learning and capacity-building around grassroots innovations, thus aiding the strategic development (e.g. up-scaling and replication) of more sustainable food systems.

*Normative contestation*, i.e. application of normative pressure to the public, policy-makers and food industry, which undermines existing unsustainable practices and shifts favour

towards alternative systems. *Regime reform*, i.e. encouragement of mainstream businesses and public bodies to adopt and embed more sustainable configurations of technologies, practices and organisational arrangements.

However, instead of enacting these roles discretely, the research found that CSOs enact multiple roles simultaneously, work together in complex divisions of labour, and shift their activities and approaches over time, in ways that maximise synergies between the four roles. Hence, properties of civil society that are crucial to understanding CSO agency in transitions include strategic multivalency, relational complexity and dynamism. The research also found that the diversity of different perspectives on sustainability problems that CSOs offer is integral to their collective capacity to transform food systems.

SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICY-MAKING

Discussions within policy circles often focus disproportionately on the question of how much food, of improved sustainability credentials, CSOs are involved in producing. This leaves policy-making unhelpfully ignorant of the different forms of systemic innovation through which CSOs influence food provision and contribute towards sustainability in both new and existing food systems. Policy-making would therefore be



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more effective if it acknowledged the collective efforts of CSOs to innovate more sustainable systems. This includes recognising the mutually reinforcing nature of the roles that they play, and accepting that there is no silver bullet instrument where civil society is concerned.

When it comes to evaluation, policy should aim to enable, rather than control, civil society innovation. Hence, support for CSOs should not be linked to evaluation measures that might suppress innovation through reinforcing homogenisation. In practice, policy should support a diversity of approaches, viewing innovation in terms of system dynamics, rather than focussing on discrete initiatives. To this end, on-going and adaptable process-based assessment by groups of peers may be more appropriate than centrally-controlled outcome-based assessment using generic indicators and metrics.

Image: courtesy of Ian Christie



This project estimated the magnitude of various 'rebound effects' following different types of energy efficiency improvement and behavioural change by UK households. The term 'rebound effects' refers to a range of economic responses to such measures, whose net result is to offset some or all of the energy and carbon savings. For example, people may choose to drive further and/or more often in a fuel-efficient car since the running costs are lower (*direct rebound*). Alternatively they may spend any cost savings on other goods and services that also require energy and carbon emissions to provide (*indirect rebound*). The project estimated these combined effects for UK households and investigated how they varied with the type and cost of the measure and between different groups. The results are published in a working paper and four journal papers.

The project found that rebound effects are fairly modest (0-32%) for measures affecting domestic electricity and gas use, larger (25-65%) for measures affecting vehicle fuel use and very large (66-106%) for measures that reduce food waste. Indirect rebound effects contribute most to these results, with the overall effect being dominated by the 'embodied emissions' of non-energy goods and services. Rebound effects were larger for low-income households because they spend a greater proportion of their cost savings on carbon-intensive

necessities such as food and drink. In addition, measures that achieved cost savings in more than one area, as well as measures that were subsidised, were associated with larger rebound effects.

The magnitude of rebound effects will change over time as the relative carbon intensity of different goods and services changes. In particular, the rebound effects from measures affecting electricity consumption will increase as the carbon intensity of UK electricity generation falls - with an increasing proportion of these emissions occurring outside of the UK. Moreover, with electricity emissions capped by the EU ETS, such measures already lead to an increase in global emissions.

Since cost-effective energy efficiency measures both increase consumer welfare and (typically) reduce emissions, such measures should continue to be encouraged. However, it is important to account for rebound effects within policy appraisals. While some UK appraisals allow for direct rebound effects (e.g. for insulation measures), this is not the case for all measures and indirect rebound effects are almost invariably overlooked. As a result, the global emission savings from such measures are likely to be overestimated.

A number of options are available for mitigating rebound effects. The most important of these is the long-



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term development of economy wide carbon pricing schemes incorporating border carbon adjustments to capture the emissions embodied in traded goods. In addition, policy approaches that target barriers to energy efficiency could usefully be complemented by parallel measures that incentivise and facilitate households in making lower carbon choices in all areas of consumption. For example, if a small proportion of the cost savings from energy efficiency improvements was used to purchase and retire EU ETS allowances, any rebound effects could be more than offset.



## People or places? Factors affecting the take-up of domestic energy efficiency measures

This study used data from the English Housing Survey to explore the factors most associated with the presence of key energy efficiency measures (loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and double glazing) in residential properties. These are recognised as cost-efficient measures which should both save households money and reduce carbon emissions, and installing them is seen as a key part of any strategy to help meet national carbon budget targets. Despite the fact that these measures pay back quickly, however, policy initiatives have not always succeeded in persuading households to install them. Understanding which households are more or less likely to have these measures could inform policy makers about potential market failures which could help to target interventions more effectively.

The study used an econometric modelling methodology drawing on data from the English Housing Survey between 2002 to 2010 to elicit the most important factors influencing the uptake of energy efficiency. Several key findings emerged from the study.

In the first place, it emerged that low income does not appear to reduce the likelihood of having efficiency measures. This suggests only a limited role for credit constraints as a barrier to take-up, perhaps reflecting policies which had previously given away or heavily subsidised measures for poorer households.

Not surprisingly, it transpires that private renters are significantly less likely to own efficiency measures than other tenure types, suggesting that failures in the landlord-tenant relationship in the private-rented sector are a key barrier to uptake. While the landlord is responsible for building infrastructure and access to capital, he or she has no incentive to make cost savings from fuel consumption, as this is paid for by tenants. Tenants on the other hand have less incentive to invest in structural measures and often lower access to capital. Conversely, it emerges from the data that social renters are more likely to have measures installed. This probably reflects previous policy measures which focused on social housing as a target for improved efficiency and created incentives for social landlords to improve the energy efficiency of social housing.

Owner-occupiers who have been in their home for some time appear to be less likely to have loft insulation than recent movers. This could reflect increased hassle costs of installing loft insulation for those with a longer duration of tenure. Older properties are much less likely to have measures installed than newer properties, reflecting changes in building regulations and the costs of insulating older dwellings.

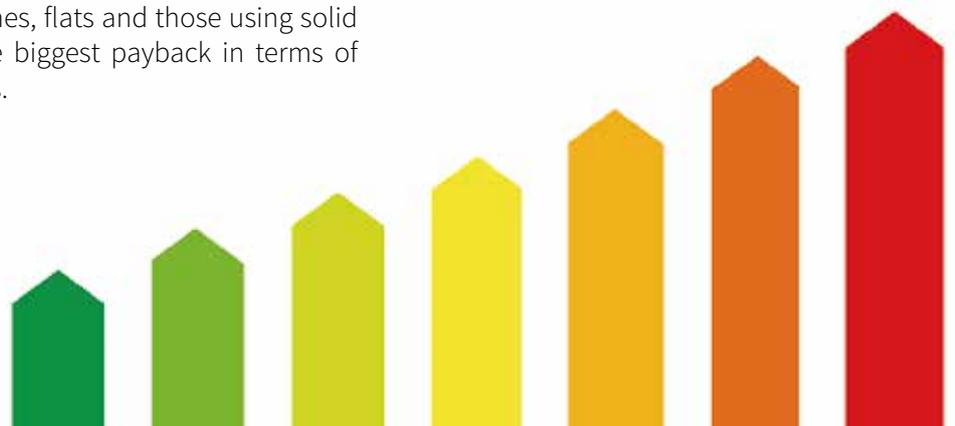
The main policy conclusions are that targeting the private rental sector and, as far as possible, older homes, flats and those using solid or communal fuels is likely to offer the biggest payback in terms of increased take-up of efficiency measures.



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In this field experiment 800 households were recruited to investigate the extent to which some of people's old habits are disrupted when they go through a life course transition (moving to a new home), and they have to re-orient and adapt themselves to this new situation. A sustainable behaviour change intervention to promote sustainable behaviours which had been developed by the Peterborough Environment City Trust was delivered by the Trust to half of those who had moved and half of those who had not moved (intervention condition). Participants who did not receive an intervention served as a comparison group (control condition). The intervention consisted of a household visit and interview, free sustainable items, tailored advice and general information.

We investigated the degree to which this life course transition provided a window of opportunity for more effective sustainable behaviour change interventions (the Habit Discontinuity Hypothesis; HDH). We found that a discontinuity provides such an opportunity: an intervention to promote more sustainable behaviours resulted in a small but statistically significant increase in self-reported sustainable behaviour when delivered to a group of participants who had very recently moved house, compared with a group who had not recently moved. This suggests that interventions may provide more value for money if they capitalise on and are delivered in the context of life course changes. This 'window of opportunity', in the present case, was found to last approximately three months after moving house.

The effect size of moving house per se was small suggesting that there should be no blanket roll-outs: instead, we suggest selecting locations where there are a larger group of individuals going through a life course change (newly built residential areas are good examples); work with professional organisations that have developed rich local knowledge and are able to deliver interventions professionally and efficiently (e.g., PECT); find the 'concerned consumers' who could be the most responsive to messages encouraging a more sustainable lifestyle; tailor communication and interventions to the beliefs, motivations and needs of the target population; attempt small behaviour changes as they can be achieved with relative ease, increasing self-efficacy; thus engendering a belief that further lifestyle changes are possible.



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## Exploring Lifestyle Change in Transition (ELiCiT)

This longitudinal, mixed-method study focused on two key household transitions - having a first child and retiring - and explored how various aspects of everyday life, which have implications for sustainable consumption, change or remain stable. We followed individuals as they moved through these two transitions by conducting in-depth interviews on three occasions, prior to retirement or the birth of the baby; soon after retirement or the birth of the baby; and finally around eight months later. We were interested in the detail of everyday life, their reflections on changes, and expectations and hopes for the future. In addition, we were interested not only in the things that people do, but also in their narratives about the right way to live one's life.

We found that lifecourse transitions do not comprise one 'moment of change', but rather are a fluid process of continuing shifts and readjustments within which multiple changes in everyday practices take place. However, these changes, and their persistence, were not solely related to the transition. Transitions were experienced differently by individuals, and individuals may have experienced more than one transition concurrently or consecutively. For example, a partnership change precipitating a house move; or having a baby leading to a change in work status. Moreover, transitions were not experienced in isolation, but rather may have affected the whole household, and the practices performed within it, such as one partner retiring encouraging the other to consider retirement and what, as a couple, they planned to accomplish in their joint retirement. Future expectations and aspirations, therefore, were constantly reassessed and adjusted as individuals and households experienced a range of transitions.

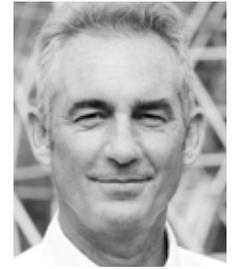
Any interventions to encourage sustainable living should take into account the multiplicity and nature of household transitions and the significance of family relationships and concerns in informing what people do.



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During the final phase of interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their understanding of what constitutes a sustainable lifestyle and whether environmental considerations informed any element of their everyday practices. These understandings were varied and not necessarily perceived as being related to environmental sustainability, encompassing ideas such as sustaining financial and family security or health and wellbeing. Even those who expressed environmental values often construed environmentally sustainable lifestyles as an unattainable ideal at odds with the 'reality' of everyday life.

Potential points at which sustainable lifestyles might be introduced and encouraged include those where people already seek information or support, such as parental support groups, and their own trusted social networks and hubs.



The SLRG portfolio included a small amount of seed funding to scope the potential for a 'flagship' project on environmental attitudes and values amongst young people. The project drew inspiration from the long running Granada TV programme, *Seven Up*, tracking the lives of a cohort of children born in 1957, at seven year intervals. The intention of our project was to develop a similar study tracking changes in the environmental attitudes, values and behaviours of young people in a changing world. At the outset it was recognised that an undertaking of this kind lay well beyond the resources of the current funding, but that its value in tracking environmental values over time could be enormous and have a longevity well beyond the life of SLRG. Consequently, we allocated a limited amount of resources to scope the potential for such a project.

From the outset, two slightly different visions for the project emerged. The academic aim was to try and establish a long-term sequential cohort study, using mixed social research methods to develop the basis for an understanding of the behaviours, values and attitudes of young people towards the environment. Because of the inspiration from the Granada documentary, however, there was also the idea that we might develop something creative, which could engage a wider audience in the issues, much as *Seven Up* had done years earlier.

Following an initial scoping phase, we therefore pursued two parallel (but linked) streams of work. The first was to develop, in collaboration with the UNEP DTIE Sustainable Consumption Unit, the outline for a longitudinal cohort study entitled: *Children and Youth in Cities - a Lifestyle Evaluation Study (CYCLES for Sustainability)*. The second was to work closely with an award-winning documentary film maker, Amanda Blue, to develop the pitch for a long form documentary.

CYCLES builds on UNEP's groundbreaking *Global Survey on Sustainable Lifestyles*, published in 2011, which explored the views of 8,000 18-34 year olds in 16 nations across the world. In December 2012 an international advisory meeting of potential international research partners jointly hosted by SLRG and UNEP in Paris agreed to pursue a longitudinal cohort study of the sustainability of the lifestyles of 12-24 year olds growing up in 21 global cities. An SLRG team based at the University of Canterbury was contracted to prepare a literature review and coauthor a chapter in the *ISSC State of the World 2013* report setting out the case for a global longitudinal mixed method study of sustainable youth consumption. In December 2013, SLRG and UNEP cohosted an international workshop to discuss research methods and research capacity building needs with 18 prospective international collaborators.



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Funding was secured from UNEP, for SLRG and partners at University of Canterbury to prepare a phased, global mixed method cohort study of urban youth consumption with potential for replication over 20 years.

In parallel with the UNEP collaboration, the SLRG team has also worked closely over three years with the UK-based, award winning documentary film-maker Amanda Blue to plan a long form documentary on children and the environment. Following the December 2013 meeting in UNEP, it was decided to develop this documentary in association with the CYCLES project, thus bringing the two strands of the project back together. This is an exciting and important way to support a new, global public conversation about how cities can sustainably support the capabilities and aspirations of new generations, within the finite resources of the planet.



The aim of the Foundations project was to synthesise findings from across the SLRG portfolio and begin to establish an understanding of the underlying foundations for sustainable living. A series of workshops, working papers and discussions held over three years provided the basis for this synthesis. Today's workshop continues that process.

The overarching aim of SLRG has been to seek a better understanding of the dynamics of human behaviours and practices and to explore how these relate to notions of sustainability. It has been concerned with developing explanations of present behaviours and practices; and understanding how these are socially constituted and how they can change. A robust exploration of these questions requires us to address social psychological variables: values, goals, attitudes, motivations, cognitive functions; and also to explore structural factors: institutions, infrastructures, systems of provision. It also demands an understanding of the relationship between these two things.

The portfolio of projects within SLRG has each addressed some aspect of this complex mix of factors. Some have explored the nature of change processes, seeking to find opportunities for policymakers to intervene creatively in transition. Others have explored the role of community and of civil society in effecting change. We have also examined some of the economic aspects of households' and citizens' responses to change.

Our findings support the possibility that moments of transition provide tentative opportunities for policy to intervene in support of sustainability. But these windows

of opportunity are narrow. Change itself is often a complex process of evolution, rather than a decisive moment; and people's own priorities in transition often obscure the possibilities for intervention. Policies that support people in transition and offer multiple benefits are more likely to be successful than simplistic one-off interventions. Similar conclusions can be drawn about the potential for communities to engage in change. Policy support for community-based change is vital. But the processes of community based change – and the interventions of civil society in support of change – are again complex. The strength and resilience of community is an end in itself. Directive instrumental change can derail these benefits. Simplistic policy prescriptions can undermine or ignore the potential for civil society to support and incubate change.

An understanding of the institutional and structural context of people's lives is vital if the transition to sustainable living is to become a reality. Actions in one place can generate either resistance or spill-over in others. The money households save from investing in energy efficiency can be spent on energy-consuming goods and services – or it can be invested in renewable energy funds. The financial context of savings and investment emerges as a key element in the transition to sustainable lifestyles, highlighting the critical influence of the wider economy on people's lives and aspirations. Policy initiatives that ignore this context will gain little traction.

Ultimately, the goal of sustainable living requires a robust sense of social context, a sophisticated approach to governance and a clear understanding of change processes.



There is growing interest among policy communities in evaluation of policies and in the relationship between research-based evidence and the process of policy development. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has undertaken a major review of investment in evidence, and has begun to develop an ‘open’ approach to policymaking drawing on networks of stakeholders. Across Whitehall, there are initiatives to examine and draw on ‘what works’ in design and delivery of ‘evidence-based policy’.

Against this backdrop, this SLRG project has explored issues concerning the relationship between research and policy development. What kinds of dialogue and interaction between research and policy communities can promote better use of evidence in policymaking? And specifically, what are the challenges and possibilities concerning the relationship between researchers and policymakers in the field of sustainable living and behaviour change? How do policy-makers make use of research evidence? How can researchers make their evidence topical and accessible to policymakers?

To explore these themes in detail we have used a methodology based on in-depth interviews with a purposively selected sample of expert informants and carried out related case studies. Interview questions and themes have been based on an initial scoping review of literature on issues concerning research-policy relationships and the impact of evidence on policy development.

The main elements of the project have been as follows. First, interviews with a sample of ‘boundary-spanning’ expert informants with experience of working in and across policy and research communities in relation to sustainable development and environmental policy, with emphasis on pro-environmental behaviours and consumption. Respondents’ experience has included work in Whitehall, devolved administrations, public agencies, think-tanks, universities and consultancy. Second, we have conducted two case studies based on interviews with research and policy staff within Defra and the Scottish Government. These have attempted to explore and map the field of influence of evidence bases on pro-environmental behaviours.

The findings reinforce the message from the literature on research-policy interactions that there are no ‘golden threads’ from evidence to readily identifiable policy impacts within a clear cycle of policy development. Rather, it makes sense to focus on fields of influence for research, and to recognise the importance of multiple contexts and uses for evidence. These factors need to be reflected in new approaches to research-policy dialogue and relationships, which are needed in order to take account of the changing political and policy landscape in UK, and of diversity in approaches to sustainable lifestyle change.

Respondents also called for a re-imagining of research-policy relationships, and raised numerous areas of tension relating to the wider political and policy background. These included concern about Whitehall’s capacity for synthesis and effective use of established bodies of evidence; about the potential mismatch between new approaches to evidence-based policy and the nature of challenges of unsustainable development and behaviour change; and about the problems for researchers of understanding policy development processes.

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# Notes



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