POLICY BRIEF
Learning to be low-carbon: lessons from two community projects
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Summary

The potential of community organisations to effect change in their localities has been recognised in Scotland through the availability of public funding for projects involving carbon reductions. This study included an overview of the Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) and a deeper 11 months participative engagement with case study projects. Summary results of the main two case studies reported in this policy brief include 1) differentiation between 'community', 'community organisation' and the 'community project' funded by the CCF; 2) potential for community initiatives to focus on internal group development or outreach, with both foci being beneficial; 3) diversity in community organisations' values and project aims that appears to be linked to different priorities resulting from inequalities, different notions of 'community' and a lack of political avenues for long-term community engagement. Community projects funded by the CCF have achieved pro-environmental and social benefits beyond carbon reductions, at local and larger scales. CCF-funded community projects act as valuable liminal spaces (spatial and temporal) in which groups and individuals can explore more sustainable living options. However, the magnitude of CCF-funded project impacts was constrained by insufficient societal and infrastructural changes. A political focus on environmental justice, intensified action to tackle climate change at all levels and involving community organisations more in democratic processes and in the design of research concerning them were recommended.

Introduction and background

Climate change poses a real threat to people and planet (IPCC 2013). International agreements have encouraged national efforts to reduce carbon emissions and Scotland has developed the most ambitious policy framework yet, with a statutory target to reduce carbon emissions by 80% (Scottish Government 2009). These targets require coordinated government or sector based actions, changes in behaviour of individuals (supported by affordable low-carbon infrastructures), and finally collective, creative and constructive community responses at a local and regional level.

The Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) is an initiative by the Scottish Government, allocating funding to community groups in competitive funding rounds for projects that reduce carbon emissions while being community-led, in the sense that they "draw their membership from, and focus their activities on, a clearly defined geographical area [or] communities of interest where they can be defined in terms of geography" (Keep Scotland Beautiful 2016). The CCF has distributed over £61 million of funding to 696 projects in 512 communities across Scotland to date, since its launch in 2008 (Scottish Government 2016). While the reduction of carbon emissions was found to occur within the projects, a qualitative evaluation of the CCF has demonstrated that "much of the value of community projects lies in their ability to enthuse people about sustainable lifestyles more widely,

and to deliver on other aspects of sustainability, such as well-being and community cohesion." (Brook Lyndhurst and Ecometrica 2011:3).

This policy brief reports on key findings and policy implications from PhD research at the University of St Andrews funded by the ESRC and the Scottish Government to better understand the nature and consequences of community projects. The research explored in particular the community organisations' leadership styles and organisational structures, ways in which learning about sustainability practices and climate change was facilitated among project participants, how 'community' was defined within the projects, and the role community projects play in wider Scottish society.

Methods

In depth case studies of two community projects were conducted with Playbusters' 'Grow Green with Glasgow's East End', and Sustaining Dunbar's 'Connecting Dunbar' in East Lothian. Participatory fieldwork over 11 months with 51 semi-structured interviews enabled analysis of the community organisations' structures and leadership, the priorities and values of their sustainability education, and the roles of community organisations in the light of climate change legislation and inequalities within Scottish society.
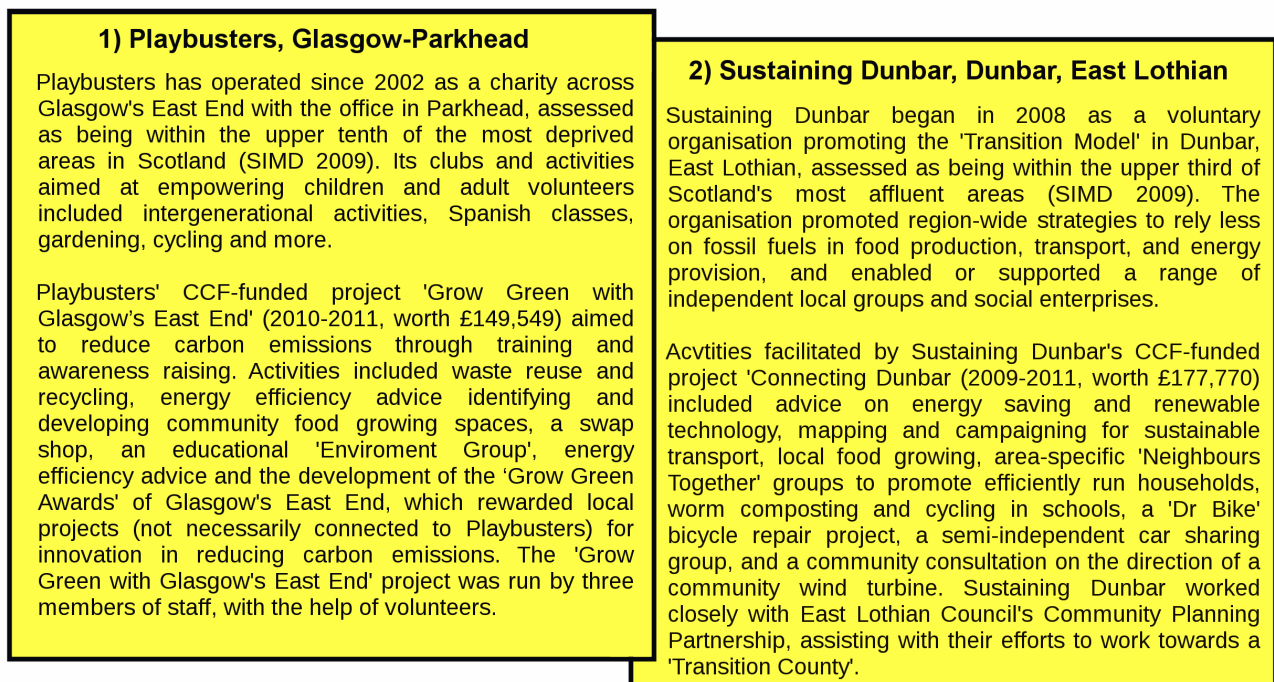
1) Playbusters, Glasgow-Parkhead

Playbusters has operated since 2002 as a charity across Glasgow's East End with the office in Parkhead, assessed as being within the upper tenth of the most deprived areas in Scotland (SIMD 2009). Its clubs and activities aimed at empowering children and adult volunteers included intergenerational activities, Spanish classes, gardening, cycling and more.

Playbusters' CCF-funded project 'Grow Green with Glasgow's East End' (2010-2011, worth £149,549) aimed to reduce carbon emissions through training and awareness raising. Activities included waste reuse and recycling, energy efficiency advice identifying and developing community food growing spaces, a swap shop, an educational 'Enviroment Group', energy efficiency advice and the development of the 'Grow Green Awards' of Glasgow's East End, which rewarded local projects (not necessarily connected to Playbusters) for innovation in reducing carbon emissions. The 'Grow Green with Glasgow's East End' project was run by three members of staff, with the help of volunteers.

2) Sustaining Dunbar, Dunbar, East Lothian

Sustaining Dunbar began in 2008 as a voluntary organisation promoting the 'Transition Model' in Dunbar, East Lothian, assessed as being within the upper third of Scotland's most affluent areas (SIMD 2009). The organisation promoted region-wide strategies to rely less on fossil fuels in food production, transport, and energy provision, and enabled or supported a range of independent local groups and social enterprises.

Acvtities facilitated by Sustaining Dunbar's CCF-funded project 'Connecting Dunbar (2009-2011, worth £177,770) included advice on energy saving and renewable technology, mapping and campaigning for sustainable transport, local food growing, area-specific 'Neighbours Together' groups to promote efficiently run households, worm composting and cycling in schools, a 'Dr Bike' bicycle repair project, a semi-independent car sharing group, and a community consultation on the direction of a community wind turbine. Sustaining Dunbar worked closely with East Lothian Council's Community Planning Partnership, assisting with their efforts to work towards a 'Transition County'.

Figure 1: characteristics of the two main case studies researched

Key findings: the organisation of community projects

1) 'Community' is a complex notion

'Communities′ tended to be defined by 'community organisations' that grew out of and responded to perceived local needs in their respective places. Whilst Playbusters initially addressed primarily the lack of play spaces for children in the local area, Sustaining Dunbar emerged as an

organisation aiming to facilitate the 'future-proofing' of its surrounding region, away from fossil fuels. In turn, community organisations comprised webs of interlinked projects that engaged overlapping circles of participants within and outside of the 'community'. Projects funded by the CCF only shaped a particular period in each organisation's longer life span - particularly in the case of Playbusters, which has existed as a charity with a focus on play spaces since 2002.

2) 'Outreach' versus 'group focus' in community

The two case studies differed along Heiskanen et al.'s (2010) distinction between community organisations that predominantly aim to reach out to the wider community, and more group-oriented community organisations that focus on engaging fewer people intensively, focusing on personal development and interpersonal bonding.

Organisation name and main characteristics	'Outreach' vs. 'Group' focus[1]
Playbusters • charity with voluntary Board of Directors • project co-ordinator • full-time, part-time or sessional staff members • volunteers	**Predominant group focus** The organisation placed an explicit emphasis on the personal development and social bonding of volunteers during project activities. However, activities such as the 'Grow Green Awards' point towards ambitions to foster environmental activities by individuals and local groups beyond Playbusters.
Sustaining Dunbar: • charity with voluntary Board of Directors, in the process of becoming a Community Interest Company • two project co-ordinators (job share) • part-time or sessional staff members	**Predominant outreach focus** The organisation placed the strongest emphasis on strategic planning for the local region, on organising local events and on offering local services. While these events and services aimed to engage people locally, there was less emphasis on defining 'Sustaining Dunbar' as a group or community in itself, beyond the professional relationships of employees.

3) Celebrating diversity - no 'one size fits all'

The CCF-funded projects differed in their values, priorities, remits, aims and objectives. The variations in content and target groups between CCF-funded projects reflect the diversity of communities that have emerged within particular places and demographics, in line with the CCF's conceptualisation of community as locality (Taylor Aiken 2014).

Key findings: what do CCF projects achieve?

1) Impacts beyond carbon

In each community organisation, social and environmental impacts were generated beyond the reduction of carbon emissions, as elaborated on in the following sections.

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[1]   The "outreach" vs. "group" characterisation represents a momentary glimpse of the case studies during fieldwork, and therefore cannot be seen as describing the community organisations in absolute terms.

2) Temporal and scaled focus on individuals, groups and regions

The projects and organisations employed diverse scaling approaches, differentially focusing on supporting the capacity of individuals, groups or the region. Both small and larger scale approaches had merit, with each dependent on the characteristics of the community context and community organisation history and goals. There was also a temporal scaling, with some emphases on immediate changes and others on longer term goals. Particularly in more deprived communities, a focus on personal development and providing opportunities to community members may take precedence to global or even regional issues. The community organisation in a more deprived area prioritised the local community's more immediate needs.

Aiming for regional changes:	Aiming for personal changes:
Sustaining Dunbar's focus was on regional transition processes for increased resilience through grassroots community planning, such as producing maps and documents containing visions for the future. Sustaining Dunbar saw its function in preparing people in and around Dunbar for the challenges ahead (interview: John), thereby implicitly adopting a leadership role within the local community, supporting or linking with other local community groups. The advantage of this approach was that the organisation essentially functioned as a catalyst and bridge between community initiatives and the local authority. However, East Lothian's Community Planning Partnership (CPP) operated county-wide and Sustaining Dunbar operated mainly within Ward 7. There was a lack of official democratic mechanisms for local community organisations to engage with the local authority or CPP.	Playbusters' focus was on personal transitions of its volunteers - from insecure to more confident, from isolated to participating in a group and learning new, sustainability-related skills such as gardening, cycling or recycling. Playbusters offered group activities, access to training courses, and created social spaces for local residents and those further afield to engage in pro-environmental activities. There were not many suitable play spaces for children in the area, nor places for adults to gather which were not pubs (Source: multiple interviews). Therefore, the creation of new spaces and activities increased the options of places to go to for local residents. Playbusters' project activities tackled the symptoms of multiple deprivation, enhancing local assets, and thereby promoted immediate improvements in the local quality of life. Within the organisation, volunteers were not only encouraged to learn new skills, but achievements of volunteers were celebrated (interview: Heather) through events, awards and personal encouragement.

3) 'Liminal spaces' within wider societal structures

Community projects can play a liminal role: they are well placed to operate on a threshold, combining elements of climate change mitigation and adaptation through meaning-making processes (Russell 2013:2) at a local level. The case study community organisations exemplify different aspects of liminality: the projects may be indicative of wider social transitions towards sustainability, or they may remain marginal if wider societal norms and structures cannot support greater uptake of these practices and creation of these types of spaces. Only where wider social structures are enabling the establishment of new sustainability practices beyond community projects, for example through low-carbon infrastructures and systems which enable low-carbon lifestyles, can liminal community projects for sustainability be successfully integrated into wider society (as illustrated in figure 2).
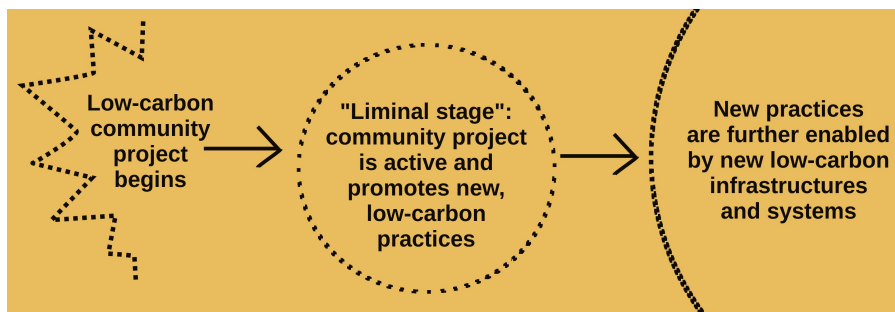
Figure 2: The three stages of beginning, liminality and integration

Policy and Practice Recommendations

Following on from the findings, we recommend a number of priority areas for policy makers in order to support community organisations' long-term aspirations in response to local needs, and help to integrate and amplify the outcomes of CCF-funding in Scottish communities.

1) Environmental justice

Funding for climate change initiatives at a community level needs to take into account issues around environmental justice, or "fair distribution, recognition, capabilities, and functioning - for communities as well as individuals" (Schlosberg 2007:3). In particular, efforts to support and enable access to funding by community organisations from deprived areas are required, and the long term nature of this effort needs to be recognised. Tackling inequality is also likely to influence the success of pro-environmental legislation (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010).

2) Wider societal structures

The barriers community projects face in implementing pro-environmental changes in their localities lie in the wider high-carbon society in which they are embedded. As indicated above, the continued and intensified pursuit of the targets in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act (Scottish Government 2009) and wider sustainability leadership will be required to enable community projects to become mainstream rather than marginal.

3) Community participation in democratic processes

To include community organisations in local decision making processes, issues around legitimacy of and transparency around community groups need to be clarified - in particular in relation to community councils. Evaluating roles of and relationships between community councils on the one hand, and community organisations that have formed around pro-environmental and other practices on the other hand, could help to strengthen the accountability and functions of both types of organisation. While especially outreach-focused community organisations contribute to suggesting strategies for sustainability regionally, the case of Sustaining Dunbar showed that there are currently no consistent avenues for community organisations to get their voices heard at a community planning level.

4) Community-led participatory research projects

The knowledge generation within community organisations could be better captured if new research projects concerning community organisations would involve participatory methods in the research designs. Participatory approaches can prioritise research topics which community groups identify as valuable to them, making research outcomes more robust and tailored to

specific needs in local areas, which can in turn help policy makers identify areas of priority in Scottish communities.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the CCF initiative offers an opportunity for community organisations across Scotland to explore pathways to sustainability. Whilst carbon emission reductions certainly emerge from these projects, thus contributing to Scotland's world leading ambitions to address climate change, CCF funding facilitates additional benefits that are at least as important. Learning is facilitated across individuals, groups and regions, building capacity that needs to be accommodated better within democratic and planning processes. CCF-funded community projects are essentially educational in nature, which highlights the experimental nature of collective efforts to move towards more sustainable practices. CCF-funded projects create spaces in which community members can explore sustainable ways of living, offering lessons not only for those communities but for wider society. The challenge is to support the long term nature of these explorations, recognising the diverse nature, needs and goals of community organisations in different contexts.

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