Becoming a (green) identity entrepreneur: Learning to negotiate situated identities to nurture community environmental practice

Alex Franklin
Coventry University, UK

Ria Dunkley
Cardiff University, UK; University of Glasgow, UK

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between 'green' identity and community environmental practice. It focuses on the ways in which professional community development facilitators and lead members of community groups attempt to actively shape how environmental projects are locally received. Drawing principally on identity, social sustainability and social practice theory scholarship, it reviews the often very personal and place-specific ways in which appeals to green identity are variously understood and applied, or are actively avoided, by community group leaders. Individuals who have become skilful in negotiating and influencing the presentation of environmental projects to the local community are understood here as (green) identity entrepreneurs. Arguably, it is the situated entrepreneurial skilfulness of lead individuals in negotiating the multiple and evolving (green) identities circulating through any one project, which plays a significant part in determining its subsequent impact and longevity. In understanding the contribution of (green) identity entrepreneurship, however, its relational association with everyday practices, routines and meanings of community and place is brought to the fore. The paper also considers how divergent external interpretations of what constitutes legitimate environmental practice at a local level further shape project identity. The discussion is informed by evidence drawn from a qualitative study of 17 community groups and 7 professional environmental support officers participating in a Welsh Government led programme aimed at facilitating 'community action on climate change'.

Corresponding author:
Alex Franklin, Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, Coventry University, Coventry CV1 5FB, UK.
Email: alex.franklin@coventry.ac.uk

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a notable growth in attention towards identity as a potentially important factor contributing to individual engagement with sustainable lifestyles, practices and institutions (see for example, Barrata and Castro, 2013; Connolly and Prothero, 2008; Whitmarsh and O'Neill, 2010). The willing adoption of a 'green' identity by individuals through their take-up of environmental practice is thought to be fuelled primarily by a desire to improve one's social standing (Griskevicius et al., 2010), or by a need to return a sense of morality to one's everyday life (Shepherd, 2002). At the same time, however, the idea of green identity being a motivator for engagement with environmental practice has also been subjected to critique (see, for example, Anderson, 2012; Delaure, 2011; Scott, 2009; Soron, 2010). We begin here by drawing on these two opposing perspectives to explore further the negotiation of green identity in the context of community environmental practice. In so doing, we show why the issue of identity merits further attention, as well as what can be gained by situating such a focus within a broader conceptual understanding of practice, community and place.

Contrary to the burgeoning enthusiasm shown by government and also some academics surrounding the promotion of green identity (for example, Whitmarsh and O'Neil, 2010), we take as our starting point the idea that at a local level appeals to green identity can have a negative impact on wider community engagement with environmental projects. However, in extending these discussions further, we also show how a stereotypical green identity label is regularly attributed to community-led environmental practice by a range of onlookers. Negotiation of a green identity consequently requires considerable sensitivity and on-going reflection on the part of lead actors. We understand this process of negotiation here as the ability of project leaders to become knowledgeable practitioners of (green) identity entrepreneurship (Besson, 1990; Haslam and Reicher, 2007; Reicher et al., 2005; Reicher and Hopkins, 1996). Arguably, it is the situated entrepreneurial skilfulness of lead individuals in negotiating the multiple and evolving identities circulating within and through environmental projects, which plays a significant part in co-determining their subsequent impact and longevity.

Green identity is conceived of here as neither fixed nor abstract, but rather as inherently situated and in-the-becoming (Postmes et al., 2005; Reicher, 2004). A situated approach calls for a relational understanding of identity, community, practice and place; an approach that accounts for the dynamism of each respective element. It acknowledges the multiplicity of people's identities, interests and attachments to place, as well as local constraints, shared practices, temporal pressures and also the historical and cultural milieus of place (Longhurst, 2013). Such an approach, arguably, enhances our understanding of why community groups may become involved in facilitating or promoting environmental practice while actively rejecting the attachment of a 'green' label, either personally or collectively. Conversely, it also helps to explain why some community groups may consciously promote or embrace a green identity, despite an absence of what some external onlookers might actually classify as a 'legitimate' form of environmental practice being present.

In evidencing these assertions, we draw upon results from a review of a Welsh Government programme targeting 'community action on climate change' across Wales (2010–2013). Of particular interest in the context of this study is how lead members of community groups, along with the professional community development officers employed through this programme, became increasingly proactive in recognising and attempting to negotiate the presence (or absence) of a green identity. In the case of more experienced practitioners especially, we illustrate how the degree to which a project was actively profiled as being 'green' varied, as dependent upon the audience in question (local or external),

or task in hand. Analysis of the research findings contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the social factors shaping local levels of variability in engagement with community-led environmental projects, but also of what constitutes (green) environmental practice from a community viewpoint. To draw on the work of Reicher et al. (2005), it allows us to appreciate how, through their facilitation of community-led environmental practice, lead individuals act 'not as mere ciphers, but rather as *entrepreneurs* of [green] identity' (p. 556, original emphasis). At the same time, by connecting this study with selected strands of recent work from the vast body of scholarship on social practice theory, it supports an approach which takes the practices associated with community environmental projects as the primary unit of analysis. Notably, however, in accordance with the project-based nature of these initiatives, the intentionality of lead individuals is also acknowledged. In this context, they are understood as, upon occasion at least, more than mere 'carriers' (Reckwitz, 2002) of practice. As Watson and Shove (2008: 81) acknowledge: '[w]hile individuals might well figure as the "carriers" of practices (Reckwitz, 2002), projects have a rather different status. For one thing they are more obviously "made" by human actors...' Such an approach enables a more nuanced consideration of the ways in which (green) identity entrepreneurship is relationally enacted by local project leaders. This includes the emergent assimilation of community environmental action within pre-existing everyday practices, but also, upon occasion, opportunistically attuning community projects to the varying policy priorities of government.

Green identity and pro-environmental action

Stereotypical caricatures of environmentalists provide an entertaining stream of material for the media industry that reaps the readership benefits of selectively portraying these ecologically driven individuals as highly eccentric (see, for example, Carter, 2013; Green, 2009). Given the visibility of these green subjectivities, it is hardly surprising that there has been an increasing focus on identity as a predictor of pro-environmental behaviours, especially within environmental psychology literature (Barrata and Castro, 2013; Kaklamanou, et al., 2013; Miller and Bentley, 2012; Poortinga et al., 2013; Uzzell et al., 2002; Van der Werff and Keizer, 2013a, 2013b; Whitmarsh and O'Neill, 2010); but also within the sustainable consumption field (Connolly and Prothero, 2008; Farbotko and Head, 2013; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Soron, 2010). Also of relevance here is the close alignment between ideas of identity as being a predictor of pro-environmental behaviour, and the current dominance of 'behaviour change' and 'nudge' problem framings for informing policy approaches to sustainable consumption (Shove, 2010).

   Within the environmental psychology literature, people with a strong environmental self-identity are thought to be intrinsically motivated by a moral obligation to adopt 'environmentally friendly actions' (Van der Werff and Keizer, 2013a: 1258). Such individuals reportedly feel that acting in this way is the 'right thing to do', while not doing so may lead to feelings of guilt. Resultantly, Van der Werff and Keizer (2013a) conclude that environmental self-identity may be a cost-effective way of promoting pro-environmental actions, because 'people with a strong environmental self-identity are likely to act in an environmentally friendly manner without an external incentive to do so' (p. 1263). Rather than providing external rewards, they suggest that government policies should attempt to 'strengthen ones moral considerations to act environmentally' (p. 1264). Adopting a similar perspective, Whitmarsh and O'Neill (2010: 313) argue that because identity is such a powerful predictor of who is likely to adopt 'pro-environmental behaviours' it should be considered in policy decision-making for building sustainable

societies. Identity, they state, helps us to establish consistency in our 'attitudes and actions and continuity across experiences', as well as being an 'external communicator' which effects how others perceive us and thereby effects our alignment and differentiation from social groups (Whitmarsh and O'Neill, 2010: 307). Accordingly, these authors propose that targeting people's self and social identities may be a means by which to change their behaviour. They speculate that this could be effectively achieved through encouraging the viewpoint that being 'green' is more culturally valuable than being, for example, well-travelled, thereby 'increasing the salience of a green identity' (p. 307).

Sociological studies involving staunchly 'sustainable' individuals similarly emphasise the inner morality and status motives that play their part in driving 'green' practice (Shepherd, 2002). Some sustainability 'leaders', we are told, even go as far as to regard sustainability as 'their religion', while many also feel that communicating their 'greenness' allows them to differentiate themselves from societal norms, but also to motivate others and inspire change, 'leading by example' within their communities (Miller and Bentley, 2012: 142). Equally as prominent within sociological studies, however, is a parallel and growing acknowledgement that a green social identity can at times prove highly problematic (DeLaure, 2011; Farbotko and Head, 2013; Soron, 2010). It is these more critical interpretations that appear as more instructive in supporting a review of community-led approaches to the promotion and negotiation of local environmental projects.

Attempts by individuals to construct a green identity through their consumption choices and everyday practices are reported as being regarded with contempt by wider publics (Farbotko and Head, 2013). For example, high profile so-called 'green like me' endeavours, such as that initiated by 'No Impact Man' (NIM) who attempted (together with his family) to live carbon-neutrally for a year, can be poorly perceived, specifically because of their overly demonstrative nature (DeLaure, 2011). The distaste that such environmentalists face is, arguably, resultant in part, of a perception of their 'elitist moralism' which 'casts ordinary people as mindless hedonists or passive dupes' (Soron, 2010: 175). Subsequently, it is observable that the moralising efforts of sustainability 'leaders', like those in Miller and Bentley's (2012) study, can backfire.

Not only is the promotion of green identity complicated by the fact that individuals hold pre-existing complex and multiple values (Kahan, 2010), it is also further impeded by the widely acknowledged gap between values and action (Blake, 1999). More fundamentally still, for proponents of practice theory a focus on values (and consequently, individual behaviour and choice) alone, is both erroneous and irreconcilable with the scale of the societal challenge faced (Shove, 2010). Rather, from a Practice Theory perspective, values (and behaviours) are best understood as constituting merely the 'tip of the iceberg' (Spurling et al., 2013:8). It is findings like these that have led some authors to declare that environmentalism is currently in trouble (Anderson, 2010; Porritt, 2005). Seemingly, however, an empirically based review of community-led approaches to environmental practice may suggest otherwise. At the very least, it highlights the opportunities that exist for reconnecting environmental initiatives to place, to community and to the practices which constitute everyday life, but also how this is, in part at least, reliant on situated negotiations of 'green' identity.

An interpretivist understanding of identity acknowledges that because individuals are formed of hybrid selves (Chatterton, 2006), identities are neither singular, uniform nor fixed, but rather are 'incomplete and open to continual (re)construction' (Wynne, 1992: 282). Accordingly, the presence (or absence) of a 'green' social identity is but one aspect of a person's identity, existing alongside, for example, being a mother or an employee (Connolly and Prothero, 2008). The self is thus best thought of as not 'singular, pure and

coherent, but rather as multiple, conflicting and often contradictory' (Anderson, 2010: 983). Such an understanding can be usefully expanded upon here to inform a review of the amalgam of identit(ies) circulating within and through community environmental projects. This requires a sensitivity towards the relationship between practices (Maller, 2015; Maller and Stengers, 2013; Shove et al., 2012), but also the ways in which particular performances of practices can come to shape the identity of participating individuals. The concept of (green) identity entrepreneurship (Besson, 1990; Haslam and Reicher, 2007; Reicher et al., 2005; Reicher and Hopkins, 1996) is drawn upon here to further support this move.

Developing on earlier work (Besson, 1990; Reicher and Hopkins, 1996), Haslam and Reicher (2007) put forward the concept of identity entrepreneurship as a framework for unpacking the relationship between social identity, processes of leadership and collective action. Paying particular attention to how situations evolve over time, they argue that 'to be influential and effective, leaders need to represent and define social identity in context', and in order to do this they need to be 'active entrepreneurs of social identity' (p. 126). Understanding community group leaders here as those who take active responsibility for introducing and facilitating the delivery of new community projects, we explore evidence of identity entrepreneurship within the context of a Welsh Government initiative targeting 'community action on climate change'. We consider in particular, the ways in which individuals learn to become skilful in practicing (green) identity entrepreneurship as a means of securing and sustaining local engagement with community-led environmental projects. The lens of identity entrepreneurship allows us to bring to the fore the wide range of identities and existing constraints that have to be negotiated at any one time during the promotion of a particular form of environmental practice, as well as the need for this negotiation to be situated in place. It also helps us to understand the mediating role of social identification in shaping collective forms of community-led environmental practice and the associated potential for community group leaders to act as creators of social identity at a project level. Bringing these identities to the fore matters, not least because of the complex and multi-layered relationships that exist between communities of interest and communities of place. As Haslam and Reicher (2007: 126) go on to assert, unlike scientific experiments 'leaders on-the-ground typically have the practical task of creating or manipulating identities'; as such, 'how shared social identity is achieved and the extent to which it proves effective remain core empirical questions'. It is towards these empirical questions that this paper seeks to contribute.

'Community action on climate change': Methodology and study context

The empirical data supporting this paper were collected as part of a (Welsh Government commissioned) study of the 'Community Action on Climate Change Pathfinder Programme' (2010–2013, hereafter referred to as the Pathfinder programme). The three guiding objectives of the Pathfinder programme were for Welsh Government to better understand: the socio-environmental impacts of projects led by community-based groups; what makes community groups flourish and how challenges can be overcome; and the external support needs of community groups and projects. The programme was structured around the employment of six full-time 'Pathfinder officers' whose primary remit was to perform a role akin to professional community development facilitators. They were required to work closely with a limited number of case study community environmental projects over a period of 12–18 months. A distinctive feature of the Pathfinder programme, however, was the requirement that Pathfinder officers work to empower individual groups by providing

support rather than leadership. The participating groups retained the on-going right to reject or ignore the advice of their Pathfinder officer at their discretion. Accordingly, Pathfinder officers were advised from the outset that they would not be held responsible for the relative success or failure of any case study project.

In self-selecting individual projects to support, the officers were encouraged to secure the representation of a wide variety of groups involved in some form of environmental practice. Selections were made based on diversity of sectors of practice, a geographical spread of projects across Wales, and the desire to have a mixture of both newly established and pre-existing community groups. The intention was that all selected projects would remain community-led, would outlast the duration of the Pathfinder programme and would become in no way dependent on the resources of the programme for their own existence.

The original academic research study brief set by the Welsh Government programme co-ordinators was to review the learning experiences of the six Pathfinder Officers and 17 Community Groups participating in the Pathfinder programme. The review was commissioned during the final quarter of the programme, to be undertaken in parallel to the official full evaluation of the programme.

In reviewing the learning journeys of participants, the research focused on individual and collective experiences of being involved with the programme. This included the tools used to inform and encourage critical group reflection on their on-the-ground practice and both community group and Pathfinder officer recommendations for ways of better supporting community-led environmental action. Data were collected during the final five months of the Pathfinder programme (September 2012–January 2013, inclusive). Informed by a qualitative research methodology, the principal method was semi-structured, conversational style interviews.

In the case of the community groups, interviews were conducted with representatives from each group, with the selection of interviewees based on the recommendations of associated Pathfinder officers. The officers were asked to nominate individuals who had been centrally involved in the case study project and regularly in contact with the officer during the programme. Individuals from all 17 case study groups subsequently agreed to be interviewed, with the number of representatives per group ranging from one or two (most common) to three individuals (in the case of two groups). All Pathfinder officer interviews and all except one interview with community group leaders were conducted face-to-face, at a location of their choosing (commonly either a local coffee shop or workplace); due to scheduling difficulties the remaining interview was conducted by telephone. As well as interviewing the six officers currently in post, a research interview was also conducted with a member of the original Pathfinder officer team who had since changed employment and was, therefore, no longer involved with the programme. On average interviews with community groups lasted 45–60 minutes, whilst interviews with Pathfinder officers lasted 60–90 minutes. All research interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. In addition to the material arising from the research interviews, analysis of the Pathfinder programme was also informed by data collected from participatory observation at Pathfinder advisory board meetings (three attended during 2012) as well as progress meetings between members of the programme management group (Welsh Government, AECOM and Severn Wye Energy Agency). In reporting the findings, pseudonyms are used throughout. For all direct quotations, the status of the respondent as either a Pathfinder officer or community group member is referenced, together in the case of the latter, with a numerical signifier of the associated community group.

We begin our analysis by describing how lead members of community groups themselves perceive and attempt to influence, relationships between 'green' project identity and local

community engagement. We review the strategies employed by these individuals in their efforts to secure and sustain the engagement of local residents. We illustrate the ways in which, through their own accounts, core members became skilled in knowledgeable practices of (green) identity entrepreneurship as part of their on-going work to situate new environmental projects within their target community. We then shift to look at the potential implications of (green) identity entrepreneurship in relation to securing additional resourcing for individual community initiatives. We also review the experiences of professional community development facilitators (the Pathfinder officers) in interacting with these (green) identity entrepreneurs. We look at how they themselves responded to the challenges of negotiating green identity as part of their own efforts to stimulate increased community engagement with the overarching programme objective of 'community action on climate change'.

Community environmentalism: Negotiating green identities of projects, participants and practices

Whilst community environmental projects are often constituted around collective forms of environmental practice, because of their localised and small scale of operation the identities of core individuals commonly remain prominent throughout. Arguably therefore, these individuals retain the potential, either intentionally or otherwise, to influence the ways in which an associated project comes to be perceived by residents of the wider community. Equally, however, whilst a project or group may come to be collectively associated with a green identity, the actual presence (or absence) of a green self-identity amongst the individual membership of a group will likely remain highly variable (Postmes et al., 2005). Also relevant will be the purveyor of the project and scale at which it is viewed (Reicher, 2004), as well as the actual nature of the 'environmental' practice around which the project is constituted. As a consequence, despite the seemingly fixed nature of a green identity stereotype, in practice factors influencing the relative degree of presence, or absence, of a green identity label will likely display wide variation over time. These factors may include, for example, individual reasons for engagement, other co-existing collective identities circulating within the group, particular situated performances of practices endorsed through the project, the co-ordination of new and existing group practices, the stated ambitions and reported outcomes of the group, or wider social, economic and environmental characteristics of place. Taking up the first of these points, because individual reasons for engagement with community environmental projects are often extremely wide ranging, this leaves open the possibility that a large proportion of participants may not be driven entirely, or even partly, by environmental motivations (Haggerty, 2007; Manzo and Perkins, 2006). As one community group respondent experienced in orchestrating local environmental projects explained in the context of their project:

> Now whether [they] are doing it because they share the same environmental views, or whether they're doing it because it helps them get on with the next-door neighbour, or whether they do it because they always wanted to find out how to grow their own vegetables and they're prepared to have the opportunity to grow it in an allotment or a community orchard, or whatever it happens to be. To a certain extent, I don't think it matters; the means justifies the ends. (Iona, community group 02)

However, alongside the wide-ranging reasons for involvement, also evident in this response, is a common perceived motivational thread of 'community'. In this instance, this includes 'getting on with the next door neighbour', or 'growing produce in an allotment or

community orchard'. In responding to this much more generalist interest in community action, but also demonstrating an awareness of green identity as potentially stimulating active dis-interest, community group respondents cited the need to try and present local environmental projects so as to neither impose restrictions on legitimate reasons for becoming involved, nor underplay their broader contribution to the locality. The challenge, however, lies in how this comes to be translated into practice.

A common approach reported by many of the respondents is to actively downplay any distinct environmental dimension of a project through conscious and continuous attention to discourse. Doing so, including during informal conversations with the wider community, is seen as a means of guarding against a project becoming adversely labelled as singularly 'green' in remit:

> The problem is that once you say the word 'green', people immediately think ... there is a split in the community: 'I won't come to that meeting, it is all that green lot'. So, the big challenge is making it inclusive enough to get everyone on board. (Claire, community group 16)

In further developing the proposition within practice theory that individuals act merely as 'carriers' of practice (Reckwitz, 2002), Shove (2010; see also Shove et al., 2012) sets out the case for why individuals have only 'secondary roles' to play in societal transitions to more sustainable patterns of production and consumption. Such a framing ensures that social practices remain 'centre stage' (Shove, 2010: 1279) as the primary unit of analysis. Notwithstanding this, it is important not to overlook the potential ramifications that the performance of practice can have on its 'carriers'. As is reflected in the above extract, regular performances of certain practices can in turn create social identities which remain with carriers even after a particular practice performance has ended. Of relevance here is the idea that 'practices may be stickier in that they persist for longer, have a stronger grip on their performers, and have greater powers of persistence than previously articulated' (Maller and Stengers, 2013: 251). Evident, for example, in the above extract is the immediate association drawn by onlookers between the practices of a project and the perceived identity of its supporters. As is also reflected, however, it is not necessarily the environmental practice per se which triggers the (anticipated) negative reaction, but instead, a resistance to the 'green lot'. That is, to the green identity of the lead individuals. Where prominent individuals are identified as 'green', encouraging wider community engagement can become particularly challenging. Nevertheless, it is the relational and in-the-becoming nature of identity, which simultaneously presents both opportunities and barriers to overcoming such a challenge (Wynne, 1992).

A popular approach pursued by some community group respondents, albeit with seemingly varying degrees of success, was to attempt to subsume and obscure any personal 'green' environmental aims, within a wider narrative concerning project goals. Through their communications with their target audiences, they often sought to emphasise connections between project aims and wider shared community interests, agendas or concerns with which local residents would more likely commonly identify. Evidence of this can be seen in the case of a student union volunteer group. A lead member of this group recounted becoming skilled in using the more widely accepted agenda of enhancing local neighbourhoods to obscure a retained personal ambition of achieving targeted environmental outcomes:

> So I [...] was re-elected into the newly merged post and the environment wasn't part of the brief ... So the way I managed to swing it was by making a lot of our community projects environment focused. So the recycling project became, well members of the local community hate the students who mess and don't put their bins out on the right day, so we'll do something

to tell students about recycling [. . .] And we did a biodiversity project . . . And again I swung that as a community thing saying students are planting wildflower seeds to brighten up the local community [. . .]it was just about, I wanted, you know, more bees and more bee friendly plants. (Tomos, community group 13)

Similar to a technique observed by Haslam and Riecher (2007) in their own study of identity entrepreneurship, here Tomos is recounting his skilfulness in creating an atmosphere of inclusivity and collectivism. Individual projects are carefully presented as responding to what 'members of the local community' want, not to Tomos' own agenda. A further advantage of such an approach is the opportunity to in turn perpetuate a more inclusive project identity by attracting participants who neither possess a green identity, nor are actively seeking to engage in environmentalist practice; participants who, as Haggerty (2007) refers to elsewhere, can usefully be understood as 'accidental environmentalists' (see also Hitchings et al., 2015). Conversely, in cases where community projects become labelled as of narrow environmental orientation (be it due to such as the dominance of green identity on the part of lead individuals, the particular nature of individual project activities, or the wider networks of practice of which they are part (for example, Transition Towns)), this can also then become self-reinforcing. As another respondent acknowledged, for example:

If you have a committed few that can be really good in terms of taking action, but it is not necessarily good when it comes to finding a way of getting the 'unconverted' involved. (Claire, community group 16)

In the case of the majority of community projects featured in the Pathfinder programme, the freedom with which lead individuals were able to alter the identity of a project by obscuring its primary purpose was seemingly much more constrained. What sets the above student union projects apart is the fact that Tomos was able to subtly re-invent both his own identity and those of his proposed projects on an annual basis with each recurrent student 'freshers' fair. Amongst more traditional community groups, where participant turnover is classically much more staggered and variously determined, the relational shaping of group or individual project identities tends to have a more gradual and elongated history. Accordingly, even at the point of an initial project launch, dominant practice identities are already intimately bound up with the pre-existing social identities of prominent members of the group (Tomaney, 2012). In such settings, where core members may already have been labelled locally as part of the 'green lot' (see above), a much higher degree of skill is seemingly then required if the identity of a new project is to remain open to negotiation. Nevertheless, as Longhurst (2013) reminds us, it is also precisely because of its situatedness, combined with the in-the-becoming nature of identity itself that the on-going potential simultaneously exists for the identity of a community project, or whole group, to continually evolve.

In reflecting further about their focus on issues or concerns 'that are quite common to most people' (Sam, community group 14), respondents also acknowledged that their selection of an appropriate narrative or point of focus would likely vary by place and by individuals involved. As two representatives from a community energy project noted, for example, helping households to reduce their energy costs was deemed the most 'realistic' approach towards securing their acceptance and engagement:

'We weren't just looking at it on some save the planet idea; we're saving here and saving your pocket . . .' (Jon, community group 02); '. . . We were trying to be a bit more realistic'. (Ruth, community group 02)

In another case, the remoteness of the rural location led to the connection between place of residence and energy cost being used as a primary point of emphasis, based around the very survival of the community:

> And the way we have got people to sign up, I think it has been not to do with climate change at all, it's been like do you want to carry on living here? Do you want your kids to be able to live here? Well, you can't. There's just no equation between your income on one end and your fuel bills on the other. [. . .] You either act as a community and do something about it or you, one by one, or family by family, you leave. It's as simple as that. (Sam, community group 14)

In effect, such extracts illustrate respondents' attempts to make meaningful, but also inclusive, connections, drawing on 'affective bonds to place' (Manzo and Perkins, 2006: 347) rather than concern for the environment per se, as a means of inspiring local environmental action. In 'rhetorically propagating' particular place meanings (Devine-Wright, 2013: 174) in this way, they are actively aspiring to foster the emergence of a situated project identity in which attachment to place forms a salient part (Uzzell et al., 2002).

Understanding local framings of community environmentalism: Engaging in (green) identity entrepreneurship

Implicit within many of the community group respondent accounts was their active use of an intimate knowledge of place and community as a foundation for attempting to shape the social identity – green and otherwise – of a project. The question that this in turn raises, however, is what happens where an individual attempts to perform the role of identity entrepreneur based on an understanding or perception of local community interest or need that is not widely shared or accepted by others? It is towards this question we now turn, widening our focus to also consider the working relationship between Pathfinder officers and community group leaders, and the approach of Pathfinder officers themselves. We begin by considering the case of an energy saving project in a sheltered housing complex (for the elderly). Here, despite their relative inexperience, the project initiators recalled how they had immediately recognised the importance of introducing the project to the residents in a manner in-keeping with their existing daily rhythms and social customs (Seamon, 2013). By their own admission, though, they had not initially appreciated the need for equal sensitivity in the accompanying discourse used to introduce the Pathfinder officer and Welsh Government root of the wider Pathfinder programme:

> So I said to him [Pathfinder officer], '[. . .]come to a coffee morning and meet them because if we just try and set up something they're not going to do it . . .'. So he did that, he came over to the coffee morning and he met with them [. . .]. I made the mistake of introducing him as somebody from the government to do energy saving or something . . . And I think I probably put the kibosh on it! [all laugh] . . . I didn't really grasp the nettle that when I introduced, I introduced him in the wrong way. (Sian, community group 04)

The reported consequence of introducing the Pathfinder officer in 'the wrong way' – as an agent of government – was that the residents 'weren't interested' (Sian, community group 04) in being involved. As this community group respondent went on to explain, though, some months later, upon a second attempt, she had been able to turn the situation around. This time, she achieved consistency in both introducing and framing the project in a manner informed by her intimate understanding of the residents' interests and needs, as well as their everyday rhythms and routines of practice. In doing so, she had seemingly become skilful in performing as an identity entrepreneur. That is, she had found a way of fostering collective

action by putting forward a project proposal which would be received as entirely consistent and synergistic to the pre-existing habitual and routinised patterns of social interaction which constituted the norms of shared practice amongst this group (Butler et al., 2016; Reicher, 2004). Specifically, she recounted how having allowed time to pass, she had managed to backtrack, subtly shifting the focus from energy saving to an energy saving '*competition*':

> I said to them . . . 'we're going to set up a competition [. . .] and we're going to have quizzes and food and a launch.' [. . .] And because they have a relationship [with me] of some years I sort of say 'now, you know, come along and . . .', 'yeah, oh all right, Sian (*sic*) we'll come, you know, we'll do this, all right we'll do it'. And if you don't do it on a Tuesday and a Friday doing the coffee morning it ain't going to happen 'cause they won't come back in an afternoon [laughs]. (Sian, community group 04)

Evident in this account is Sian's awareness of the need to capitalise on, conform to and interweave existing social structures, meanings and routines observed by the group – in this instance aligning the collective project activities around the coffee mornings and the residents' 'love of food and competition' – with their social relationship with this lead individual. Also present though is Sian's knowledge of where the boundaries lie. To this end, she further reflected:

> I suppose it's know your people, isn't it [. . .] and I know this group inside out now [. . .] and so I could then grasp how I could get them into a project and how I could get them into perhaps taking a little bit of interest in energy saving . . . (Sian, community group 04)

Through their own research, Evans and Abrahamse (2009) reveal a wide variety of ways in which environmental activism occurs and the 'multiple entry points' (p. 494) for sustainable lifestyles. They conclude that 'it makes little sense to conceive of any individual's lifestyle as an internally coherent "life project" concerned only with the reduction of environmental impact'. It is better understood as a process through which individuals 'have – and move between – *multiple bundles* of social practices such that they have more than one lifestyle and these are not necessarily all conducive to a reduction in environmental impact' (p. 500, emphasis added). In the above case, the structural entry points to what subsequently became a relatively successful project (with average participant energy saving reductions of 15%), thus turned out to be coffee mornings, competition and food. The case demonstrates the importance of not overlooking the potentially substantive contributions that can be made by groups (or projects) with other-than-green identities when it comes to broadening local level engagement with community environmentalism (Hitchings et al., 2015).

In learning to manage and negotiate multiple identities, community groups may also attempt to shape the social identity of a project towards multiple ends simultaneously. That is, such that on one hand as wide a range of local participants can be attracted as possible, whilst on the other, openness to a range of potential sources of support (including funding) is also retained. However, where this results in a widely perceived identity becoming out of line with actual project practice this, in turn, can create challenges for support officers and other external stakeholders. It requires that they too have to become skilful in reading, accommodating and responding to occasions of (green) identity entrepreneurship, but also, to any unintended occurrences of 'greenwash' associated with the lure of securing additional external support. In the case of the Pathfinder programme, a proactive measure included in an attempt to reduce this risk, was the decision from the outset not to give Pathfinder officers individual project fund allocations. The willingness of community groups to participate as full partners had to be secured based on their genuine interest in working collaboratively

with a Pathfinder officer over an extended period; not because it would constitute a direct form of project income. In practice, despite the presence of a seeming mutual commitment to environmental practice, problems continued to surface with a number of participating groups. For some, the difficulty lay in a variance of definitions as to what constituted environmental practice. In part, this appeared to be due to the 'community action on climate change' focus of the Pathfinder programme initially triggering what might be regarded as an 'overly purified subject position' (Anderson, 2010: 981) with respect to what constituted environmentalist (or 'green') practice. One such example was a community group who had originally been approached by a Pathfinder officer on the basis of their group name and associated green social identity as an 'environmental action group'. From working together, however, it became apparent to both sides that two very different conceptions of 'green' practice were in play. For the Pathfinder officer, the interests of the group and their conceptualisation of environmental action did not naturally align with what he understood to be the much stricter carbon cutting agenda of the Pathfinder programme:

> ...I mean they've been focusing in on hanging [flower] baskets and I've been desperately trying to get them to do more than that. And I tried to say to them look you're going down a route which it's not actually very positive from an environmental point of view. ...completely accepted, you do live in a deprived area, this might well make people feel better about where they live. [...] At the end of the day, that's what they cared about more. They might have said they're an environmental group, but they didn't really, I wouldn't want to say to them, you know, you don't care about that 'cause that would be excessively harsh. But that's not their first priority. And sometimes I think they were ticking boxes to be doing stuff on the environmental side because that's what Communities First's [previous funding programme] objective was. (Adam, Pathfinder officer)

The references made by this officer to environmental action not being the group's 'first priority' and to their apparent 'tick box' approach, reflect his personal frustration at their lack of conformity with a standardised, prescribed programme level definition of what constituted community environmental practice. In direct contrast, however, from the community respondent's perspective, their interests and, therefore, their identity also, was understood to be 'more green' than the Pathfinder officer seemingly appreciated. Moreover, the concern this then raised for the group was that their situated 'greenness' was under threat (Wynne, 1992); it was not being acknowledged by the Pathfinder officer due to his being 'besotted' with energy:

> When [the Pathfinder officer] became besotted with concentrating on the energy thing I thought hang on no, that's not my path, my path's more green, I want to see the area clean and want to see a better place for people to live. I want to raise their feelings about it, I want to make them feel 'oh this looks better we need to keep it like this', and perhaps then the youngsters will keep it nice rather than just somewhere to rampage in [...] It still comes within our remit with environment, because if the environment is no good then people do not feel well, they are not going to be well, they are not going to be healthy...(Marina, community group 07)

At the heart of this respondent's situated understanding of their own green identity is their ambition to improve the image and features of their town by greening and enhancing the quality of the local environment. What matters here and motivates this respondent is her particular sense of what constitutes environmental practice. Her account also resonates closely with the conclusion drawn elsewhere by Chappells et al. (2011) regarding individual consumption whereby: 'even if a context is created in which individuals are compelled to examine their own lifestyles there are many varied baselines of "normal"

consumption practice, each of which generates different interpretations of the "right" way to live' (p. 704). This example also points to the inherent naivety of attempts at imposing a set of climate change actions from above.

Whereas, in the case of the above community group, the Pathfinder officer had initially felt compelled to try to encourage the group to undertake an (energy) project more directly aligned with the core aims of the wider programme, he gradually came to realise that this would not serve the interest of either side. To this end, he states:

> I think they care about the area they live and they want it to be a better place to live [...] And that's been tricky for me because it took me, I was trying to juggle what Pathfinder was about, they had given the impression when I first met them that they were up for doing projects that seemed to fit within the climate change action remit but actually I realised along the journey that [...] they're not moving along those lines themselves [...] I thought bloody hell what do I do? I've chosen them as a case study... and they're not really going to be delivering anything to do with what we were originally chosen to do. But fair enough, you know, I just kind of thought I can't fight this anymore. (Adam, Pathfinder officer)

One of the ways of negotiating the tension between community-derived and top-down programme-derived definitions of environmental practice was for the Pathfinder officers themselves to develop their own skills in (green) identity entrepreneurship. This became evident in the ways in which they sought to build relations with core community group members and wider community residents, but also in the ways they subsequently promoted the identity of individual community projects nationally through the programme. Thus, ultimately, in contrast sometimes to their actual experience and levels of acceptance on the ground, all 17 case study projects were formally presented by the Pathfinder officers and officially recorded at a programme level, as corresponding to mainstream policy definitions of community environmental practice. That is, they were presented as conforming to a standardised green project identity. As was also subsequently alluded to by one of the Pathfinder officers, though, until progress can be made within government away from a singular green identity style reporting of community environmental practice, there remains a danger that the co-dependency of the 'bundles' and 'complexes' of practices (Shove et al., 2012: 17), and associated much wider array of community outcomes, will continue to be lost:

> I think you miss the wider impacts that community activity has. So the skill development, the community cohesion kind of, you know, all the big words. But yeah, how groups gel. How it impacts on a sense of community and how if you count the carbon on a cycling project, you might then miss how that cycling project then turned into some of the people were getting together and doing something to save the local post office or the sort of the bigger picture within which the projects sit... We started off by being all about a project when actually a lot of community activity is beyond just one project, people are doing lots of things at once, it all fits together, it's really hard to just pin down one project, but that makes it really hard to then do any kind of base-lining or measuring... (Aron, Pathfinder officer)

Conclusions

Although it has been asserted elsewhere that people may have fallen out of love with environmentalism (Anderson, 2010), a focus on green identity within the context of community environmental projects suggests the need for more optimism. Rather than despondency with environmentalism, analysis of the Pathfinder programme leads us to conclude that what individuals actually reject are overly rigid approaches to and narrow

prescriptions of what constitutes legitimate environmental action. As knowledge about ecological issues has evolved, 'green' movements based on inflexible identities are seemingly being rejected in favour of those based on collective and situated forms of community environmental practice. Accordingly, in this paper, we have argued that attempts to 'increase the salience of green identity' (Whitmarsh and O'Neill, 2010: 307) may prove highly problematic. Failure to recognise the value of local on-the-ground conceptions of environmental practice can estrange those who have neither the agency, nor perhaps more controversially the will, to adopt a green identity (Carrus et al., 2013).

Returning to the earlier question, as originally raised by Haslam and Reicher (2007: 126), of 'how shared social identity is achieved and the extent to which it proves effective' in furthering collective forms of practice, the study of the Pathfinder programme permits a number of tentative conclusions to be offered. Significantly, it does so from a 'real' world case rather than a scientific-experiment based study. Moreover (and in contrast to the approach advocated by some social practice theorists), extended attention has been given here to the intentionality of lead individuals in actively shaping community environmental projects (Watson and Shove, 2008). Accordingly, the manner in which (green) identity entrepreneurship has been approached and conceptualised aligns with and extends the emergent body of work concerned with exploring the 'lived interplay of values and actions' (Hitchings et al., 2015: 372; see also Butler et al., 2016; Young and Middlemiss, 2012). A notable feature of this approach is that it permits study of a context in which the elements and performances of practice and associated shared project identities are perpetually permeable. Where evidence of (green) identity entrepreneurship was found, attempts at creating a shared project identity were approached in a manner which acknowledged and embraced the presence of a heterogeneous amalgam of participant identities (Postmes et al., 2005). It was precisely by avoiding the attempted imposition of a singular prescribed group identity (green or otherwise) that a much more fluid form of shared identity was able to emerge on a project-by-project basis. Through this sensitive assemblage of identities, lead individuals strove (where necessary) to mitigate the association between an individual project identity and any underlying green identity of prominent participants, or composite elements of practice. In this way knowledgeable practitioners of (green) identity entrepreneurship aspired to retain an inclusive, rather than exclusive, understanding of what constitutes community-led environmental practice (Postmes et al., 2005).

As situated forms of practice, local residents commonly engage with community environmental projects where they are perceived to hold synergy with personal framings of community need and place attachment (Devine-Wright, 2013). For government bodies and other stakeholders seeking to better support and promote increased participation in environmental practice, this suggests the need for an approach that simultaneously permits an active downplaying of green project labels. Moreover, the continued shorthand use of a green identity-based approach by government, funding councils, media organisations, and many other external bodies, as a way of seeking out and categorising community projects and groups, is also increasingly problematic for other reasons. As well as sustaining a false understanding of what it is that supports the ongoing presence of collective forms of local level environmental practice, such a framing can seemingly also lead to a potential mismatching of support, an overly narrow approach to recording and monitoring the actual impact of community projects, or risk of obscuring from view the significant and growing contribution of community projects with other-than-green, or rather, non-environmentally distinct, shared identities. Further research is thus required in order to address the knowledge gaps, misconceptions and under-reporting which an externally imposed green identity framing may have produced.

To conclude, lasting change towards more environmentally sustainable performances of practice does require sensitivity towards the on-going mediating role of social identity in shaping societal engagement with environmental action. However, this is not an endorsement for naively trying to change people's existing values to encourage the adoption of a green self-identity. Nor, is it a call for issues of identity – or lead individuals – to be focused upon in isolation from the full range of 'materials, competences and meanings' (Shove et al., 2012: 14) of practice of which they are an integral part. Rather, the complexity of social practices, but also their relative 'stickiness' (Maller and Stengers, 2013) – that is the ways in which particular performances of practices can come to shape the identity of participating individuals – need to be attended to simultaneously.

Finally, further research is also required into cases where community environmental projects are framed around issues and shared practices that already resonate with local residents. When seeking to engage local residents in environmental action it is seemingly more effective to begin by identifying situated aspects of locales and cultures as a focus for action, but also as a pivot point for performing (green) identity entrepreneurship. This requires government (and other programme leading bodies) to support community groups in determining for themselves their own paths towards more sustainable futures. Such change needs to be facilitated by those looking to drive environmental practices and action, as indeed examples within this paper have shown is increasingly the case. To this end, though, these same actors must avoid the construction of a fixed green identity, pursuing instead a more reflexive, situated and negotiable approach to identity sharing. In short they must learn and retain, but also actively develop with others, the skill of practicing (green) identity entrepreneurship.

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