

Practice meets community: the role of community-based organisations in stimulating sustainable practices among participants

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Introduction

Projects run by community-based organisations that target participants' sustainability practices have burgeoned in recent years in the UK. Organisations at national and local levels, from the public, private and voluntary sectors have released funding or initiated projects to address participant sustainability practices at the community level. Witness, for instance, Defra's Environmental Action Fund, the Women's Institute's 90@90 programme, the bottom up Transition Towns movement, and Global Action Plan's Ecoteams programme (Global Action Plan, 2006; National Federation of Women's Institutes, 2008; Transition Towns Network, 2008; UK Government, 2008). These projects have in common a desire to influence member practices, which seems to stem from a set of beliefs about the power of community. For some organisations this relates to an instinct that responsibility for sustainability problems can be taken at a local level (UK Government, 2005; Ecocongregation, 2008; National Federation of Women's Institutes, 2008). In addition there is a sense that community organisations have a closeness to participants which allows them to argue more convincingly for changes in practice (Global Action Plan, 2006). Some of these organisations also argue that local, bottom-up processes are more likely to result in long-term change than government initiatives (Transition Towns Network, 2008).

In this paper I report on theoretical outputs of an extensive empirical project which examined the role of community-based organisations in stimulating sustainability practices

among participants. I designed this project as a response to the relatively limited academic engagement with these types of attempt to promote sustainable consumption (see Middlemiss, 2008a for a review of the existing literature). My empirical work explored case studies of five community-based organisations, with 60 qualitative interviews exploring participants' and practitioners' reactions to each initiative, and their reasons for changing practices. The specific theoretical output I report here is an explanation of how community-based organisations stimulate change in practice. This draws extensively on empirical data, but also speaks to a specific theory of 'behaviour' change: practice theory. In contrast to other theories used to explain the way that people act, practice theory draws extensively on social context to explain the actions of individuals, and indeed understands 'practice' as emerging from the day to day lives of socially embedded individuals. As such it is highly appropriate as a theory to explain change in practice in the context of community-based initiatives, which aim to mobilise groups of people to change practices through collective action. Practice theory has only relatively recently been used in the sustainable consumption area, and marks the engagement of sociology with sustainable consumption issues (see for instance Shove, 2003; Spaargaren, 2003; Southerton *et al.*, 2004a). In this paper I document my use of practice theory to theorise about the topic area in question, developing the theory somewhat in the process.

This paper makes several contributions to knowledge in this area. First, it begins to fill the gap in research on community engagement for sustainability practice, in particular by explaining how community-based organisations stimulate sustainability practices among participants in the kinds of projects described above. In doing so it adds to the scope of practice theory work on sustainable consumption to date. I begin the paper by reviewing the literature on practice theory, including that which relates to sustainable consumption in particular. I then briefly describe my research project on the role of community-based organisations in promoting sustainability practices. I outline my theory of 'sustainability practice change in community' that emerged from that project, and that explains how these organisations promote practice change among their members. I then evidence each concept within the theory with empirical work. Finally, I discuss the implications of my theory for an understanding of the role of community-based organisations in sustainability practice, and for the study of sustainable consumption more generally.

Practice theory

In investigating how community engagement can result in changes to sustainability practices for participants, I turn to the literature on practice theory. Practice theory refers to a group of theories that deal with 'practice' as a focal point of social research, rather than the individual, or structures inhabited by that individual (Schatzki, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002). There is no authoritative version of practice theory (Schatzki, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2005), although there are some high profile and influential proponents, including Giddens and Bourdieu (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990). Here I outline the theory, its use to date in sustainable consumption research, and the relevance of such an explanation of change to the specific context of my research.

Before I go on to discuss practice theory, it is worth noting that the literature on sustainable consumption has a long history of theorising on change in behaviour. There is not space here to discuss the range of models of behaviour change that have been applied in sustainable consumption (see Jackson, 2005 for a review of models of change; and Middlemiss, 2008b for my perspective on this issue). One of the key differentiating factors between models is the prominence of the individual in explanations of change. Models deriving from psychology and economics tend to focus on internal motivations for change (individuals' values and cognitive response to environmental issues), while work originating in sociology tends to focus on structural factors that promote or prevent change (e.g. culture, infrastructure etc.). The former (individualistic approaches) have attracted considerable criticism in recent years (see for instance Spaargaren, 2000; Maniates, 2002; Southerton *et al.*, 2004b). In response, the sociological community working on sustainable consumption issues has engaged with practice theory, an approach which seeks explanation of structural as well as agency influences.

The greatest contrast to other dominant theories of behaviour in the sustainable consumption field is that practice theory does not prioritise individual choice or action (agency) as the main trigger for social change (Warde, 2005). This is evident in Giddens's structuration theory, which posits that the domain of study in the social sciences: "...is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time." (Giddens, 1984, p. 2) The centrality of practice in this approach, results in a focus on the interaction between agency and structure and how that creates practice. This represents a distinct ontology among practice theoreticians, who share a belief that "the social is a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organised around shared

practical understandings" (Schatzki, 2001, p. 3) in contrast to conceptions of the social that privilege individuals, structures or systems.

So in practice theory, practices are created by the interaction between internal and external processes, two aspects that deserve more attention here. Internal processes can be conscious or unconscious, and may thus be more or less cognitive or habitual. Giddens refers to these two polarities as 'discursive consciousness' (involving cognitive and affective processes) and 'practical consciousness' (involving habitual processes) (Giddens, 1984). Giddens further characterises the external influences on practice as consisting of rules and resources, which amount to the 'duality' of structure (*ibid.*). In his understanding rules have two aspects: "Rules relate on the one hand to the constitution of meaning and on the other to the sanctioning of modes of social conduct" (Giddens, 1984, p. 18). According to Sewell's interpretation of Giddens's concept, rules are also 'generalisable procedures' which can be transposed to different circumstances as they arise (Sewell, 1992). As such, they amount to a collective understanding of the way things should be and the way that people should practice. Resources, on the other hand, are "structured properties of social systems, drawn upon and reproduced by knowledgeable agents in the course of interaction", and are inherently associated with power, in that they are a means by which power is exercised (Giddens, 1984, p. 15). Sewell clarifies that resources can be used to maintain or enhance power, and crucially that agents can be empowered by their access to resources (Sewell, 1992).

Various writers have discussed or applied practice theories in consumption or sustainable consumption studies (Shove, 2003; Spaargaren, 2003; Southerton *et al.*, 2004a; Vliet *et al.*, 2005; Warde, 2005). Practice theory based sustainable consumption research until now has tended to focus on the structural determinants of practice, rather than on agency-led change. Structural factors are not seen by these writers to necessarily encourage pro-environmental practice, rather, to make such practice feasible. In other words, the structures of our society constrain and enable people to act in certain ways. As Spaargaren puts it:

When there is a high level - both in quantitative and qualitative respects - of green provisioning, people are more or less brought into a position in which the greening of their corresponding lifestyle segment becomes a feasible option. (Spaargaren, 2003, p. 690)

Southerton *et al* expand on the effect of these material or infrastructural arrangements with Levett's idea of 'choice sets' which are the sets of possibilities available to people as a result

of the social structures in which they live (Levett, 2003 in Southerton *et al.*, 2004b). These authors argue that focusing on the choices of individuals in sustainable consumption is misleading, because the ability to make choices is restricted by the choice sets available to an individual.

Spaargaren has translated a specific strand of practice theory (Giddens's structuration) for use in sustainable consumption research (Spaargaren, 2003). What Spaargaren calls the 'domains of social life', often expressed in terms of the activities that people engage in (for instance shopping, eating, travelling), have been central in the way in which work on sustainable consumption is conceptualised. In Spaargaren's analysis, these domains aggregate to make up a 'lifestyle'. Studies in this area have tended to focus on one domain of practice, analysing the way that practice is affected by agency and structure relations (for instance Shove, 2003; Vliet *et al.*, 2005). They have also emphasised the lack of connections between domains – in that someone with highly sustainable practices in one domain may have unsustainable practices in another (Spaargaren, 2003).

The efforts of community-based organisations to change members' sustainability practices can benefit from the explanatory framework that practice theory offers, although my work does involve a slight reframing of the theory. These initiatives can be conceptualised as a 'social intermediary' (the community-based organisation) reshaping members' opportunities for sustainable consumption (Southerton *et al.*, 2004a). In Giddens's terminology, the community-based organisation does this by offering new resources to its members, and exposing them to revised rules which encourage or enable sustainable practices, and which the members can then choose (through discursive consciousness) to enact. Given their emphasis on collective practice development, I would argue that the initiatives under study here represent one of the 'routes for innovation' based on practice theory that Spaargaren identifies as an important aim of sustainable consumption research (Spaargaren, 2003). The idea that the members of community-based organisations can be encouraged through membership to take on more sustainable practices also fits well into conceptions of practice adoption and development. As Warde explains:

Processes of enrolment into practices will range from introduction to domestic ones during infancy to joining of formal associations for the pursuit of social and recreational activities. (Warde, 2005, p. 145)

Indeed, Warde sees the strength of practice theory in its understanding of “collective development of modes of appropriate conduct in everyday life” (Warde, 2005, p. 146). In effect community sustainability initiatives attempt to develop appropriate sustainability practices through collective action at the community level. As such, in studying such interventions, I focus on understanding a specific process “through which modes of consumption become embedded in conventions of daily practice.” (Southerton *et al.*, 2004b, p. 33).

Note that this paper brings into question several different practices. First, the practice of participation in a project on sustainability led by a community-based organisation. Second, the practice of attempting to reduce impacts on the environment and other people (sustainability practice), as collaboratively defined and promoted by the particular individual and community-based organisation concerned. This second set of practices has implications for a group of other practices, depending again on the particular individual and community-based organisation, which focus around various facets of day-to-day living (e.g. gardening practices, energy use, shopping choices), what Spaargaren would call the domains of practice (Spaargaren, 2003). As such, this paper explores the question of how the practice of involvement in community-based activities on sustainability affects the practices that an individual or community-based organisation associates with sustainability.

So how does the literature contribute to an understanding of the role of community initiatives in promoting sustainability practice? The practice theory literature offers a way of explaining the interaction between community and participant and its effect on their practices. It allows a situated understanding of practice formation, which includes structural elements (rules and resources) as well as internal explanations (practical and discursive consciousness) as explanatory concepts.

Research outline

The empirical study from which the theory in this paper is derived, focused on participant engagement in community sustainability projects aimed (either wholly or partly) at changing their practice. It evaluated five case studies of community-based organisations’ attempts to change their participants’ sustainability practices using the ‘realistic evaluation’ methodology (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). The cases aimed to change a variety of their participants’ practices, described collectively as ‘sustainability practices’: any practice which is understood to have an impact on sustainability. A short description of each of the case studies under my research is

given in Table 1. The cases were chosen to be as varied as possible and were ‘best case’ examples of community engagement, as recommended by national representatives of the voluntary organisations which were connected to the cases. Data collection consisted mainly of qualitative interviews with participants, practitioners (local organisers) and national representatives. This amounted to a total of 60 interviews, as well as case documents, informal observation and some survey work. Data analysis took the form of grounded qualitative analysis, categorising transcribed interviews using the software Nvivo. The theory which forms the focus of the rest of the paper, emerged from this analysis, and my reading of the practice theory literature summarised above.

Theory of sustainability practice change in community

Here I present a theory of sustainability practice change in a community context. In this theory I integrate the explanations of how change occurs from my empirical work with the more general explanations of change in the practice theory literature discussed above. The section proceeds as follows: I first present my theory of ‘sustainability practice change in community’. I then take the key concepts from each part of the theory and provide evidence from my data to support the role of each element in stimulating practice change. This includes a discussion of the role of the participants’ discursive and practical consciousness, and the different types of rules and resources that impact on change, with reference to examples from my data. Note that the terminology I use here (rules and resources, practical and discursive consciousness) comes from Giddens’s description of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984). Another term is used here to represent the relationships between these concepts: ‘mechanisms’. Pawson and Tilley define mechanisms as “how program outputs follow from the stakeholders’ choices (reasoning) and their capacity (resources) to put these into practice” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p. 66).

The theory evolved from a strong pattern in my data. I observed that change in sustainability practice, in the context of these kind of initiatives, occurred as a result of an interaction between the discursive consciousness of the participant and the structures of the community-based organisation. To be precise, my study found that:

- The community-based organisation offers new organisational and infrastructural resources to participants which help them to change their sustainability practice, and influences the cultural rules of the community on sustainability practice;
- The participant also brings personal resources to the organisation;

Table 1 Descriptions of case studies under this research

Case Study Name	Description
Meanwood School	A walking bus project designed to reduce the numbers of children being driven to their primary school in Meanwood, a suburb of Leeds. Participant volunteers walked to school in the morning in a group picking up children from designated stops along the way. Numbers of children going to school by car reduced considerably in the year that the bus was introduced.
Holy Trinity	An ecology project which aimed to encourage sustainability practices in the church, church members and the townsfolk of a market town in the North of England. At the time of study, the Christian Ecology Group within Holy Trinity had been active for 12 years in promoting sustainable living. Events and activities included fair trade stalls in church, a fair trade fashion show and a Christian Ecology conference, which participants helped to organise or attended.
Green Gym	BTCV's Green Gyms are gardening or conservation projects, which aim to improve health, environmental understanding and community cohesion for their participants. The cases under study were projects set up in deprived areas of cities in the North of England, where allotment sites or country parks were used as a basis for organic food growing and conservation activities.
Women's Institute	A project using the Ecoteams programme to change sustainability practices of members of Women's Institute groups from rural areas of the Midlands. Ecoteams requires members to examine their current practices and commit to making small changes in the course of the project (Global Action Plan, 2006). Members from existing Women's Institute groups worked together to reduce their own personal impacts.
Bollington Carbon Revolution	A project designed to reduce the carbon footprint of Bollington residents, a commuter town in Cheshire. This group were inspired by the neighbouring Ashton Hayes project (Ashton Hayes Going Carbon Neutral, 2008), and put on film showings, held stalls at events in Bollington, and ran Ecoteams within the town. Participants both organised and attended these activities.

- These rules and resources impact on sustainability practice when participants' discursive consciousness is also activated to take on change, amounting to the interaction between agency and structure stimulating change in sustainability practice.

These regularities are represented in the form of a theoretical model in figure 1. There are three main elements to Figure 1: the structure, represented by the circle labelled 'community-based organisation', the agency, represented by the picture of a person, and the sustainability practices. The arrows in the diagram represent the relationship between the structure and agency elements and their ultimate influence on practice. These arrows are effectively the locus of

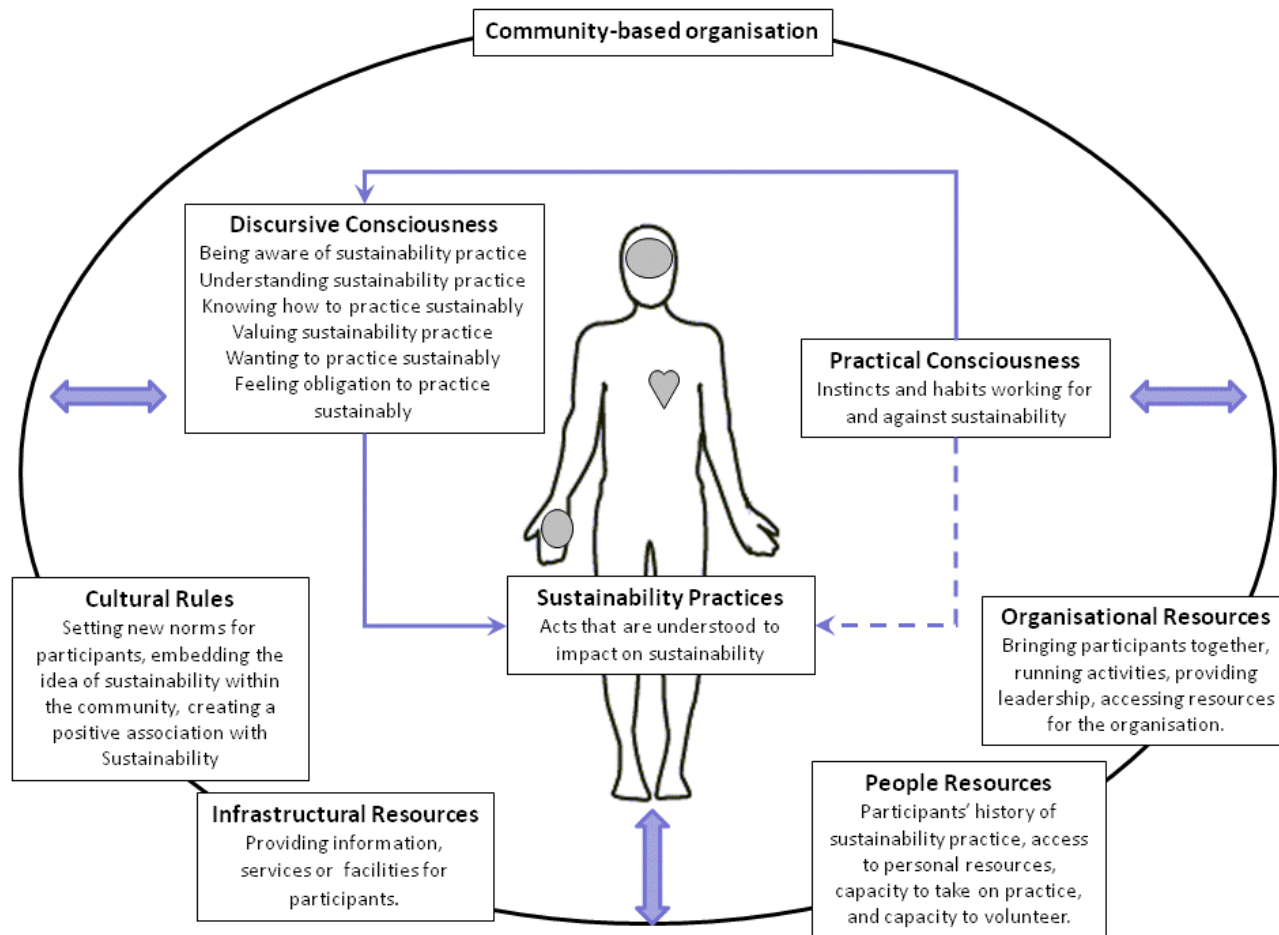


Figure 1 Model of sustainability practice change in community: how change in sustainability practice occurs in the context of interventions by community-based organisations

change within the diagram, as they explain how the different elements connect and influence each other. The most direct influence of the participant (and therefore agency) on practice is represented by the arrow that links discursive consciousness with sustainability practice. The discursive consciousness elements in Figure 1 divide into knowledge related elements (being aware of sustainability practice, understanding sustainability practice and knowing how to practice sustainably) and value related elements (valuing sustainability practice, wanting to practice sustainably, feeling obligation to practice sustainably). The dotted arrow between practical consciousness and sustainability practice shows that while the influence of the former on the latter is possible, it was not observed within this kind of project. Instead there is an indirect connection between practical consciousness and sustainability practices, via the discursive consciousness. The community-based organisation (the circle around the outside of the diagram) impacts on sustainability practice by providing rules and resources to the participant. The double-ended blue arrows which connect the community-based organisation, the participant and their sustainability practice represent the recursive relationship between agency and structure in creating practice. To clarify: community-based organisations in this context create rules and resources for participants who change their sustainability practice, which in turn can impact on the rules and resources available.

I will now outline each concept in the diagram in turn with examples from mechanisms that I identified in my data to evidence the role of each concept in stimulating change and the relationship between concepts. I will also discuss the nature of each concept in relation to the potential for community-based organisations as a structure that influences participant practice.

Discursive and practical consciousness

In my study I found that discursive and practical consciousness affect practice in two ways. First, discursive consciousness affects practice directly, when a community-based organisation triggers the participant to take on change by suggesting how to make a change or through the activation of a particular set of values. An example of discursive consciousness affecting practice directly was a mechanism which I call *heightened sense of responsibility*. This mechanism was triggered when participants felt a greater obligation to practice sustainably as a result of exposure to cultural rules in the community-based organisation. Green Gym participants, for instance, noted that working on conservation issues within a particular place, gave an experience of nature that was more personal and resulted in a newfound immediacy in members' understandings of sustainability problems. Participants developed a feeling of responsibility through working for their local environment.

Partly because we've had more contact with nature I think. I felt that very much. We've seen the changing of the seasons... up close every Saturday, and really felt it. I've felt more sympathetic... to the cause, the need for change really.

Coming into close and regular contact with their local nature through conservation activities heightened members' sense of responsibility for their place, as a new ethic of care for environment emerged, which resulted in members taking on more sustainable practices.

The second way in which consciousness affects practice is when the practice moves from the participants' practical consciousness into their discursive consciousness as a result of their involvement in the community-based organisation. In doing so it becomes an act that is conscious rather than instinctively followed. An example of practical consciousness being brought into the discursive consciousness was in the mechanism of *amplification*. Here participants with a history of engagement in sustainability practices noted a greater personal focus on environmental or ethical issues since being involved in their group's activities. By regularly attending group meetings or events, participants found that these issues become more central in their lives. As a Bollington participant and a Holy Trinity participant explained respectively:

It just keeps you focused on it rather than just about saying 'ah, well yes we'll get that sorted out', you know I think it keeps you focused on a month by month basis.

... with ethical issues, we don't realise we are making an ethical decision, and it's keeping that in your mind that almost anything that you do has an impact on the environment in some way.

Amplification therefore stemmed from participants being triggered to think about their sustainability practices more often as a result of their involvement in the community-based organisation. Actively thinking about sustainability practices was stimulated by membership of a community-based organisation with interests in sustainability and indeed the provision of activities (organisational resources) by that organisation. In effect participants' habitual practices were moved into their discursive consciousness as a result of membership, stimulating a re-examination of habitual acts.

Cultural rules

Cultural rules are the norms of social conduct that govern a participant's sustainability practices. They provide a lens through which a participant understands sustainability practices as a result of their involvement in a community-based organisation. This lens is constructed collaboratively within the community-based organisation. I will make three

points here about cultural rules and their affect on practice in the context of this research. First, sustainability activities were framed by community-based organisations within central narratives of the communities concerned. Second, these organisations created a positive feeling around sustainability for participants who then felt more positive about taking on sustainability practices. Finally, there are limits to how cultural rules can affect practice which were observed in some cases.

Projects legitimized their activities by framing them within central narratives in their community. Practitioners and participants in these projects seem to understand their work as embedded within their particular community. In my data, I saw organisations making these links on the community's behalf, and from varied starting points. For instance, the Bollington Carbon Revolution made an explicit link to its community's historic origins as a hub of the industrial revolution in its very name, reframing the environmental challenge of climate change as an opportunity for the community. The Women's Institute group members articulated a strong ethos of avoiding waste, which was strengthened by their involvement in the group. One respondent's comments on water use exemplified this ethos:

“We are not metered, so you think oh it doesn't matter, but yes it does matter it is still wasting it even if you pay the same amount.”

The mechanism of *amplification* explained above was activated here, as individual member's practices were amplified by the group's collaborative conception of the ethos of avoiding waste (a cultural rule) that members shared.

As well as attempting to embed sustainability into narratives of community, some of the organisations created a positive feeling around sustainability that resulted in their participants taking on sustainability practices. Organisations tried to create an understanding of sustainability practices being positive, in reaction to the widespread assumption among members that living sustainably will cost more and be inconvenient. A Women's Institute practitioner here referred to an experience at a conference which she brought to the group:

There was something that she said, I wrote it down: ‘Be part of the solution instead of part of the problem’. I came away with that so for anyone who has any doubts I say well why not be part of the solution instead of part of the problem.

Members of several groups felt that their involvement in community-based sustainability activities was accessible, and unthreatening and this helped to create an atmosphere conducive to practice change. Part of the reason for these projects being unthreatening was the approach they took to encouraging change. This approach had a logic

that small and manageable changes made by individuals aggregate to make a substantial difference. I call this mechanism *valuing small changes*. As a member from Bollington explained:

one of the things that I enjoyed about the Ecoteam is that they were really small things that you could do that would make a difference, things like turning off a tap when you are brushing your teeth, that kind of thing...

In a sense, the valuing of small changes, allowed members to move away from a more depressing narrative of environmentalism. Such a belief in small actions making a difference was not always easy to maintain in the face of failure to act and pessimism in society more generally, however:

The number of us who rang the council about recycling and it just had so little effect for so long, until it became mandatory nothing actually happened.

Individual's actions for change were not always reciprocated by other organisations or members. Indeed, there are limits to the power of these organisations to change culture, and attempts to embed sustainability into a community's narrative can be problematic. This was particularly noticeable at Holy Trinity. The practitioners struggled against a hostile counter-culture to the one promoted by the CEG, despite the Church hierarchy's support for their activities. Members of the church did not always make the connection between environment and religion. While this group started with a positive attitude to community practice change it was difficult to maintain in the long term. As one of the practitioners remembered, this attitude was hindered by other members of the church having different priorities:

Well we suggested recently that they could use fair trade sugar ... they've discussed it and they'll do it if it's not too expensive. [emotional pause] I had to bite my tongue because you know that is not the point. You know we're a fair trade church, I couldn't believe it.

Crucially then these community-based organisations do not have a unified culture, and indeed cannot necessarily create all-encompassing cultural rules, particularly in the face of other rules outside their remit.

Organisational resources

Organisational resources are all the resources that stem from organisations within the community. This term can refer to resources offered by the specific community-based organisation in question, or the organisations to which it connects. This includes the act of getting people together in providing activities, providing leadership, and access to

organisational resources, and each of these will be discussed in turn here, with reference to examples.

One of the more tangible resources that the community-based organisations provided was the opportunity for people to come together to discuss and think about sustainability practices. This took the form of activities that the organisation ran on sustainability practice which sometimes had a direct influence on member practice. This was the case in a mechanism I named *learning by example*. Learning by example involved the community-based organisation bringing participants together in activities on sustainability to learn about how to practice sustainably and foster participants' motivation to practice sustainably. This was explicitly encouraged, where activities revolved around providing an example of good practice, or more implicitly stimulated by 'good practice' from the organisation in question. One of the Holy Trinity respondents, for instance, took her first steps into understanding and buying Fair Trade after a conversation with a member who organises Fair Trade stalls in church:

I think I got interested it first when [practitioner] had a fair trade stall ... 'cause [she] told me 'Oh I buy Christmas presents for my god children here' and I thought, I could do that as well.

Here, the respondent found that the example set by the stallholder was a practice that she can also use in her own life, and her involvement in the group brings this practice to her attention and understanding (discursive consciousness).

The importance of leadership on sustainability issues from the community-based organisation was also apparent. The *leadership* mechanism involved the community-based organisation providing leadership (an organisational resource) for participants, who were then motivated to want to practice more sustainably. Women's Institute, Green Gym and Holy Trinity participants emphasised the importance of leadership from the practitioners in their groups in inspiring sustainability practice. In their comments, participants expressed respect for practitioners' personalities as leaders and their knowledge and enthusiasm on sustainability, for instance a Holy Trinity respondent said:

I think the ecology group, they are a lovely set of people and they are very passionate about ... all aspects of ecology... [that] really made me more determined to do what I could.

In addition many of the practitioners expressed respect for the leadership of their parent organisations. Women's Institute members and practitioners were, for instance, proud

of their organisation taking a stand on environmental issues. Leadership from a parent organisation provided added impetus and respectability for local initiatives in this way.

All the cases under study accessed some kind of resources from the organisations around them to engage in the activities they undertook. Resources from other organisations included financial support, guidance in applying for funding, and support in kind. The ability to access resources was essential to the function of the group. Some cases suffered from difficulties in accessing resources. The Green Gym projects, for instance, would eventually run out of funding, and groups did not have the capacity to find funding to replace the project leader or to find volunteers to take on this role. Ability to access resources depended on the skills of the practitioners of the group, and the willingness of connected organisations to assist and collaborate. Partnerships with connected organisations took advantage of the mix of skills and resources available in the local community. In Bollington, for instance, the group had links with a tree-planting organisation, the local baker which had a window display about their activities, and the local borough council. The group at Holy Trinity organised a fair trade fashion show in collaboration with the local Oxfam shop and the fashion department at the further education college, using the clothes of the former and design skills of the latter to put the show together. This propensity to make links with other organisations to meet objectives resulted in an understanding of sustainability which was often very broad, incorporating the multiple environmental and social objectives of the connected organisations.

Infrastructural resources

Infrastructural resources are the material arrangements which pertain in the particular community in question. This includes all infrastructures which affect sustainability practice (e.g. transport systems, energy systems, shops). It also includes new information, services or facilities that are offered by the community-based organisations to their participants, and that allow participants to take on sustainability practices. The infrastructural resources that were offered to participants by the community-based organisations under study were varied, but in general rather limited. The most noticeable change in participants' access to infrastructural resources was the provision of information (or an opportunity to share information) by community-based organisations, which allowed participants to live more sustainably within the existing infrastructure. The mechanism *information provision and exchange* therefore involved increasing participants understanding of sustainability practice, and their knowledge of how to practice sustainably, through the provision of information (infrastructural resources) and activities by the community-based organisation.

Information was sometimes provided in an integrated way with the group or parent organisation's activity. For instance, many of the Holy Trinity activities either took place within the church or were promoted within it. For one participant this is important:

The church is bringing these things to our attention. It's not the same as hearing it on the television, because you can switch off from that. If you are doing it in a more concentrated form... it has more effect doesn't it. It's more one to one.

This participant found the treatment of environmental and ethical issues by the church a more immediate way of communicating information, one that touched her more directly. Participants also reported information exchange in the group setting. As a participant from the Women's Institute explained:

I think it is joining with other people, and talking to other people. Everybody does something different, you've all got your own ideas and you can learn from other people and give your ideas and get some back.

The Ecoteams programme that this participant is engaged in involves monthly discussions on current and potential future practice, and, as such, the exchange of each group member's knowledge of how to act is an important part of the process.

Participants and practitioners commented on the relative difficulty of taking on specific sustainability practices as a result of the nature of existing infrastructural resources. In some communities the infrastructure can be conducive to sustainability practices, for instance in the Meanwood School case, the physical layout of the approach to school meant that most participants commented on how difficult driving a child into school was. Elsewhere the infrastructure was less conducive to sustainability practice. In one Women's Institute group, for instance, members did not even consider changing their transport practices as this was considered too difficult given that most members live in rural areas. In a rural setting, with limited availability of public transport and limited services available within walking distance, many members could not see a realistic alternative to car use. As one member puts it:

I've got a car but I would struggle without... You really need one when you are in the country. While you give people lifts and you do share when you go on outings... very often you have to use cars, it is just not viable to use anything else.

In effect, members feel that they are doing their best in the context of a limiting infrastructure. Such infrastructural problems are beyond the power of community-based organisations to resolve, given their low level of resources.

People resources

People resources are the resources that participants make available to the community-based organisation. This includes participant involvement in sustainability practice projects, and help in developing them. The resources people have available depend on the history of the participant's engagement in sustainability practice, the nature of participants as volunteers, and the kinds of resources that each participant has available to them, and each of these is discussed below. People resources are essential to the sustainability of the community-based organisation in question as most of these organisations rely on volunteers to organise, run and attend their activities.

Participants had a range of sustainability practice histories. Some participants had been engaged in sustainability practice for some years, others had not thought much about sustainability before being involved in the community project in question. This impacted on the changes they were likely to make to their sustainability practices, as well as the contribution they could make to the group. My data showed evidence of participants' history of sustainability practice impacting on the sustainability practices of other participants. This is seen, for instance in the *leadership* and *information provision and exchange* mechanisms explained above. In the former, some of the participants took on a leadership mentality, in reaction to the leadership of their community-based organisation, which in turn set an example for other members. In the latter, members exchanged information on how to live sustainably among themselves, an exchange which relied on someone having experience and knowledge to contribute.

The resources that participants had to offer a community-based organisation as volunteers varied according to their personal background. Along these lines, the case studies accessed funding using the range of skills and the different networks available to their members. The Holy Trinity group, for instance, baked cakes to raise money. In contrast the Bollington Carbon Revolution practitioners used their considerable professional experience in grant writing to access more diverse (and more substantial) funds. Inevitably, well connected and well resourced participants were more likely to come from wealthy, well-networked communities. One lesson of importance from the Green Gym, however, is that it was not always evident what resources participants' hold. Here one of the participants pointed out that capacity to act among members can be deceptive:

...if you've got a group, they might seem very capable, but you've got to know who the vulnerable members are don't you... because you only actually know what people have allowed you to know.

The main way in which these organisations relied on their participants is as a volunteering resource. Some of the cases in this study noted difficulties in finding volunteers to help run projects and events. For both Meanwood School and Holy Trinity this meant difficulties in finding help to implement the projects initiated by the groups. Once the idea for the project was established, finding people who could be responsible for activities proved difficult. In the Green Gym, members sometimes did not have the resources to carry out activities, or had trouble finding someone who was prepared to coordinate the activity. While plenty of group members were willing to attend conservation activities, none was prepared to take on the responsibility of running these activities. Bollington practitioners, on the other hand, seemed to have accepted the transient nature of voluntary help. As well as accepting that things might go wrong, the group tried to manage the risk inherent in voluntary activities by planning for uncertainty in their activities. This marked a rather sophisticated approach to volunteers at Bollington which was not seen elsewhere.

Discussion

In the review of the literature on practice theory above, I argued that the conceptualisation of behaviour as stimulated by the interaction between participant and community-based organisation, was useful for an understanding of how community engagement might stimulate practice change. So what does my theoretical model, based on practice theory, add to an understanding of sustainability practice? In this discussion I draw out three contributions: first, my model helps to explain how community-based organisations help members to change their practices. In doing so it details the elements of community and participant that have an influence on sustainability practices. Second, I explain how this work contributes to the sustainable consumption literature more generally. Finally I discuss the implications of my research for policy on sustainable consumption.

Figure 1 makes clear that community-based organisations influence participants' sustainability practices by changing the rules and resources available to them. Changing rules and resources, is not enough however, and in order for sustainability practices to change, the participants' discursive consciousness had to be engaged in thinking or feeling about a particular practice. Given the review of practice theory in this paper, it will be clear to the reader that these ideas of how change occurs are not new in themselves. My theoretical model does make a contribution in its codification of the social context in which change occurs (in

other words the contribution to practice change of organisational, infrastructural and people resources and cultural rules) and the types of responses from the participant that trigger change (discursive consciousness). The rules and resources I identified in my data have some parallels in Southerton et al.'s work on structural factors affecting sustainable consumption, with, for instance, their 'norms of social interaction' (cultural rules), and 'material and infrastructural arrangements' (infrastructural resources) are mirrored in my work (Southerton *et al.*, 2004b). My theory is a useful framework for a case-based understanding of the kinds of resources that community-based organisations provide and that have an impact on participant practice.

So how does this model contribute to the academic literature on sustainable consumption? This is the first attempt to integrate practice theory into explanations of how change in practice in the sustainable consumption context can be stimulated. Until now, practice theory work in the sustainable consumption area has tended to study how things are rather than how things could change (Shove, 2003; Spaargaren, 2003; Southerton *et al.*, 2004a). I would emphasise that research on how things are is very important for an understanding of change, providing the foundations for understanding practice as it now stands. Spreading the use of practice theory into studies of consumption policy is an important contribution of my theory here here. In an area of policy which is criticised for focusing too much on economic interventions (Dobson, 2007) and where responsibility is often placed rather unsuccessfully on the shoulders of the individual (Maniates, 2002), practice theory provides a more holistic way forward for considering sustainable consumption policy and possibilities for intervention. The model I have proposed here mirrors a more holistic view of policy for sustainable consumption that seems to be emerging in reaction to the 'isolated technical fixes' which van Vliet et al criticise (Vliet *et al.*, 2005).

In work on sustainable consumption and practice theory to date, the discursive consciousness has received relatively little attention, with the main focus being on habitual behaviour as stimulated by structural factors (see for instance Shove, 2003). In my work, the participants' discursive consciousness was quite central given the nature of the initiatives: the discursive consciousness had to be activated in order for sustainability practice to change. There are interesting parallels with other literatures here (economics and psychology) where emphasis is placed on the agency of individuals through their discursive consciousness. Ultimately practice theory tries to integrate both knowledge and values explanations within a social context (Giddens, 1984), just as I have tried to do in Figure 1. This work does not represent an integrated theory of the economics, psychology and sociology of sustainability

practices. Indeed that would be a task far beyond my (mainly empirical) project on the role of community-based organisations. My work does suggest a potential way forward for these disciplines to work together on sustainable consumption issues, providing a theoretical framework (practice theory) in which some of the other theories could be mobilised to explain change.

In practical terms, I would argue that my theory offers a way of thinking about the limits and potential of the types of intervention under study in this thesis. It could be used as a starting point for policy makers and practitioners thinking about resourcing these kinds of intervention. The structural elements of the model in Figure 1 are intended to be interpreted as dynamic, indeed structural factors could be subject to change as a result of investment, policy or additional infrastructure. By distinguishing four structural elements that have an impact on participant opportunities to take on sustainability practices in the context of community-based projects on sustainability, I highlight the potential for resourcing these initiatives. All the structural factors (rules and resources) that I identified here could be enhanced using policy interventions. For instance 'people resources' could be made more powerful by offering training and support for volunteers in key areas. In addition, from a practitioner point of view, this model could be used as a way of identifying the resources available, and the rules that persist in a community-based organisation, in order to grasp how these resources can be mobilised in a specific context, and what boundaries there might be to change.

Conclusion

In this paper I considered a new form of activity on sustainable consumption: community initiatives which attempt to stimulate sustainability practices, in the light of the practice theory literature. I presented a theoretical model that explains how change in sustainability practice occurs in the context of community-based organisations, drawing on extensive empirical work and on the practice theory literature. The implications of this theoretical model are threefold: it helps to codify the structural elements impacting on sustainability practice in the context of community engagement, it finds a way of talking about policy in sustainable consumption in a sociological context, and it offers a conceptual tool to policy-makers and practitioners working in this area.

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