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Published online: 04 Aug 2024.

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Pulling together or pulling apart? Understanding the heterogenous collective action frames of local climate activists through a Q methodology study

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ABSTRACT
The potential for green community groups to respond effectively to climate change depends on the heterogeneity of preferences of individual member activists. Using a Q-methodology study of two groups in England, we propose an original typology of collective action frames for local green activism: 'consensus seeking', 'community building', 'radical adversarial', and 'eco-egalitarian'. These differ according to how activists articulate and act upon the diagnosis of the problem, the solutions proposed, and the rationale for action. Both groups comprised members aligned to the four different frames, none of which was dominant. This presents organisers with the challenge of how to construct frames meaningful to such heterogeneous collectives. Ongoing (re)framing was observed in both groups, reflecting struggles between the four frames identified. We conclude by reflecting on how a heterogeneity of frames within community groups was managed through flexible organisational forms that facilitate multiple platforms and projects, enabling sub-groups to act autonomously.

Introduction

The coming together of people, in community-led groups, to act collectively to advance a climate resilient future assumes a common framing of this activism: the problem(s), solution(s) and motivation(s) for action (Lubell 2002, Smith *et al.* 2016, Fischer *et al.* 2017). However, these organisations comprise a varied mix of activists (Giugni and Grasso 2015). Their capacity for collective action can, thus, be pulled together or pulled apart by the

heterogeneity of the individuals, their characteristics, and beliefs that comprise the group (Ostrom *et al.* 2007).

To fully understand the potential for collective action of local environmental groups, it is imperative to investigate the, hitherto under-researched, heterogeneity of values, understandings, and motivations that individual activists construct as they engage with their organisations (Fischer *et al.* 2017). It is within the differences between these that are sown the seeds of organisational tension and conflict. This article will explore and classify, systematically, the degree of heterogeneity of environmental activists' predispositions, preferences, and practices. This will allow us to better understand the debates within community-led organisations, how different types of activism co-exist and evolve within them, how groups manage the (potentially) competing beliefs of their activists, and how a more creative and productive relationship within local groups, and with the formal structures and process of governance might be framed.

We argue that community-led climate change groups and their members construct collective action frames 'to assign meaning to, and interpret, relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support and to demobilise antagonists' (Snow and Benford 1988, p. 198). We use Q methodology – an exploratory method for identifying and categorising, in a systematic (i.e. semi-quantitative) manner, participant attitudes on a complex topic – to discern, describe, and evaluate the attributes of collective action frames expressed by individual climate change activists in two case study groups in small towns in Southern England. We present an original typology of collective action frames for local climate action: 'consensus seeking' (advancing inclusive, society-wide responses to climate change), 'community building' (enhancing social capital, sense of place and togetherness), 'radical adversarial' (confronting hegemonic political and economic interests), and 'eco-egalitarian' (prioritising green outcomes over organising processes). We find that the heterogeneity between individual activists within our case study groups is more significant than that between the groups. Indeed, no dominant collective action frame exists within either group. We conclude that groups engage with this heterogeneity to regularly remake and rejuvenate themselves from within.

The article comprises four sections. Firstly, we explore the nature and scope of the heterogeneity of environmental activism, focusing on the multiple dimensions of environmental discourses and the practical trade-offs involved in local collective action, articulated in the existing literature, and consider how the collective framing of activism might be conceptualised. Second, we outline the Q-methodology research design that we have used to examine and order the heterogeneity of activists' preferences. The third section compares and contrasts the four collective action frames in respect

of, following Snow and Benford (1988): the diagnosis of the problem; the solutions proposed (prognosis); and, the rationale for action (motivation). Finally, the article discusses the implications of identifying the heterogeneity of the collective action frames of individual activists as well as discussing the evidence of 'incomplete' action frames amongst some participants. We discuss how these groups have worked with that heterogeneity to build sufficient common purpose to underpin their collective actions.

Framing and heterogeneity

Activists seek to articulate the ecological crisis, its causes, and its solutions through heterogenous discourses, 'an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena' (Hajer and Versteeg 2005, p. 175). Dryzek (2012) proposes a typology of the extant environmental discourses differentiated according to the desired realignment of the relationship between humanity and nature, and the balance sought between incremental reform of the existing socio-technocratic regime and fundamental system change (cf. O'Riordan 1989, Sutton 2000, Hopwood *et al.* 2005). 'Radical/imaginative' discourses foreground the exploitative nature of neo-liberalism, the environmental limits on human development, the rights of the contemporary poor, future generations, and non-human species, and the displacement of neo-liberalism by a more egalitarian and eco-centric society (Dryzek 2012). 'Reformist/prosaic' discourses, including ecological modernisation (Hajer 1995), assume a potential for equalising economic, social, and environmental outcomes, they prioritise economic growth, market mechanisms and technical development, and incremental reform of the existing economic order (Dryzek 2012). There is further heterogeneity between discourses in respect of the attribution of agency, normatively or empirically, to different actors (e.g. economic elites, experts, consumers, citizens, and communities) and their motivations (e.g. profit, self-interest, and public good) (Dryzek 2012).

Fischer *et al.* (2017) argue that these macro-level discourses are reflected in the micropolitics, the everyday tensions and compromises, of doing local collective organisation. Matthews and Pratt (2012) identify two such types of local climate action. First, action-oriented activism addresses adaptation or mitigation directly or indirectly, and includes community energy (Seyfang *et al.* 2013); local currencies (Seyfang and Longhurst 2013); eco-housing (Seyfang 2010); and, local food networks (Seyfang 2006). These sectors are heterogeneous, but the extant literature focuses primarily on differences between, rather than within, groups (Fischer *et al.* 2017). Thus, some groups are deemed to be interested in cultivating alternatives to mainstream responses to climate change, others simply in effecting improvements in well-

being locally. Seyfang and Smith (2007 p. 593) argue 'the point is to appreciate empirically the sustainability dimensions and trade-offs being developed in niches and to relate niche self-interpretation of performance to their motivating ideologies'. Second, discursive and cognitive processes include cultivating new future-oriented ways of thinking and doing through everyday practice, as highlighted by the literature on prefiguration (Yates 2015, Swain 2019). In practice, examples include the Transition Movement, which anticipates the demise of the fossil fuel powered paradigm and the construction of resilient, low carbon local economies (Bailey *et al.* 2010, North and Longhurst 2013). This standpoint also gives rise to multiple contradictions; 'whether to aim for widespread systemic change, influencing large numbers of people and elites; or acting more as producers of new knowledges or ways of living in pre-figurative ways' (North and Longhurst 2013, p. 1426).

Our objective is to capture this heterogeneity of environmental discourses and daily practice within local groups systematically. In so doing, we have turned to the work of collective action framing. In this context, a 'frame' is 'an interpretative schemata that signifies and condenses the "world out there" by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of action in one's present or past environment' (Snow *et al.* 1992 cited in Gahan and Pekarek 2013, p. 761). Collective action frames are shared by activists within a group. The overall master frame represents general ways of seeing the world that define the core values and objectives of the group, e.g. environmental or social justice. These are worked into the tasks for mobilising individual activists in ways aligned to the agenda of the master frame. Tasks include diagnosis, identifying a problem and attributing blame or causality; prognosis, suggesting solutions to the problem, identifying strategies, tactics, and targets; and, motivation, formulating a rationale for engagement, and issuing a 'call to arms' (Snow and Benford 1988). Frame building is a dynamic process that is conceptualised in Figure 1, derived from the work of Gahan and Pekarek (2013). Benford and Snow (2000), p. 612) note that collective action frames are the result of negotiating shared meaning, they are constantly being reformed to mobilise individual activists around master frames. Through a series of selective uses and re-interpretations of the master frames, groups attempt to align their master frames with the individual frames of activists (some of which are shared with other group members) and/or the collective action frames of other groups (Gahan and Pekarek 2013).

The aim of the present article is to identify and articulate the collective action frames that shape local action, as opposed to the action itself, in two case study localities at a point in time, as opposed to the process of creating these frames. It is to that challenge that we now turn.
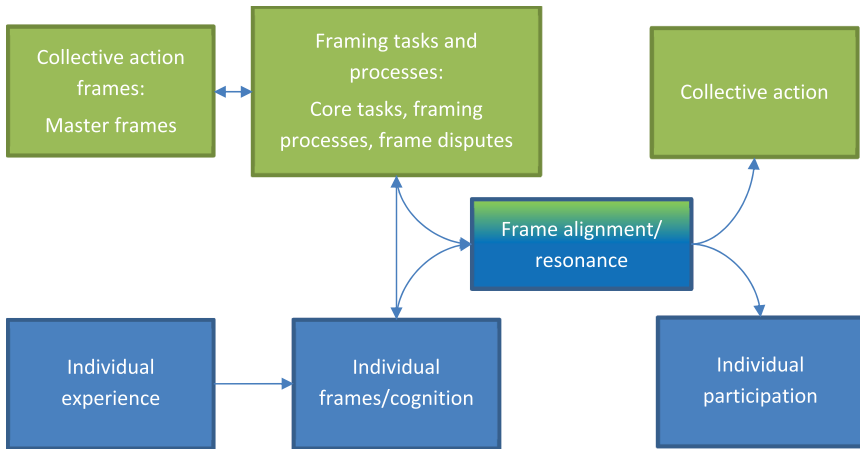
Figure 1. Framing processes between individuals and groups (derived from Gahan and Pekarek 2013).

Research design

Q Methodology provides a research instrument to discern and describe the shared viewpoints on a topic (in this case, local climate activism) and to disclose points of consensus and dissensus. The process involves respondents sorting a set of statements (a representative sample of the thinkable landscape of the topic in question; the 'concourse') into a distribution of preference (the 'Q sort'), typically using an inverted pyramid grid that offers degrees of (dis)agreement according to a Likert scale. The Q sorts reveal the subjective meaning given to the statements by each individual participant. They are correlated and factorised to reveal statistically significant factors or shared viewpoints; in the present article, collective action frames. Participants may be asked to provide a commentary on their results, the rationale for the distribution of statements, their context and broader significance, and discussions recorded for additional content analysis. A title and descriptive narrative accompanying each viewpoint is articulated (Brown 1980, Watts and Stenner 2012).

We constructed our concourse, mapping potential diagnoses, prognoses, and motivations to reveal collective action frames of local climate activists through a literature review, focusing on, firstly, environmental discourses and, secondly, empirical studies of local climate activism. We sought representative statements, first, to position our respondents on the continuum of discourses of ecological crisis from radical/ecocentric to technocratic reformist (e.g. Dryzek 2012; O'Riordan 1989; Hajer 1995), and, second, to enable us to explore the everyday micropolitics of local climate activism. The latter were drawn from the literature on grassroots innovations for sustainable

development which explores the potential of community projects (e.g. local currencies, energy cooperatives, and food networks) to nurture paradigm-changing innovation (Seyfang and Smith 2007); the literature on localisation which sets out the prefigurative construction of resource poor but fulfilling lifestyle options epitomised by the Transition Movement (Bailey *et al.* 2010, North and Longhurst 2013, Yates 2015); and, the literature on ecological citizenship which explores new relationships as members of communities of interest or place, emphasising responsibilities that are non-reciprocal, exercised in the private sphere and global in scope (Dobson 2003; Seyfang 2006).

We constructed a sample of 47 representative statements from a long list of over 300, by using a sampling grid which organised statements on a matrix according to their definitions of problems, and their root causes (ie diagnoses), necessary or desired outcomes (prognoses), and rationales for action (motivations), on the one hand, and alignment with the continuum of environmental discourses, on the other. A full list of statements and factor scores is provided in Appendix A.

We applied this research instrument to two geographically bound case study groups, Transition Keynsham and Winchester Action on Climate Change (WINACC), described in Appendix B. The groups were chosen purposively because they pursue similar portfolios of activities (renewable energy, waste and recycling, local food, campaigning) in small English towns but do so through contrasting organisational contexts. WinACC, established in 2008, initially funded by the local authority and university to animate efforts to reduce carbon emissions locally, is a formal organisation that has a (small) staff team and trustees. Transition Keynsham, established in 2010, is a more informal organisation, aligned with the Transition Movement. It seeks to raise public awareness of environmental crises and promote, prefiguratively, alternative lifestyles through sociable activities. The two groups, thus, offer different histories, organisational practices, aims, and challenges; different 'niches' within the ecology of community-based climate change groups in England. They were not selected to represent all climate change groups in England. The Q sorts were delivered through 52 face to face interviews, completed in late 2018 and evenly divided between the two case study groups. The respondents were recruited via a snowball [purposive] method and included core activists/organisers and partners within the broader local green network. Informed consent was sought prior to each Q-sort interview from each respondent following a procedure approved by the University Research and Ethics Committee (UREC- ID UREC 14/15/07). All participant-respondents were invited to an interpretation workshop during the analysis phase of the research to discuss our interpretations.

A by-person factor analysis of the Q sorts involved a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) using PQ Method software. This analytical approach is based on cross-correlating q-sorts (individual action frames)

and, thus, identifying 'factors', shared viewpoints, or, in the present article, latent collective action frames. The question of how many factors to extract from a given analysis is one of judgement (Watts and Stenner 2012). We chose a four-factor solution assessing these against the number of participants aligning (or not) on factors, the number aligning with one or more factors, as well as examining correlations between factors. All factors had more than five people aligned with them and none consistently positioned itself in agreement with another factor on a variety of issues. The four factors accounted for 53% of variance explained and 79% of Q Sorts were retained as archetypes. Thus, one-fifth of respondents did not align conclusively with any of the common action frames. Appendix A provides the average factor scores for each of the four collective action frames.

We now introduce and describe our four original collective action frames, then, following Snow and Benford (1988) compare and contrast them by reference to their diagnoses, prognoses, and motivations.

Four collective action frames for climate change activism

The four collective action frames identified by the Q-methodology study are, briefly:

(1) 'Consensus seeking' activists **advance inclusive, society-wide responses to climate change**. The distinctive contribution of self-organising lies in making mainstream society aware of the threats of climate change' (s11). Consensus seekers are ecological modernisers, seeking to balance economic growth and environmental protection (s6), promoting technological advances (s47). They renounce unlawful action (s24), direct challenges to government and business interests (s44), and radical reform of the economic system (s36). However, they are not uncritical of the status quo, questioning whether capitalism is sufficiently flexible to resolve the climate crisis (s45).

(2) 'Community building' activists **seek to develop a sense of place and togetherness**. Their distinguishing belief is that the primary objective of self-organising is the building of social (s27) and geographical (s41) bonds. Community builders denounce anthropocentric development (s10), arguing for fundamental socioeconomic reform (36). They are avowed ecological citizens; thinking global, acting local (s31), recognising climate change as the most elementary contemporary global challenge (s39), and believing in the innate efficacy of local action (s29). Their attitude to formal authority is equivocal, denying it is the responsibility of the government to lead the response to climate change (s8), but also refuting the validity of illegal actions (s24).

(3) 'Radical adversarial' activists **advocate confronting hegemonic political and economic interests**. They are unique in their oppositional approach to self-organising, presenting a direct challenge to government and business interests, as an alternative to mainstream debate (s44), and emphasising ecological ideals as the foundation of local collective action (s18). Radical adversarials articulate a robust critique of capitalism (s23) and economic elites (s46) as drivers of the ecological crisis. They endorse the idea of the environment as a public good, arguing against its commercialisation for private profit (s36), and support radical economic reform (s40). Radical adversarials are sceptical of consensual statements (s3) and project a strong seriousness of purpose (s42).

(4) 'Eco-egalitarian' activists **prioritise green outcomes over collective organising processes**. Eco-egalitarians are idiosyncratic in not prioritising questions of self-organising. They are persuaded that the human race is living beyond the carrying capacity of the Earth (s15) and accept lower material standards of living in the future as a consequence (s34). These green beliefs are wedded to a committed advocacy of social and environmental fairness (s38). Eco-egalitarians are sceptical of privileging local activism over other processes, e.g. conventional business (s14), and of prohibiting the commodification of the environment and ecosystems (s40). Nevertheless, they reject the core techno-centric premises of ecological modernisation (s47).

Diagnosis

The four frames exhibit the highest level of homogeneity in respect of diagnosis.

There is, unsurprisingly, unanimity that 'the scientific evidence that human activity is responsible for the warming of the Earth's climate is indisputable' (s25), and all frames reject the contrarian proposition 'climate change science is subject to too much uncertainty to be the basis of a road map for action' (s43). The eco-egalitarian frame is distinctive in its preoccupation with the causes and consequences of the climate crisis. It is persuaded that 'climate change is proof that the Earth cannot provide sufficient natural resources for, or absorb the waste products of, modern society' (s15). The climate emergency is also central to the community-building frame's diagnosis which rejects the statement 'the most important global challenges facing humanity are poverty, hunger and disease, not climate change' (s39).

The four frames were also united in their conviction that an unreformed capitalist system represents a key driver of climate change. All strongly disagreed that 'capitalism is flexible, creative and resilient enough to solve global problems in ways we cannot yet anticipate' (s45), and that 'the

transition to a low carbon economy can be achieved within the existing economic and social order' (s32). However, the radical adversarial frame presents a singular critique of the neoliberal order, arguing 'the ecological crisis is the result of the exploitation of nature and society by a powerful, global economic elite' (s23) and that 'decisions are too often made about a local community by elites far away and with no commitment or even knowledge of the places they affect' (s46).

Prognosis

The four frames display much greater heterogeneity in respect of prognosis, especially the extent to which they advocate the pursuit of change within or against the extant socio-technical paradigm.

The consensus-building frame is unique in its affinity with the discourse of ecological modernisation. Its prognosis is based on the proposition 'sustainability is built on the synergy, not conflict, between economic growth and environmental protection' (s6) and 'environmental problems will be solved primarily by advances in technology' (s47). The other frames each foreground different aspects of radical/ecocentric discourses, endorsing the statement 'radical and fundamental reform of the entire economic system is needed to produce sustainable, accountable and fair alternatives to capitalism' (s36). The eco-egalitarian frame is noteworthy for its limits to growth prognosis, acknowledging that 'in future, people will have to accept a lower material standard of living due to resource shortages and other environmental problems' (s34). All frames, especially the eco-egalitarian display a conviction that 'a socially unjust or inequitable world is not sustainable' (s38), and all, especially the community-building frame, exhibit a distaste for anthropocentric development, arguing 'humanity should not seek to dominate and control nature, but must exist in harmony with it' (s10).

Not surprisingly, the consensus-seeking frame proved most resistant to the principle of subversive activism, rejecting the propositions 'I am not interested in preserving the status quo. I want to overthrow it' (s9) and 'it is OK to break the law to advance the climate change debate' (s24). They construe local collective action as a means of exerting influence from within the formal structures and processes of governance (s3). Conversely, radical adversarials reject consensual statements such as 'local collective action should avoid confrontation with government and business in favour of dialogue, consensus and influence' (s3), arguing 'local collective action must directly challenge government and business interests; it is an alternative to mainstream policy' (s44). However, in discussion, most participants, including some radical adversarials, while acknowledging the flaws of representative democracy, advocated an evolutionary process, working collaboratively within a pluralist mixed economy, to effect the reform of the system

rather than its downfall. Overall, activists considered unlawful and violent protest to represent an imperfect vehicle for achieving enduring change.

The debate on relationships with, and the role of, the state and market was equally divisive. Curiously, the proposition 'traditional government led methods of participation do not achieve genuine participation in decision making' (s4) did not elicit a strong response from any activists. Indeed, the consensus seeking and eco-egalitarian activists argued 'it is the responsibility of government, acting in the public interest, to lead the response to climate change' (s8) although adherents of all four frames argue that government had historically failed to embrace this role. The frames were unanimous in rejecting the proposition 'local collective action disguises the shortcomings of mainstream government policy' (s2), considering it their role to make manifest the deficiencies of government, to propose alternative actions, and to ensure that green issues remained on the political agenda. All four frames rejected the proposition 'economic growth is necessary for making sustainable development politically acceptable' (s16). However, in discussion, there was a broad consensus that while unalloyed free enterprise could not deliver sustainable outcomes, it could play an important role in facilitating change within a governance framework in which consumer preferences could evolve by promoting alternatives to mainstream market provision. The ideal of the environment as an inviolate public good (s40) was only supported with real conviction by the radical adversarials.

Motivation

The four factors displayed a high degree of heterogeneity in respect of motivation, especially in terms of the nature, scope, and salience of 'community'.

All frames, except the radical adversarials, were motivated by their belief in the existence and value of individual agency and its role in underpinning collective action, rejecting the statement 'as individuals acting alone, people have no control over their lives' (s37). In discussion, this agency was evidenced by the adoption of green lifestyles, the role of local activists as torchbearers of change, and the projection of citizen voice into the political domain, representing a power of persuasion underpinned by moral purpose, information, and networking. However, important barriers prevented individuals, citizens, and consumers, from exercising their latent agency, including a lack of self-awareness or self-belief, apathy, or, more seriously, outright denial and abdication of responsibility.

The consensus seekers argue 'the most important aspect of local collective action is making the mainstream of society aware of the threats of climate change' (s11). Indeed, all activists were keenly aware of the importance of their activity in motivating, or

demotivating, others. In discussion, most were reluctant to antagonise the broader public; a constituency whose agreement and action was deemed necessary to achieve an effective response to climate change. They were, thus, keen to project a positive message about change that appealed to the broader public, although most retained a fundamental seriousness of purpose; 'a protest, not a party' (s42). Others proposed alternative forms of motivation: working together for a common cause, having an impact, and engendering a sense of achievement.

The community-building frame is defined by its motivation for nurturing bonds of association, based on place and interest. Community builders are noteworthy for their conviction that 'local collective action is primarily concerned with building a sense of "togetherness" which is valuable for its own sake' (s27), that 'building a "sense of place" is a critical dimension of local collective action' (s41), and 'the objective of small projects is to "scale up" each project and to build larger numbers of projects so they have a greater impact' (s20). The community-building frame is the most prefigurative of the four in seeking to reconstruct the local participatory practices of the present in ways that reflect the aspired to climate resilient society of the future (Yates 2015, Swain 2019). It is curious that questions of community elicited only an indifferent response from the other frames. Nevertheless, in discussion, activists aligned to all frames utilised 'the global' as a discursive device, citing the existence of inequality between the Global South and North and the imperative to moderate the excess consumption in the latter and to afford the former a better quality of life. The notion of a parochial local activism in which 'the sustainable, self-reliant community must be built from within' (s1) exhibited very little salience for all participants.

The motivation of the radical adversarial collective action frame is unique in its ecological rigour, oppositional approach to state and market organisation, and seriousness of purpose. Radical adversarials argue that 'local collective action must directly challenge government and business interests; it is an alternative to mainstream policy' (s44). They reject the propositions that 'local collective action need not be consciously and strongly green' (s18) and 'local collective action should be enjoyable, more of a party than a protest' (s42). Radical adversarials were unique in their ambition to confront the public with difficult truths on climate change.

The eco-egalitarian activist collective action frame is distinctive in that it does not articulate a distinctive motivation for local collective action. Indeed, it is even sceptical of privileging local collectivism over other actions, rejecting the argument that 'grassroots action, not conventional business is the key source of innovation for sustainability' (s14).
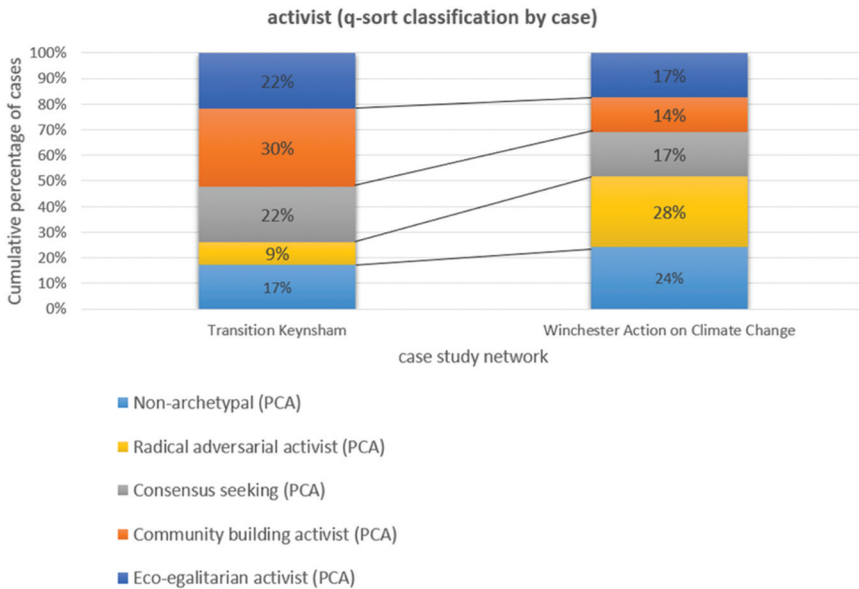
activist (q-sort classification by case)

Figure 2. The distribution of collective action frames by case study organisation.

Heterogeneity within the case study groups

The Q Methodology study demonstrates very clearly the heterogeneity of activist views that exists within WinACC and Transition Keynsham. All four frames are represented by the participating activists in each group. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of action frames (and non-archetypal respondents) within the two groups. The frames are not distributed equally between the groups. For example, adherents of the community-building frame are, proportionately, a little more numerous within Transition Keynsham than WinACC, reflecting, perhaps, the prefigurative ideals of the Transition movement. The reverse is true of the radical adversarial frame. However, and crucially, there is no dominant frame within either group.

Discussion

We have sought to test whether different collective action frames can be identified within local climate groups and to demonstrate the value of Q-methodology for identifying and categorising those frames. The four distinctive collective action frames, as outlined above, mirror the multiple discourses of environmentalism and the micropolitics of practice identified through our literature review. Transition Keynsham and WINACC remained active, 'pulling together', at the point of the fieldwork, even with the presence of such a heterogeneity of membership dispositions and

purpose, and the potential to 'pull apart', identified through the collective action frames. In point of fact, we observed a greater degree of heterogeneity of activist preferences within the two groups than between them. This may be a function of organisational type, the role it plays within the locality, both being multi-functional groupings, with a broad membership base, active within a small town setting, and, hence, a paucity of rival local environmental groups.

Some 20% of activist Q-sorts confounded our categorisation. That is, each was aligned to more than one collective action frame and, thus, was not classifiable individually. We describe these as 'non-archetypal' sorts. The dynamic process of collective action framing (see Figure 1) sees frames constantly renegotiated as individual activists work on alignment. In discussion, participants foregrounded the notion of collective action frames as emergent entities subject to re-working. The Q-methodology exercise, however, represents a snapshot. We interpret the non-archetypal Q-sorts as representing activists that are in the process of pulling together (or pulling apart) at any given moment. The research has, thus, also highlighted the degree to which activists do not appear to share the frames of their associates. For many activists, the process of mobilisation is uneven, incomplete, and ongoing.

Through the rendering of difference, one would expect to see both harmony (pulling together) and dissonance (pulling apart) between group and individual representations as activists internalise the master action frames of their groups. Indeed, it was notable that both groups had entered into such reflection. This, in part, explains why they signed up to be involved in this research. Thus, whereas at the level of the individual activist, there was not a strong link between action frame and action, at the level of the group, there was an acknowledgement that common purpose (represented through collective frames) did need to be constructed. The presence of multiple collective action frames within such organisations presents leaders with the problematic issue of how to construct master frames that might resonate across such as heterogeneous collective.

The debates that the research team evoked and observed involved binary distinctions: debating the value of being associated (or not) with the Transition Movement, or distinctions such as being organised as a 'club' or as 'movement'. A key priority for both organisations was to renew and refresh continually their membership. This prompted an ongoing and unresolved discussion, in both cases, of the relative merits of being a club based on voluntary association with formal membership, involving an element of exclusivity, or a movement where bonds of association were looser, embracing all comers, and the focus of action more varied. These debates reflected struggles between the collective action frames, broadly equally represented within the

organisations as a whole, that the Q methodology study had identified. Thus, advocates for the idea of group-as-movement mirror the thinking embedded in the consensus-seeking frame, centred as it is on the idea of openness and inclusivity. However, the notion of group-as-club is captured within the community-building action frame, stressing the importance of group identity and internal bonding over broader inclusivity.

The two case study organisations also acknowledged ongoing reflections on the merits of membership of the Transition Movement and its (real or perceived) values as the master frame. The Transition Movement was associated in both groups with a focus on 'soft' outcomes, building happy, resilient communities, with climate change a secondary consideration. The ethos of WinACC, conversely, emphasised 'hard' (measurable) outcomes, especially reductions in carbon emissions, with members required to undertake a personal pledge to this effect. In the case of Winchester, which rejected Transition alignment, the debate around joining/not joining is captured in the tensions between an eco-egalitarian frame centred on engaging in local policy debates and a discussion of the scientific evidence supporting policy options in the local area. In the case of Keynsham, the debate about whether to remain part of the Transition Movement reflected tensions between the consensus-seeking frame that stressed the importance of engaging in wider sustainability debates and a community-building group that stressed the importance of local engagement (for example, the local 'Wombles' litter picking initiative). In Keynsham, Transition Movement membership was most strongly associated with this latter group.

Thus, Q-methodology provides a means of drawing the diversity of collective action frames into the open. They seem not to significantly impact the individual actions of activists (in relation to organising work) but they seem to be present in the collective debates that these groups were having at the time of the fieldwork. Heterogeneity exists within the groups and results in a creative tension in the collective discussion of being organised and of establishing a common purpose. Within these locales, these groups were made up of long-standing residents who lived in areas that tended to have formal governance institutions at odds with what these activists wanted to achieve. The heterogeneity of collective action frames generated a creative tension whereby activists could debate the merits of pulling together (against the formal politics of their locales) or of being pulled apart. We would suggest that, based on our typology and observations of the internal debates of these organisations that their continued existence is evidence of them finding a 'Goldilocks' zone, of having sufficient (but not too many) differences in collective frames that permit the organisations to periodically reinvent themselves from within.

Conclusions

The aim of this article was to utilise Q Methodology to explore the heterogeneous patterns of attitudes and beliefs of individual climate change activists in two case study voluntary associations in a systematic manner. We have identified four distinctive and original collective action frames – consensus seeking, community building, radical adversarial, and eco-egalitarian – that were present amongst activists in both organisations and have linked these to ongoing debates on the work of organisations within the groups. We also argue that the presence of 'unclassified' frames is evidence of the active process of frame construction within these groups and thus constitutes a significant group of emergent activists rather than just a residual group.

The research method involves respondents interpreting our general statements of diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation. We do not claim that the collective action frames we have generated are generalisable. They constitute a rendering of how the respondents understood their own contingent action frame and the master frames of the group to which they relate. Their significance is that we can systematically articulate differences in diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation in the respondents that took part in this exercise. This is a means of articulating contingent differences.

Our work broadens insights into the relationships between the heterogeneity of activist predispositions and preferences and the work of organising for collective action in the environmental movement, but it is likely to resonate more widely across the voluntary and community sectors. Existing research has considered heterogeneity in relation to environmental discourses and how organising practices differ between local groups. Fischer *et al.* (2017) reject the common assumption of a homogenous framing of environmental activism, highlighting heterogeneity within groups in respect of: being political (confronting the social-economic system or seeking reform from within), prioritising project survival (balancing core aspirations with financial viability) and the adoption of different types of organisational form. We develop this line of enquiry, using Q Methodology, to establish the different subjective and contingent viewpoints within groups – conceived as collection action frames, linked to core tasks of organising; diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation – to identify the distribution of people within groups aligned to these frames, and to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the frames. We set out a typology of different collective action frames, demonstrate the range of collective action frames that co-exist within the same voluntary association, and establish that there is no clear evidence that heterogeneity per se leads to a reduction in activism. We can link the four collective action frames to actions the respondents discussed, but we did not seek to link, systematically, the Q-sorts to specific actions undertaken by the respondents.

The ability to identify differences in motivational frames and to set out the specific characteristics of competing frames is a potentially useful device for organising voluntary associations. It points to the need for group organisers to give voice to different modes of organising, especially within groups, such as our case studies, that are attempting to manage larger social transitions in smaller localities. It is perhaps also important to recognise the importance of difference in the organisation of such groups. We would propose the idea that voluntary associations require a degree of (manageable) difference to help them continually negotiate their mission in a changing context. Thus, the aim of organisational practice here is not to reduce the degree of difference but to make it explicit and to work with it.

The research covered here has taken a snapshot of collective action framing in two organisations over the period of a year. Our study is based on activists operating in a particular milieu. The climate change response movement is heterogenous, and it is likely that a study incorporating different groups might introduce other forms of collective action framing. This is a supposition that requires further research. The study has not sought to capture the dynamic processes and the impact of debates over collective action frames over an extended period of time. It has not attempted to measure these frames before and after such an extended period, and it has not sought to demonstrate how individual activists might revisit and reform the collective action frames they hold as a result of relating their individual activism to the collective vision of being organised. It is these dynamics of frame negotiating and change that also need more research, with environmental activists, groups and organisations, but also broader campaigns for social change too.

Disclosure statement

Funding

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Appendix A. Statement scores

ID	Statement	Predicted Q-score – Eco-Egalitarian Frame	Predicted Q-score – Consensus Seeker Frame	Predicted Q-score – Community Builder Frame	Predicted Q-score – Eco-Adversarial Frame
s1	The sustainable, self-reliant community must be built from within.	−2	1	1	−1
s2	Local collective activism disguises the shortcomings of mainstream government policy.	−3	−2	−1	0
s3	Local collective activism should avoid confrontation with government and business.	0	1	−2	−4
s4	Traditional, government led methods of public engagement do not achieve genuine participation in decision making.	2	−2	0	2
s5	Local collective action must discourage local communities from meeting their own needs at the expense of less well-endowed communities elsewhere.	−2	0	−2	0
s6	Sustainability is based on the connections between economic growth and environmental protection.	−1	3	1	0
s7	Local collective activism emerges in response to immediate local needs that cannot be met through the private market.	−1	0	0	−1
s8	It is the responsibility of government, acting in the public interest, to lead the response to climate change.	3	4	−3	2
s9	I am not interested in preserving the status quo, I want to overthrow it	0	−4	−2	1
s10	Humanity should not seek to dominate and control nature.	3	3	5	2
s11	The most important aspect of local collective action is making the mainstream of society aware of the threats of climate change	1	4	−1	2
s12	Green innovation will only prosper if can make a profit.	2	−1	−1	−1
s13	Local collective action on climate change is motivated primarily by the need to adapt to the effects of climate change.	−1	0	0	−2
s14	Grassroots action, not conventional business, is the	−4	−2	0	0

(*Continued*)

ID	Statement	Predicted Q-score – Eco-Egalitarian Frame	Predicted Q-score – Consensus Seeker Frame	Predicted Q-score – Community Builder Frame	Predicted Q-score – Eco-Adversarial Frame
	key source of innovation for sustainability				
s15	Climate change is proof that the Earth cannot provide sufficient natural resources for, or absorb the waste products of, modern society.	4	0	−2	2
s16	Economic growth is necessary for making sustainable development politically acceptable.	−3	−1	−3	−4
s17	Social interaction offers new ways of learning about, understanding and responding to problems such as climate change.	2	2	2	0
s18	Local collective action need not be consciously and strongly 'green'.	1	1	2	−3
s19	Ideological and/or moral conviction to achieve societal change is the main driver of local collective activism	0	1	−1	1
s20	The objective of small local projects is to 'scale up' each project and build larger numbers of them so they have a greater impact.	1	2	4	1
s21	The ecological crisis arises from inadequate mechanisms of ownership, pricing and regulation of natural resources.	2	0	1	0
s22	Increasing citizens' resilience at a local level is the only viable foundation for sustainable development.	−1	0	0	−2
s23	The ecological crisis is the result of the exploitation of nature and society by a powerful, global economic elite.	2	2	0	5
s24	It is OK to break the law in order to advance the climate change debate.	1	−5	−3	−1
s25	The scientific evidence that human activity is responsible for the warming of the earth's climate is indisputable.	5	5	3)	5
s26	Active and inclusive partnership between policy makers, scientists, business and the public is the key to sustainable development.	3	5	4	3
s27		−2	1	3	−2

(*Continued*)

ID	Statement	Predicted Q-score – Eco-Egalitarian Frame	Predicted Q-score – Consensus Seeker Frame	Predicted Q-score – Community Builder Frame	Predicted Q-score – Eco-Adversarial Frame
	Local collective action is primarily concerned with building a sense of 'togetherness' which is valuable for its own sake.				
s28	Environmental activists are alienating the public with their radical and utopian talk of climate change.	0	−4	−1	−3
s29	Local action will be ineffective, or even counterproductive, if other towns and cities are not doing the same.	−3	−3	−3	−1
s30	The provision of goods and services on a 'not for profit' basis should supplement, not challenge, commercial enterprise.	−1	−1	−1	−2
s31	Think global, act local	0	2	4	1
s32	The transition to a low carbon economy can be achieved within the existing social order and capitalist economy	−2	−2	−5	−4
s33	Climate change and global resource constraints represent immediate and potentially catastrophic challenges for humanity.	4	4	1	3
s34	In future, people will have to accept a lower material standard of living due to resource shortages and other environmental problems.	3	1	1	1
s35	Prosperity is more about well-being and happiness than about consumption of material goods.	5	2	5	1
s36	Radical and fundamental reform of the entire economic system is needed to produce sustainable, accountable and fair alternatives to capitalism.	0	−3	3	4
s37	As individuals acting alone people have no control over their lives.	−5	−5	−5	0
s38	A socially unjust or inequitable world is not sustainable	4	3	2	3
s39	The most important global challenges facing humanity are poverty, hunger and disease, not climate change.	−2	−1	−4	−3
s40	The environment and ecosystems belong to us all and should be off-limits to commercialisation	−3	−1	2	4

(*Continued*)

ID	Statement	Predicted Q-score – Eco-Egalitarian Frame	Predicted Q-score – Consensus Seeker Frame	Predicted Q-score – Community Builder Frame	Predicted Q-score – Eco-Adversarial Frame
	and private profit.				
s41	Building a 'sense of place' is a critical dimension of local collective action.	1	−2	3	−2
s42	Local collective action should be enjoyable; more like a party than a protest	−1	−1	2	−3
s43	Climate change science is subject to too much uncertainty to be the basis of a precise 'road map' for action.	−4	−4	−4	−5
s44	Local collective action must directly challenge government and business interests; it is an alternative to mainstream policy.	0	−3	1	3
s45	Capitalism is flexible, creative and resilient enough to solve global problems in ways we cannot yet anticipate.	−4	−3)	−4	−5
s46	Decisions are too often made about a local community by elites far away and with no commitment or even knowledge of the places they affect	1	0	0	4
s47	Environmental problems will be solved primarily by advances in technology.	−5	3	−2	−1

Appendix B. Case studies

	Winchester Action for Climate Change (WinACC)	Transition Keynsham
Place (locale)	Small historical town with 45,000 population (2021 census). Local Authority District with Conservative majority (2011-19). Conservative MP. 9%-17% vote for Green Party (2015 parish elections in city)	Small town with population of 19,600 (2021 census). Civil Parish with larger Unitary Authority (Bath and North-East Somerset). Conservative majority (2015). Conservative MP. 8%-13% vote for Green Party (parish level elections)
History of Activist Group	Established 2008, funding from local authority/university to inform climate change for City of Winchester.	Established 2010 by local residents, nominally associated with Transition Network

(*Continued*)

(Continued).

	Winchester Action for Climate Change (WinACC)	Transition Keynsham
Practices of being organised	Partnership/network. Formally employs small team but relies on volunteers to run working groups and projects. Formally institutionalised as limited company (not for profit) with board of trustees. Newsletter/website/social media presence/meetings, formal reporting and projects. Membership model (includes personal commitment to reduce emissions).	Informal group. Core group of activists meet regularly (no staff). Projects, community engagement, run by volunteer activists. Engagement with other groups within Keynsham with common interest in 'green' issues. Social media presence, informal meetings/reporting, social events and projects.
Aims of Group (as expressed to outsiders)	Explicit climate change mission. Multiple aims, represented by different working groups, including renewable energy, waste, local planning, food. Represents local community on climate and planning related issues.	Addressing climate change not core mission but has broader concern with sustainability. Multiple aims represented by action groups, renewable energy, litter picking, food, repair and recycle.
Type of intended outcome of collective action	Focus on 'hard' measurable outcomes, e.g. district wide carbon emissions.	Focus on 'soft' intangible outcomes relating to well-being and community resilience.