Title: Delivering climate change through behaviour change: the work of civil society organisations

Keith Baker, Polly Griffiths, Paul Teedon*, Craig Thomson,
Glasgow Caledonian University, School of the Built and Natural Environment

Civil sector organisations (CSOs) are playing increasingly more important and diverse roles in the setting and delivery of the climate change agenda, from local to global levels. However the CSO landscape is also highly diverse, and in its broadest interpretation includes not-for-profit companies, social enterprises, quasi-governmental bodies, and others, alongside charities and NGOs. Developing a more detailed understanding of how these organisations operate, both within and across national and international contexts, is essential in informing the development of strategies to combat climate change amongst its wider networks of stakeholders.

At a global level, the opportunities for CSOs to engage with, inform, and deliver aspects of the global climate change agenda were recognised in the publication of Local Agenda 21 at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, and subsequently in the UNFCCC. More recently in the UK this has been realised in the Scottish Government’s ‘Empowering Communities’ programme (including the setting up of the Climate Challenge Fund), and now by the ‘Big Society’ agenda being pursued by the UK government more broadly and the piloting of the Low Carbon Communities Challenge. In particular these policy packages emphasise the opportunities for CSOs to bridge the democratic deficit that is perceived between government and the public by enabling greater and wider participation in environmental decision making, and inform and deliver pro-environmental behaviour change. However, the current climate of economic austerity also poses its own challenges for the successful realisation of such policies.

When viewed from a historical context these current trends in the evolution of the roles played by CSOs in participatory democracy are neither unique nor exceptional, and in Europe (at least) they build on traditions that have existed for hundreds of years. What is new is the adaptation of these organisations and their varied modes of operations to engaging with the multi-faceted (and multi-disciplinary) problems of tackling climate change. These problems are much less focused and clear-cut than many of the issues which civil society has acted upon in the past, such as voting reform and workers’ rights, and there exist significant differences of opinion as to the ‘solutions’ to them, and how they may be achieved using the tools and levers available to CSOs. This also leads to the questioning of the legitimacy of different CSOs (and different categories of CSOs) as agents for delivering those solutions, of which delivering pro-environmental behaviour change is a significant but under-researched component.

A key step towards filling these knowledge gaps will be the development of a typology (or typologies) with which to understand and interpret the CSO landscape, and thus inform the development of governmental policies and strategies that necessitate engagement with CSOs. Furthermore, establishing the veracity and value of such a typology for use beyond a single national (or cross-national) context will require greater understanding of the differences between how CSOs

* Corresponding author: Paul.Teedon@gcu.ac.uk
exist and operate within and across different national, social, environmental and cultural boundaries.

Drawing on the evidence that is now emerging from implementation of Scottish and UK climate change policy, the Sustainable Urban Environments Research Group (SUE-RG) at Glasgow Caledonian University is pursuing a programme of research that seeks to examine the effectiveness of engaging CSOs in delivering pro-environmental behaviour change, a key aim of this work is to develop such a typology, initially using Scottish case material.

This paper will report on SUE-RG’s preliminary findings based on interviews with key high-level Scottish stakeholders.