

**Ethnic heterogeneity in green community initiatives:  
The case of the London Borough of Southwark**

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**Dissertation Summary**

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### Abstract

This paper analyses the degree of, and identifies some of the barriers to, ethnic heterogeneity within Green community initiatives in Southwark. It also seeks to test the assumption that engagement in community initiatives, green or otherwise, can be the catalyst to further civic engagement. It finds that ethnic minorities are not fairly represented within Green initiatives in the borough. It also finds that such initiatives are indeed the vessel for further civic engagement and empowerment: by promoting further engagement, participation in such initiatives can therefore not only foster greater environmental awareness and outcomes, but also a fairer and more equitable society.

## Introduction

Awareness of environmental issues and of the large-scale environmental knock-on effects of our actions is growing (Vertovec, 2003:2; WWF, 2008:13; Strong, 2003), and with it a sense of our individual responsibility towards solving such environmental dilemmas. An increasing disillusionment with governments' ability and/or will to solve some common goods problems (Hero and Walkenhorst, 2008), is also triggering bottom-up searches for solutions.

Thus community-led environmental initiatives are increasingly important in the articulation of environmental concerns and actions. (Vertovec, 2003; Brand and Thomas, 2005) Growth in the Transition Towns network, with towns embracing 'carbon descent' plans to reduce their dependency on fossil fuels, is a recent and documented trend<sup>1</sup>. In the South West of England alone, Friends of the Earth (2007) show that some 25,000 people are involved, mostly voluntarily, in climate change projects, and that the number of projects has been growing rapidly since 2005.

The merits of social networks and peer-pressure in engendering pro-environmental behaviour are well documented. (Barr, 2003; Dobson, 2007; WWF, 2009) Their importance in supporting and empowering vulnerable individuals at times of risk and uncertainty and in improving social policy outcomes is not lost on policy makers, and neither is their potential for neighbourhood renewal and for creating the ties that enable collective action. (Gilchrist, 2004a). Localised collective choice can also help redress the inequalities of market individualism. (In Taylor, 2003:40)

Yet, people participation in community initiatives will depend on numerous variables: health, age, gender, socio-economic background, income, ethnicity, religion, values, access to infrastructure and resources, skills, confidence etc. Structural conditions at the local, national and global scale (Vedeld, 1997; Medina, 2007) will also shape the incentives for people to tackle their concerns collectively.

Within urban settings, greater heterogeneity of ethnicity and culture, as well as greater transience of people (Taylor, 2003), can challenge the shared sense of belonging that underpins communities, adding further complexities to participation within community initiatives of any kind. In these settings, how integrated individuals feel within such heterogeneous social contexts will also be key. (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000)

Ultimately it is the establishment of large social networks and the bridging between diverse communities that is likely to underpin the emergence of civic communities, their resilience over time, and their effectiveness in solving collective action problems within any locality. (Putnam, 1993; Taylor, 2003) Environmental sustainability cannot be achieved without such civic participation. (Girardet, 2003)

As community-led environmentalism grows, a critical eye needs however to be cast on its inclusiveness. Because the positive effects of participation can extend beyond the environmental realm, to greater social cohesion and empowerment, further civic and political engagement (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000; Putnam, 1995), and particularly so within deprived communities (Burns *et al*, 2004), the more inclusive these initiatives are,

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<sup>1</sup> [www.transitiontowns.org](http://www.transitiontowns.org)

the greater their environmental outcomes, the spread of their multiple benefits, and the likelihood of a fairer and more equitable society.

With this in mind I sought to investigate the degree of ethnic diversity within green community groups in the London inner-city borough of Southwark. London is the most ethnically diverse city in Europe (GLA, 2008), and a city of extremes: wealth creation on one end, poverty, deprivation and social exclusion on the other. Despite its rich diversity, disadvantage in London befalls primarily on those groups who have historically been discriminated against: among them, ethnic minorities. (GLA, 2008:3)

The London Borough of Southwark (LBS) is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in London, with 47% of its population from ethnic minority backgrounds (ONS, 2001): this is higher than London as a whole as well as nationally, at 32% and 9% respectively. (ONS, 2001) At 16% on the 2001 Census, Black Africans are the largest minority group in the borough, followed by the Black Caribbean group at 8%, and by the Other Black group, at 2%. (Southwark Analytical Hub, 2006)

LBS is ranked 26 out of 354 local authorities on the Index of Multiple Deprivation<sup>2</sup> in England. (Southwark Analytical Hub, 2008) Using social housing tenure as a proxy for disadvantage, data for LBS shows that the largest BAME groups tend to live in the most disadvantaged areas (Southwark Analytical Hub, 2006), thus in line with Castells (2003), ethnic diversity appears to be segregated at the low end of the social ladder.

Through the lens of collective action theory I thus sought to examine some of the barriers and incentives to greater ethnic diversity within green community groups in LBS. Shining light on the level of BAME groups' engagement within such initiatives can help promote more inclusive and effective environmental policy, and better targeting of limited government resources. It can also inform government about the resources they can mobilise towards a bolder sustainability agenda. Just as importantly, it can help pursue social welfare, community cohesion, and equality of opportunity. Lastly, fostering grassroots connections between different ethnic groups can help reduce inter-ethnic conflict. (Gilchrist, 2004a; Zetter *et al*, 2006).

Indeed my research also sought to test the assumption that engagement in green community initiatives can be a catalyst to civic engagement more broadly, in line with theories of social capital (Putnam, 1993, 2000). With urbanisation on the rise globally, the analysis can provide an interesting case study in seeking to understand such issues within inner-city contexts.

## Definitions

The definition of 'community' is multidimensional and notoriously elusive. (Involve, 2008; Taylor, 2003) Community can be seen "*as a spatial unit, a social structure and a set of shared norms*". (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999:633) For Singleton and Taylor (1992:315), community is characterised by: 1) shared beliefs, norms and preferences; 2) stability of its members; 3) likelihood of repeat future interaction between members; 4) direct relations between members, i.e. not mediated by external agencies.

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<sup>2</sup> The IMD 2004 is an overall measure of deprivation in an area (where 1 indicates the most and 354 the least deprived local authority). Income, employment, health and disability, education skills and training, barriers to housing and services, living environment and crime, are the specific dimensions it includes. (Southwark Analytical Hub, 2008)

This paper focuses on the geographical dimension of the term and includes a set of people living within a particular area, albeit one in which “*communities founded on shared interests, background, ethnicity or religion are considered as overlapping with and existing within such geographically defined communities*”. (Involve, 2008:37) However for any meaningful definition of community, it is important to recognise that individuals often simultaneously belong to multiple communities (neighbourhood, work, recreational, etc.), and that communities are made up of diverse members, who often only share *some* interests. (Taylor, 2003)

‘Ethnicity’ is another multilayered term. Because of its inherently subjective meaning, ethnicity should ideally include all the categories by which people may identify themselves as belonging to an ethnic group: country of birth, nationality, language spoken at home, parents’ country of birth, racial group, religion, skin colour. (ONS, no date) This study uses the race-based ethnicity classification of ONS census statistics. (ONS, 2001)

Lastly, by ‘grassroots’ environmental/green initiatives I mean locally-led and democratic initiatives in informal settings, in which ordinary people tackle their environmental concerns collectively. While the democratic nature of these groups is recognised to be sometimes *aspirational* (Gould *et al*, 1996) - voice and bargaining powers do vary inside any group - rather than on the power structures internal to these groups my primary concern here is the *presence* of ethnic minorities within such initiatives (presence, in these informal settings, being the precondition to voice), whether it reflects the ethnic composition of the borough, and what may be some of the barriers to it.

### **Theoretical background**

Collective action is a constant force operating in, and shaping, our societies. (Medina, 2007) On a daily basis, individuals everywhere act together in the pursuit of diverse objectives. Managing local forestry, maintaining irrigation systems, or fishing quotas, or cutting carbon emissions are some of the examples in which individuals must act together to prevent the depletion of common natural resources and therefore avert, in Hardin’s words (1968), the *tragedy of the commons*. Yet not all succeed in these collective efforts.

“*Collective action is action by more than one person directed towards the achievement of a common goal or the satisfaction of a common interest*” (Wade, 1987:97) By analysing the numerous variables affecting cooperation, the theory offers a most relevant analytical tool in explaining what leads some to, and prevent others from, taking part in bottom-up solutions to our environmental dilemmas.

Collective action theory is concerned with the management of Common Pool Resources (CPRs); these are a type of public goods, but whereas the use of public goods does not affect how much is left for others to use (e.g. air) with CPRs if a person uses more (e.g. felling trees in a forest) less remains for others. (Wade, 1994:183) Thus overuse destroys their sustainability, and how we limit such use, enforce limits, and sanction those who do not comply have vital consequences for human ecology and the environment. Three main theories seek to explain the problems arising from overuse of

CPRs: Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' (1968); the 'Prisoners' Dilemma' theory (in Ostrom, 1990; in Wade, 1987), and Olson's 'logic of collective action'. (1965)

The 'tragedy of the commons' theory encapsulates the notion that when individuals have access to CPRs, they will tend to overexploit them for their own individual short-term benefit, even if in the long term they are all likely to lose from the resources' depletion. Hardin's example is that of a herder who will suffer when all herders overgraze a common pasture, yet he is motivated to overgraze himself because of the direct benefit he receives, while only bearing a minimum share of the costs resulting from overgrazing. (Hardin, 1968:1244)

In the 'Prisoners' Dilemma' (in Wade, 1987:97) two prisoners are being separately interrogated about a crime they have jointly committed. If they both stay silent, they both get a lighter sentence. If one confesses and the other one doesn't, the first gets a shorter sentence, while the latter gets a longer sentence. If they both confess, they both get longer sentences. Yet, while they would both benefit from remaining silent, if one remains silent while the other does not, the silent prisoner would get the worst possible outcome, i.e. a longer sentence. Therefore both end up confessing in the hope that the other one does not, and both end up with a longer sentence. The 'Prisoners' Dilemma' theory conceptualises the paradox that individual rationality leads to collectively irrational outcomes, thus individuals are simply unable to cooperate. (in Ostrom, 1990:4-5)

Lastly, in 'The Logic of Collective Action' Olson (1965) challenges the notion that for the pursuit of their collective benefits all that is needed is for a group of individuals to share some common benefits. For the author, individuals who cannot be excluded from enjoying the benefits of a collective good are not likely to voluntarily contribute to its provision, and will free ride.

These three theories tend to offer a pessimistic account of the problems of collective action (Wade, 1987), namely that narrow self-interest always prevails, thus undermining any possibility of collective welfare. Yet this simplistic view of human nature has been challenged by those showing the complexity of multidimensional variables, both situational and structural, that affect individuals' incentives to cooperate in the pursuit of common goals.

Ethnic heterogeneity is one such variable. The debate on heterogeneity focuses on the assumption that the more homogenous a group, the greater the cooperative behaviour of its members in managing CPRs. (See: Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000; Khwaja, 2001; Bandiera *et al*, 2005; Vedeld, 1997; Bardham and Johnson, 2002) As groups share traits such as income level, ethnicity and language for example, they are more likely to share aspirations, norms and values that facilitate the pursuit of collective outcomes. (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999) Yet, disentangling the effects of ethnic heterogeneity from those of the *economic inequality* which often characterises ethnic minority groups is no easy task, and a much debated issue in the literature.

Notwithstanding, the impact of ethnic heterogeneity on collective action is of particular interest within increasingly multicultural urban settings: understanding the drivers and the barriers to the common pursuit of pro-environmental goals within ethnically diverse communities is fundamental in informing the designing of environmental policy that is relevant, inclusive and effective.

## Methodology

The analysis relies on primary data collected through a mix of questionnaires and structured and semi-structured interviews.

Questionnaires targeted at Southwark residents sought to capture the views of:

- a) All volunteers within green community groups in Southwark – enabling me to get a sense of who takes part in these initiatives generally;
- b) Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) volunteers within BAME groups in Southwark – by targeting these organisations specifically I sought to reach the highest number of BAME volunteers.

Supplementary data was also collected via:

- a) Face-to-face structured interviews with three green community initiatives;
- b) One face-to-face structured interview with the coordinator for the Latin American community, within a BAME umbrella organisation;
- c) One face to face structured interview with the coordinator for the Sierra Leone community within the same BAME umbrella organisation.

Additional feedback was also provided through a semi-structured telephone interview by an organisation that promotes BAME third sector engagement in policy debates.

## Main findings

My research found that ethnic minorities are not fairly represented within the sample of green initiatives analysed. A combination of structural and communication barriers limit the inclusion policies of green community groups, while structural constraints limit the pursuit of the green agenda within ethnic minorities groups.

Table 1 below shows the green groups, and how many respondents from each, who took part in my survey.

**Table 1: Green groups details**

	Group name	Group size	Remit	Number of Respondents
1	Southwark Friends of the Earth	31+	Environmental campaigning.	3
2	People's Republic of Southwark	31+	Website community hub, including environmental hub.	3
3	Friends of Nursery Row	11-15	To protect and enhance the Nursery Row Park.	2
4	Growing Southwark	31+	To encourage local people to grow food as a community.	1
5	Cossall Food Growing Project	21-25	To grow food on the estate and make it available to residents. To learn about food and the environment.	1

6	Southwark Streets	Living	11-15	To make LBS safer and more pleasant for those on foot.	1
7	Dulwich Greener	Going	31+	Food growing project for local residents. Educational.	1
8	The Secret Garden		6-10	Individual and community food growing project; a way of reducing environmental impact; improve health and community cohesion.	1
9	Friends of Cross Bones		11-15	To create a public garden as remembrance and shrine.	1
10	Peckham Power		6-10	To help people to generate and use energy sustainably, by provide advice/skills training.	1
Total					15

Source: Author

Table 2 below provides a summary of the ethnic composition of the green groups, and highlights a lack of ethnic diversity in the sample.

**Table 2: Ethnicity of green groups volunteers**

	Ethnic groups	No. of respondents	% of total sample	% of LBS population*
1	White British	12	80	52
2	White Other	2	13	8
3	White Irish	1	7	3
4	Mixed White and Black: Caribbean	-	-	1
5	Mixed White and Black: African	-	-	1
6	Mixed White and Asian	-	-	0.5
7	Mixed Other	-	-	1
8	Asian or Asian British: Indian	-	-	1
9	Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	-	-	0.5
10	Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	-	-	1
11	Asian or Asian British: Other Asian	-	-	1
12	Black or Black British: Caribbean	-	-	8
13	Black or Black British: African	-	-	16
14	Black or Black British: Other Black	-	-	2
15	Chinese or Other Ethnic group: Chinese	-	-	2
16	Chinese or Other Ethnic group: Other	-	-	1
	TOTAL	15	100	

[\*Southwark Analytical Hub, 2006] Source: Author

While the above figures relate to individual respondents and do not necessarily reflect the ethnic breakdown of the groups as a whole, answers to the question about 'the proportion of the group coming from ethnic minorities' are also consistent with the above figures. Of the twelve respondents who answered: 53% said 'none' (eight respondents), 20% (three) said 'only a few', and another 7% (one) said '0-10%'. A further 20% didn't know.

The sample's lack of ethnicities thus may appear to support the argument in the literature that successful cooperation is underpinned by group ethnic homogeneity. (Vigdor, 2003; Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000). However to test this assumption we would need to look at ethnically mixed groups.

Table 3 below provides a summary of the barriers to ethnic diversity both internal to green groups, as well as those faced by BAME groups. Indeed 87% of Green groups respondents (13) agreed that there may be BAME specific barriers to engagement. Table three acknowledges the main barriers Green groups identified within both their own groups and BAME groups.

**Table 3: Main barriers for BAME engagement in Green groups** (as identified by Green groups)

	Barriers	Some respondents' comments
<b>Green groups internal barriers</b>	<b>Communication issues</b>	E.g. <i>'Language barriers', or 'the art of communications, talking to others so that they will engage in our campaigns' or 'local communications are patchy' or 'Difficulty in making environmental, gardening and park issues accessible to a broad range of cultures and experiences'.</i>
	<b>Funding</b>	E.g. <i>'Not enough volunteers to cover all events' 'difficulty of publicising our activities on a zero budget', 'Limited capacity for and means of communication'</i>
	<b>Reputational barriers</b>	E.g. <i>'Could be that we appear rather esoteric and rarified and not rooted in the day to day.'</i> or <i>'A lot of people may not be well disposed to a group that is reasonably anti-car'</i>
	<b>Complacency</b>	E.g. <i>'An excellent active core of people'</i>
<b>BAME groups barriers</b>	<b>Culture</b>	E.g. <i>'Male/female mixed meetings. Ability of some social/ethnic groups to participate as individuals rather than closed groups', or 'Less of a culture of involvement in voluntary/community initiatives'</i>
	<b>Exclusion and disadvantage</b>	E.g. <i>'Exclusion from society', 'Possibly lack of interest on their part as they are too busy with life issues'</i>
	<b>Language</b>	E.g. <i>'English only on fliers and posters'</i>
	<b>Lack of interest</b>	E.g. <i>'Possibly lack of interest on their part as newcomers to the area', or 'Do not normally join groups', or 'many people say they don't receive details, in fact they haven't bothered to read the details'</i>
	<b>Transience</b>	E.g. <i>'High churn of ethnic minority groups in the area compared to White working class population'</i>

Source: Author

Turning to the feedback of BAME volunteers next reveals their side of this exclusion story. Four people took part in my written questionnaire. All four BAME respondents cited that one reason affecting their decision not to join a green group is that they did not know anyone within them. Other two reasons included time constraints and the environment not being a priority concern.

All agreed that a lack of ethnic diversity within green groups would not affect their decision to *join* the group. Three agreed that it would not affect their *time commitment* to the group, with one saying that they would spend more time seeking to increase its diversity.

When asked whether they would consider *leaving* after realising upon joining that ethnic diversity was low, one said 'yes', two said 'no', and one said 'don't think so'.

The sample size does not allow me to make any inferences. Yet for these four respondents while diversity would not be the main concern when considering joining a green group, it could become more of an issue as time progressed. Indeed one respondent would wish to increase it. Also, respondents were more likely to join a green group if they knew someone within it. Of notice also is that these were all either UK-born or UK-educated, thus likely to be part of a wider and more diverse social network. For new immigrants, or isolated communities, the issue of kinship within these groups is likely to be more prevalent and more highly related to ethnicity.

Table 4 below highlights the barriers as perceived by the Sierra Leone and the Latin American community representatives.

**Table 4: Barriers to BAME engagement in green groups** (as identified by specific BAME groups)

BAME group	Type of barrier	Barrier
Sierra Leone community	Structural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial/employment concerns, especially for new migrants.</li> </ul>
	Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New migrant often only speak Creole or poor English.</li> </ul>
	Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor promotion of green initiatives.</li> <li>Inappropriate communication strategies.</li> </ul>
	Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteering focused toward helping Sierra Leone (international development).</li> <li>The 'green thing' is a foreign concept.</li> <li>A large and insular community – no need to branch out.</li> <li>Mistrust of local government.</li> <li>Economic status focus.</li> </ul>
Latin American community	Structural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Other more pressing concerns, e.g. access to employment, health, education/training, business support.</li> <li>Unsuitable meetings times/venues (e.g. mothers with young children).</li> </ul>
	Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Campaigns and awareness all in English, either press or email.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of people from similar language/cultural background to engage Latin American community.</li> </ul>
	<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough outreach in the community.</li> <li>• Inability of council to communicate in an engaging way. Too official.</li> <li>• Use of English media only.</li> </ul>
	<b>Cultural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People like to engage as families, with activities for children.</li> <li>• Meetings in air-conditioned office, or in pubs, do not appeal, at least initially.</li> </ul>

Source: Author

Tables 3 and 4 highlight that there is broad agreement and awareness with regards to the main barriers to BAME engagement in Green initiatives. Both Green groups and BAME groups' representatives have identified the structural, communication and cultural barriers hindering greater ethnic diversity within such initiatives. These are discussed in more detail below.

Cultural barriers: Culturally irrelevant institutional arrangements can impede cooperation between diverse groups. For example, in line with Ostrom's principle of participation in rules setting for successive collective action (1990:90), Sierra Leoneans mistrust of local government highlights the need for alternative institutions, such as BAME umbrella groups, not only to mediate but to ensure that the voice of minority groups is taken into account.

Support needs therefore to be channelled towards such umbrella groups, who can use their inside knowledge (language, culture, understanding of BAME specific issues) to maximise value for money. By avoiding resourcing badly thought out initiatives, green groups and local governments might be able to also save themselves some bucks, a particularly pressing concern in the current economic climate.

Communication barriers: A lack of a centrally-held comprehensive directory of green groups in LBS makes it challenging to identify such groups generally. While the efforts of initiatives such as ProjectDirt and London21<sup>3</sup> must be recognised, green groups would benefit from a single recognisable directory, to be also promoted through BAME languages media in the borough.

Consistent with the principles of successful cooperation discussed in the literature (See: Jansen and Ostrom, 2007:67), awareness of the *benefits* arising from participating in green initiatives is also key. Engaging with BAME communities in *devising* a communication strategy might be a good place to start, for both green groups and local authorities, to understand what motivates BAME individuals to participate. And by taking into account the stratified needs of members within such groups (i.e. women, young people, faith groups), such communication campaigns are more likely to succeed.

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.projectdirt.com/> , <http://www.london21.org/>

Thus, for the career-minded Sierra Leoneans, the professional development potential of volunteering might need to be highlighted (horticultural, team-playing, fundraising, campaigning skills, etc.). The awarding of certificates to volunteers might help to that end. On the other hand, given the importance of the family unit for the Latin American community, fewer meetings in air-con offices, or pubs, and more workshop-type activities for the whole family might lead to their greater engagement in green initiatives.

Green and BAME organisations resource constraints: Indeed the very tight resources green community groups often make do with are the heart of some of the barriers to participation discussed. Great recognition exists within these groups of the merits of ethnic diversity, and many are frustrated by their inability to pursue such an agenda. At the same time, while caring for the environment is not just a Western concept (in particular it was highlighted how in Latin America communities often make things from scratch, grow crops locally, and throw very little away) BAME organisations' resource constraints nevertheless prevent them from engaging in the green agenda, and thus limit the educational potential such organisations could have within the communities they represent here in London. BAME umbrella organisations have therefore an important role to play in supporting under-resourced community groups with training, capacity building, information, and networking opportunities.

Economic barriers: The sample revealed that BAME groups' participation in green initiatives can be inhibited by underlying poverty and inequality (of access to services, of voice). This indeed supports the argument that ethnic heterogeneity is problematic for collective action when associated with wealth heterogeneity. (Bardhan and Dayton Johnson, 2002) To tackle such structural constraints, communication campaigns alone will not be sufficient, indeed they may even distract from the real issues: minimum wage, access to free education and health, affirmative action will all have to be up for debate.

On a more positive note, with the majority of the Green groups' respondents explaining how their volunteering within their group gave them the confidence to get involved in additional and unrelated activities (e.g. lobbying, helping with other initiatives, setting up a community group, etc), the study also found that volunteering within green community initiatives can indeed be conducive to further civic participation and empowerment of those involved.

Indeed since joining the green group, engagement in activities *external and unrelated* to those of the group also had increased for 87% of respondents. Respondents explained that joining the group had made them feel more empowered, supported and confident. The group had given them 'licence'. The findings corroborate the self-reinforcing notion of social capital, and that participation in community activities can be the catalyst for further civic engagement. (Alesina and LaFerrara, 2000; Putnam, 1993)

The findings thus indicate that by promoting further engagement, participation in such initiatives can not only foster greater environmental awareness and outcomes, but also a fairer and more equitable society, in which more voices come to be heard.

Of interest is also the environmental values profile of respondents. Based on DEFRA segmentation of pro-environmental behaviours (2008), fourteen green groups respondents (93%) are 'Positive Greens'; the remaining one is a 'Waste Watcher'. In the framework, DEFRA identifies seven categories of behaviours: accordingly 'Positive Greens' followed by 'Waste Watchers', are people with the greatest concern for, and

who are most active in the protection of, the environment. The initiatives in my sample therefore appear driven by deeply held environmental values within their members: their ranking of motivation for joining supports this, with environmental concerns the main motive for 47% respondents, and community concerns for 33%.

Given the green remit of the initiatives analysed the findings are of course no surprise, and selection bias was clearly at work here; however people may join green groups for reasons other than deeply held environmental beliefs, such as desire to give something back to the community in general, to socialise, to gain new skills, etc. A larger sample would provide more robust evidence on motives.

BAME volunteers' feedback indicated that the environment was not a main concern – however given that they were *not* volunteering within green initiatives, selection bias was at work in this case also; had they been involved in green initiatives, one would expect the findings to be more in line with those of the green groups' sample.

### **Limitations of the study**

While some of the issues revealed may resonate across similar organisations, a larger sample is needed, both in terms of the number of organisations and of individual volunteers, to make my findings more robust.

The study highlights some of the barriers that green groups are faced with in promoting greater inclusion of ethnic minority groups; it also reveals some of the barriers BAME groups face in joining green groups. However, a complete lack of BAME individuals within my green groups sample prevented me from assessing the causal links between ethnic heterogeneity and participation in such initiatives: with a more ethnically diverse sample I may have been able to establish whether such diversity was an incentive to greater participation for all. Responses from BAME groups' volunteers were also insufficient to this end.

My study fails to extricate the effects of socio-economic variables from those of ethnicity on participation within green community initiatives: indeed, inequality of wealth, skills, education and political voice all appear to be key.

### **Areas for further research**

In order to identify the effects of ethnicity on green groups' formation and success, further research could investigate the groups who failed. While identifying such groups can be challenging, linking with BAME umbrella organisations might disclose some attempted initiatives.

Further research is needed to isolate the effects of broader socio-economic variables on participation from the cultural practices associated with ethnicity. Revealing the effects of groups' political salience on participation in green initiatives might be valuable to that end.

Also, investigating the environmental values held by different faiths in LBS might be useful in devising tailored strategies for engagement.

## Conclusion

My research has revealed that ethnic heterogeneity within green community initiatives is not representative of the overall ethnic make-up of the London Borough of Southwark, and that BAME groups' inclusion is hindered by economic, language and cultural obstacles, as well as organisational constraints.

More positively, the findings also confirmed that participating within green community initiatives can nurture further civic engagement, and that, beyond the environmental realm, the inclusion of BAME groups within such initiatives can therefore have important positive repercussions for their empowerment, for a more equitable distribution of resources, and for cohesion of the community at large.

Community environmental action is increasingly necessary for sustainability, yet the study has revealed how its voluntary nature can be both an asset and a liability. It can be an asset when voluntary groups are able to reflect the voice and priorities of local citizens, thus fostering participation. It becomes a liability when uncertain funding regimes make green groups the preserve of white middle-classes by undermining their ability to engage minority and disadvantaged groups and thus perpetuate their exclusion. Indeed funding streams tying green groups to a BAME inclusion agenda, and tying BAME groups to the green agenda, may help address this issue.

Lastly however, my study fails to explain the absence of BAME groups in my green groups sample as a lack of trust/reciprocity inherent to ethnically heterogeneous communities - a collective action problem identified by much of the literature (See: Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000; Khwaja, 2001; Vigdor, 2004; Bardham and Johnson, 2002). It rather suggests that before such an assumption can be tested, deliberate inclusion policies, and culturally relevant communications and outreach campaigns, will need to be pursued by green groups: only then the opportunities will be created for such diverse groups to come together in the first place, and to become aware of how much they might actually share.

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