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The interests, ideas, and institutions shaping public participation in local climate change governance in Ireland

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ABSTRACT

Public participation in local governance is crucial for effective climate action and for ensuring that policies are designed in a way that respects the rights of communities. Policy developments and choices are shaped by the groups that participate, by the ideas that they hold, and by the institutions that enable and constrain their participation. This paper seeks to understand local climate change governance in Ireland by identifying the environmental interests and the ideas of the groups that participate, and by examining how they engage with institutionalised local policymaking processes and with the organisations that represent the officially recognised views of the country's national environmental movement. An analysis of survey data collected from the groups that are members of one of Ireland's Public Participation Networks shows that a majority of groups are small, rural, voluntary, interested in a wide variety of environmental issues and have a pro-ecological worldview. Most groups follow a pro-institutional advocacy strategy at the local level, while only a minority interact with the national environmental movement, mostly limiting their engagement to the acquisition of information. This paper contributes to the literature that examines how interests, ideas, and institutions shape public participation in local climate politics.

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Climate change; inclusive institutions; participatory planning; Ireland; New Ecological Paradigm Scale

Introduction

A now vast amount of academic literature has sought to understand how humanity is responding to the climate crisis; examining the local, national, regional, transnational, polycentric, and international dimensions of climate politics (Bulkeley and Newell 2015; Jordan et al. 2018; Keohane and Victor 2011; Lieven 2020; Wagner et al. 2021b), and investigating the role of the private sector, scientific organisations, NGOs, international institutions, thinktanks, policy networks, and the media (Allan 2021; Dunlap and Jacques 2013; Satoh, Nagel, and Schneider 2022; Tobin et al. 2018; Vesa, Gronow, and Ylä-Anttila 2020). Not enough research has examined the interests and ideas of the groups that participate in local climate governance while also examining how they engage with both local and national policymaking institutions.

Since the Rio Declaration in 1992, citizen participation in environmental action has been an important feature of how the public has engaged with the reality of climate change. States were

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given the important mission of facilitating public participation by providing access to information and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes (Hügel and Davies 2020). The fragmentary nature of how different states have responded to climate change over the years, including a reluctance or inability to tackle the problem, suggests that non-state actors could play a role in mobilising public opinion and generating innovative solutions (Lemos and Agrawal 2006). Indeed, some have argued that public participation in local climate governance is a necessary condition for addressing the crisis (Cattino and Reckien 2021),. Public participation in climate governance and policymaking was slow to take up, but over the years climate activism has increased at the local, national, and international levels. Popular mobilisation has increased for several reasons: more evidence on the urgency of climate change, the increasing number of international conferences and events and the "movement spillover" of the global justice movement, which has recently become involved in climate politics (de Moor et al. 2021).

This study focuses on the groups that participate in local climate policymaking institutions in Ireland. Ireland is an important case study because climate change is not considered a top priority by the Irish public (TASC 2021) and because the country's record of climate action is routinely amongst the worst in Europe (CSO 2020). In addition, Ireland's participatory experiences of public participation have attracted attention as both a model of best practice and as a relevant case study (e.g. Citizens' Assembly and the Environmental Pillar) (Devaney, Brereton, and Torney 2020), even though the institutionalised participation of civil society in environmental policymaking processes is a relatively recent feature (Russell 2020). The number of groups that participate in local environmental politics has increased in recent years (DPER 2020), with hundreds now registered as members of local participatory policymaking structures organised by local authorities to deal with environmental issues. Considering that together these groups play a vital role in the debate over climate policy, our first research question asks: how many groups are interested in climate change compared to other environmental issues and what are the ideas of the groups that participate in institutionalised local climate policymaking processes in Ireland? Our second question asks: how do these groups engage in local policy processes and with the professional ENGOs that participate in institutionalised policy processes at the national-level? Because our research questions are descriptive, we make no a priori assumptions about the interests or ideas of the local groups, or about how they engage with institutionalised policymaking processes. We use the 3Is framework (Interests, Ideas, and Institutions) to structure how we address the two research questions (Hall 1997). Interests refers to the agendas of policy actors. Ideas refer to how actors make sense of societal problems. Institutions refer to both the formal and informal rules of the policymaking game. By bringing together three different schools of thought about how policy is developed, the framework facilitates a multifaceted understanding of public participation in local climate change governance in Ireland.

Our analysis proceeds in five steps. First, we begin by reviewing the literature on citizen participation in local governance. Second, we outline our theoretical approach by describing how interests, ideas, and institutions shape public participation. Third, we describe steps that led to the institutionalisation of environmental interest groups in Irish policymaking. Fourth, we present our data and the results from our analysis and discuss our findings. We then conclude by detailing how this study contributes to the literature and by offering suggestions for future research.

Public participation in climate governance

The importance of democratic participation and the inclusion of citizens in environmental decisions has been promoted as a means to increase the capacity of states to cope with climate change (IPCC 2022). In Europe, the principle of "environmental democracy" was expanded in 1998 with UNECE's Aarhus Convention to include the legal right for citizens to be involved in environmental governance, by accessing environmental information, participating in environmental decision-making, and by bringing legal proceedings (Kingston et al. 2021). The increased pressure from civil society

and a widening of public activism around climate change – as noted by recent research focused on the recent cycle of climate activism headed by the Fridays for Future and the Extinction Rebellion movements (de Moor et al. 2021) – means that there is an assumption (and perhaps an expectation) that public participation in climate change governance can lead to stronger policy ownership and compliance, and ultimately, better environmental outcomes (Mason 2008).

Public participation is a process that engages the public in policymaking, including various forms of interaction among stakeholders and policymakers via dialogues, debates, and fora, with a view to implementing joint decisions. By giving non-state actors a voice, access and institutionalised channels for representation and participation in agenda-setting, monitoring and implementation, government officials can secure democratic legitimacy in environmental decision-making (Pickering, Bäckstrand, and Schlosberg 2020). A significant literature has developed around how a variety of stakeholders in local climate planning can help policy to drift towards transformative and less traditional practices. Other research has shown that participation and processes of co-production of decisions often fail to achieve stated objectives of empowerment and societal transformation, mostly due to the costly, time-intensive, and uncertain outcomes (Cattino and Reckien 2021). In practice, however, it is often challenging for the public to meaningfully participate in policymaking processes (Lima 2020). Studies of particular cases can increase our understanding of the factors that contribute to successfully instituted forms of public participation.

Academic work that has paid attention to climate policy at the local level has often focused on the role of municipalities and city-level initiatives (Heikkinen, Ylä-Anttila, and Juhola 2019). This research reflects the political and economic weight of cities as key climate actors, as well as the role that cities play in promoting more radical policies on the climate crisis than those proposed by national governments (Russell and Christie 2021). More specifically, the "local" scale has come to the fore when it comes to acting on climate change. This can occur when local groups show national organisations how to foment public support and leverage that support for a policy win (McKenzie and Carter 2021), or can translate into an expectation that the local scale can step up and fill the void left by national governments and global institutions (Howarth, Matthew, and Amanda 2022).

Actors involved in local climate change policies often organise along the lines of local networks to engage in the policy process with a view to achieving their policy goals. A good illustration of this are local governance networks, in which the public, climate advocates and voluntary sector bodies organise around the issues that climate change poses for society. Concrete examples are the network of local Climate Commissions in the U.K. and the Environmental Pillar of Public Participation Networks in Ireland (the focus of this paper, discussed in more detail below). The participation of citizens in those groups addressing complex problems associated with climate change suggest an understanding of the underlying values, strategies and solutions and constructs about climate change, improving the likelihood of reaching a mutually satisfactory outcome in a decision-making process (Baldwin and Chandler 2010).

Research on institutionalised participation is part of a broader literature that connects democratic values with good governance, including academic work on citizen participation, social justice, accountability, and legitimacy (Lemos and Agrawal 2006). The institutionalisation of local climate governance has not just increased over time – it has become a local strength that supports both multi-level and polycentric approaches to climate governance. However, without a clear vision of coordination and long-term planning, the presence of such a variety of actors can result in unclear responsibilities, strategies, and a reduced impact on climate policy, in addition to an impact on relationships between centralised national agencies and local actors in the context of designing and implementing effective climate policies (Howarth, Matthew, and Amanda 2022; Russell and Christie 2021).

The literature on local climate policymaking brings an understanding of the importance of new governance models and the participation of new actors at both the national and local levels. This includes the creation of movement alliances, city networks and NGO coalitions (Russell and Christie 2021), and also the participation of activists, students, academic advocates, and local stakeholders in

climate change policymaking via a multi-level climate governance model. The increase in actors, new ways of knowing, the development of methods to assess the success of policies and also the different guiding principles of governance arrangements are a consequence of the diversity of relevant participants covered by the term "climate policies' (Zimmermann, Boghrat, and Weber 2015). Taken together, these literatures highlight the relevance of innovative actions at the local level and offer a significant body of knowledge and theory that demonstrates the centrality and importance of public participation in local climate governance and policymaking.

Interests, ideas, and institutions

Interests

Environmental interests refer to concerns related to the well-being and the preservation of all aspects of the environment, including addressing climate change. They stem from a growing recognition of the interdependence between human well-being and the health of our environment. Environmental interests are pursued by a diverse range of stakeholders, including environmental organisations, activists, scientists, policymakers, businesses, and individuals. Any group with environmental interests can engage in policy advocacy work to shape public opinion and to advocate for policies that align with their environmental protection goals. Public participation has been shown repeatedly to have a positive impact on environmental governance outcomes, including climate change (Hügel and Davies 2020; Newig et al. 2023). Identifying the environmental interests of the groups that participate in a policy process is therefore a crucial first step in understanding the relative levels of public engagement with the variety of different environmental problems facing a society.

In this study, environmental interests refer to the set of issues that encompass the concerns and the priorities in relation to the environment and its protection amongst the groups that participate in local policymaking institutions in Ireland. We therefore address the first part of first research question by establishing how many local groups have an interest in climate change and by comparing this to the level of interest in other environmental issues. It is important to know how many local groups are interested in shaping local climate policy because policy decisions are shaped by the groups that participate in a policy process (Hall and Taylor 1996). By investigating the percentage of groups that are focused on climate change compared to other issues enables us to ascertain the relative level of societal engagement with the issue and the democratic legitimacy of local climate policymaking processes.

Ideas

Climate change policy outcomes do not only depend on the interests and concerns of the groups that participate in policymaking, but also by the values of the groups. Those that centre the ideational approach to politics contend that the primary reason that actors engage in policy debates is to see policies implemented that align with their worldview (Sabatier 1998). This study focuses on the normative and ontological beliefs of the groups participating in local Irish climate governance because the character of their ideological beliefs is likely to drive their agenda and shape how they participate in policymaking processes. We use Dunlap et al.'s (2000) New Ecological Paradigm scale to assess the environmental values and orientations of the participating groups. The scale provides a standardised and validated measure for determining if a set of survey respondents endorse a "pro-ecological" worldview or if instead that they have a Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) orientation. The established psychometric properties of the scale and its extensive use in research provide consistency and comparability across studies. Those with a DSP orientation tend to believe in limitless resources, continuous progress, the necessity of growth; they have faith in the problem-solving abilities of science and technology, have a strong emotional commitment to a laissez-faire economy and

to the sanctity of private property rights. Those with a pro-ecological view reject these positions, believing instead that humans are not only part of natural systems, but that they are constrained by them. The NEP scale can be used to gauge the level of concern and commitment that a set of respondents have towards climate action and to provide an indication of their inclination to engage in pro-environmental protection behaviour, including public participation.

Institutions

Institutions are the formal and informal rules that organise the social, political, and economic relations that enable and constrain political participation, which, as a consequence, favour some outcomes over others (North 1990). Interest groups rely upon institutions for legitimacy and coordination. The literature on political advocacy behaviour identifies two categories of strategies that interest groups can use to engage with formal and informal policymaking institutions: insider and outsider strategies (Grant 1978), sometimes referred to as direct and indirect strategies (Binderkrantz 2005). Insider strategies are non-confrontational means of trying to influence policy. They involve direct engagement with decision-makers, through lobbying, participation in official policy forums, by providing scientific or technical analysis, and by offering testimony at public hearings. Outsider strategies refer to forms of participation that involve working outside formal institutional processes, such as media campaigns, demonstrations, and petitions. In early research on the use of advocacy strategies, scientific organisations and businesses interests were associated with insider strategies, whereas NGOs and civil society groups were associated with outsider strategies. It is now understood that in most contexts that the relationship between actor type and choice of advocacy strategy is not so simple (Petrova and Tarrow 2007). Actors use different strategies at different times, and it is common for actors to use a mixture of strategies (Binderkrantz 2005; Wagner et al. 2023). Nevertheless, the extent to which groups use insider strategies is an indication of how well integrated they are into formal policymaking institutions, where they are more likely to have influence.

Groups that participate in local climate governance could potentially increase their capacity to influence local climate policy by tapping into the resources, knowledge and networking opportunities offered by ENGOs that participate in institutionalised policy processes at the national-level. Through collaboration, groups can gain access to additional resources and increase their level of influence (Weible and Sabatier 2005; Fischer and Sciarini 2015). Policy actors with extensive collaborative relationships with important national-level NGOs are likely to be seen as more credible in the eyes of others, including decision-makers. Resource-poor local groups can rely on professionalised NGOs with larger budgets for both scientific and policy information to increase their understanding of the issues that concern them. Participating in forums organised by the national-level NGOs would enable local groups actors to learn from those with whom they don't usually interact and to build relationships and trust with those with similar beliefs.

The institutionalisation of environmental interests in Irish policymaking

Until the late 1980s, there existed little in the way of rules or regulations that were designed specifically to protect the Irish environment, and environmental protection was seen by most in the government, the business community, and the agricultural sector as subservient to the need for the country to attract foreign direct investment to generate economic growth. The historical underdevelopment of environmental policy in Ireland can also partly be attributable to the historical weakness of green groups and environmentally concerned citizens. Garavan (2007) has argued that the small, locally based and relatively late emergence of the Irish environmental movement can be explained by the country's small population, which made it difficult for people concerned about the environment to create a large network of environmental activists, and by the low levels of visible pollutants and environmental damage prior to the 1980s, which meant that many were unaware of the existence of environmental problems. Garavan also highlights how the agricultural

sector, as the dominant player in the Irish economy during the twentieth century, was successfully able to conceptualise the environment in the eyes of many as a resource to be exploited for economic gain rather than as an asset to be protected. In addition, Ireland's high levels of unemployment, poverty, and emigration throughout the century led most of the population to acquiesce to polices that aimed to generate economic growth, even if they caused some degradation of the natural environment.

Despite these impediments, an environmental movement eventually did emerge. Baker (1990) traces the emergence of the movement back to the anti-nuclear protest movement of the late 1970s. Yearley (1995) cites the community-based organisations that formed in the 1980s to voice their concerns about industrial pollutants being emitted by large multinational pharmaceutical manufacturing plants in County Cork. Leonard's (2007) identifies two distinct phases. The first began with the anti-nuclear protests in the 1970s and lasted up until the Celtic Tiger period. During this time, protests were organised by local groups in rural locations around the country in opposition to new forms of production driven by multinational led economic development. Leonard situates the second phase in the years after substantial economic growth occurred. In this period, protests were held in opposition to large infrastructural projects, such as the construction of landfills and incinerators proposed by the state to dispose of the large amounts of waste generated by increased levels of consumption and production. Leonard argues that what both phases have in common is the territorially derived nature of the culture of the groups that formed and their resistance to forms of development that they believed were being imposed upon them by economic and political elites. The actions of the original environmental groups did not lead to the creation of a national environmental movement because the protests were locally based and community led, and because those involved rarely seised on opportunities to cooperate and learn from one another (Leonard 2007).

Tovey (2007) identifies two strands of environmentalism in Ireland, with the first encompassing the locally based environmental protests movements described by Baker, Leonard, and Yearley. The members of these groups not only engaged in protests to raise awareness about environmental problems and to fight for stronger environmental policies, but also grappled with what they perceived to be deficiencies in Irish democratic practices. Tovey finds that local environmental groups tended not to have formal organisational structures or defined membership boundaries but were held together by the friendships between members. Their goals, objectives and practices were found to be diverse, but they tended to share a distrust of any agencies of the state responsible for environmental protection. They also tended to believe that their opinions and knowledge were routinely ignored and belittled by state actors.

Tovey labels the second type of environmentalist organisations that she identified as "official environmentalism", which includes national-level environmental organisations, such as *An Taisce* and *Birdwatch Ireland*. These organisations often have academic experts in leading roles, work directly with state bodies, and engage in official policymaking processes. During the second phase of environmental protests (Leonard 2007), environmental movements sometimes partnered with these professionally led established organisations to challenge the state on their own terms, doing so through official channels and by employing their ability to make arguments using elite approved scientific knowledge. This approach tended to be considered more legitimate by political elites, who often see the tasks of environmental and economic management as being integrated concerns that should be dealt with through facilitating cooperation and consultation between economic and environmental experts. The two types of environmental groups eventually came to be integrated into formalised policymaking processes. The former through the Public Participation Networks. The latter through the Environmental Pillar.

Public Participation Networks (PPN) were established under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 as a mechanism to formalise and facilitate greater public participation in local government policy development, decision-making, and oversight of local government activities. Each council area PPN provides membership groups access to information (on finance, consultations, developments), training, and opportunities to network with other groups. There are three electoral colleges

within each PPN: (i) Environmental, (ii) Social Inclusion and (iii) Community & Voluntary. Any local group whose main focus is in the area of environmental protection or sustainability can join the environmental college of their local council's PPN. Members of a PPN can be elected to join one of their local council's strategic policy committees (SPCs), which offer participants an opportunity to advise and assist councils in the formulation, development, and revision of policies that are strategic in nature. Participation in a local PPN is therefore the first step that a local environmental group can take towards becoming a member of an SPC and a participant in formal institutionalised local environmental policymaking processes (Russell 2021).

The Environmental Pillar was established in 2009 by the Green Party minister for the environment, John Gormley, as the organisation that would be the officially recognised voice of the Irish environmental sector. It includes representatives from the most prominent ENGOs that make up the "official environmentalism" movement described by Tovey. It was argued that by inviting them to participate in official state organised corporatist dialogues that their concerns related to sustainability issues could be integrated into the social and economic decisions made by the state. It was also hoped that a more cooperative and trusting relationship between them, agricultural interests, the business sector, and the government could be fostered, and that ENGOs would abandon their use of protests and other reactive and confrontational measures.

Data and methods

We answer our two research questions using survey data collected from local groups that are a member of an environmental electoral college for any one of Ireland's 31 public participation networks. In Autumn 2020, we identified 429 groups that were listed as members on a council PPN website. The email addresses of 342 of these groups were either available on the websites at that time or they were found through online searches. In summer 2021, over a period of four weeks, a questionnaire was sent to these 342 groups up to three times. 112 local groups responded to the questionnaire, a response rate of 33%, putting it in line with other surveys of organisations (Baruch and Holtom 2008). We exclude twelve of these groups from our analysis as they indicated that they were *Not at all* involved in issues to related climate change.

Before addressing our two research questions, we begin our analysis by describing the following characteristics of the respondents: number of members; number of employees; gender balance; whether they have children as members; the province in which they are located; and whether their focus is rural, urban, or mixed. We establish the environmental interests of the groups by asking them which issues are part of their environmental agenda. We examine the ideas of the groups by conducting a principal components analysis, using varimax factor rotation, on their responses to the questions that constitute Dunlap et al.'s New Ecological Paradigm scale (2000). Because the scale cannot be used to reliably predict respondents' behaviours, we gain an understanding of how the groups participate in local climate policy processes by asking them to indicate how often they use each of the seven advocacy strategies defined below. Finally, to understand how respondents interact with the ENGOs in the Environmental Pillar, we asked the groups to indicate with which of the ENGOs they (i) collaborate with on projects or programmes, (ii) obtain information from about issues related to environmental protection, and (iii) attend forums organised by to discuss environmental protection issues.

Insider Strategies

- *Lobbying* – Informal contacts with political parties, government officials to advocate for your position.
- *Policymaking* – formal testimony at public hearings, participation on government advisory committee, draft legislation proposals or text.
- *Technical analysis* – distribution of data analysis, policy analysis, research documents.
- *Discussion forums* – Exchange ideas and preferences with other interested groups.

Outsider Strategies

- *Media and publicity* – Press releases, press conferences, advertising to publicise your position.
- *Petitions* – Collect signatures on petitions, call or send letters or emails to politicians or officials.
- *Mobilisation* – Street demonstrations, mass meetings, non-violent direct action to bring attention to environmental issues.

Analysis and discussion

We begin this section by presenting a summary of the characteristics of the groups that responded to the survey. Following this, we examine the interests and the ideas of the groups. The section concludes with an analysis of how the groups use advocacy strategies to engage with local institutionalised policymaking processes and by examining how the groups interact with the ENGOs in the Environmental Pillar.

The majority of respondents indicated that they have no employees, have less than 100 members, are majority male, and do not have children as members. 20% of the respondents operate exclusively in urban areas, 44% of the respondent groups are rural based, with the remaining groups operating in both. These results indicate that the characteristics of the groups that participate in local PPNs today are similar to those of the characteristics of the early community environmental groups identified by Leonard (2007), Tovey (2007), and Yearley (1995). The main difference between the two is that the former participate in institutionalised local policymaking processes while the latter rejected them, believing that their opinions and knowledge were ignored by the State (Tovey 2007, Figure 1).

Interests

In this section, we ascertain how many respondents are interested in climate change, comparing this to the number of respondents with an interest in other environmental issues. This study looks at each issue in isolation because we are interested in issue popularity, but we do not presume that there is no correlation or interdependence between groups' environmental interests. Figure 2

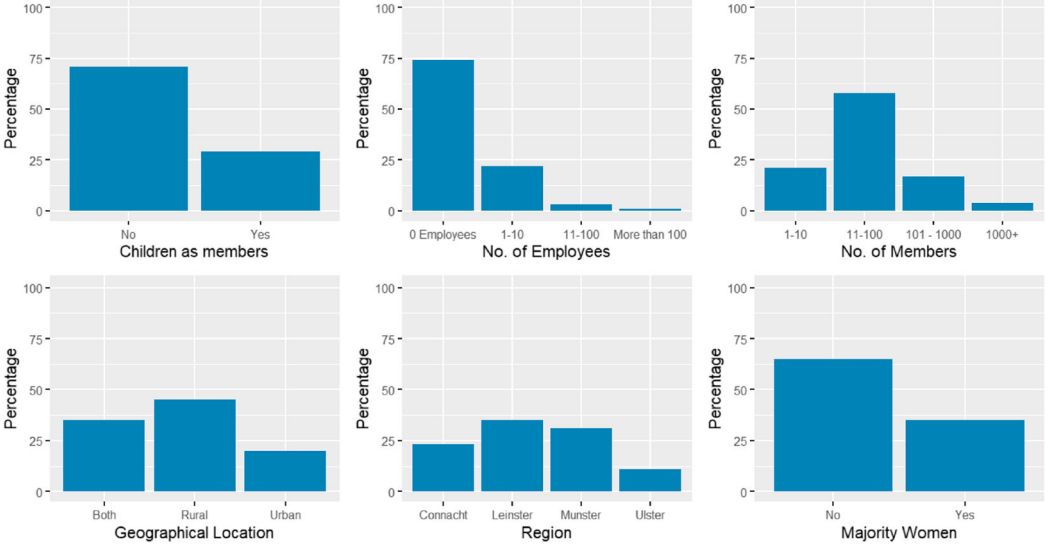

Figure 1. Characteristics of respondents.

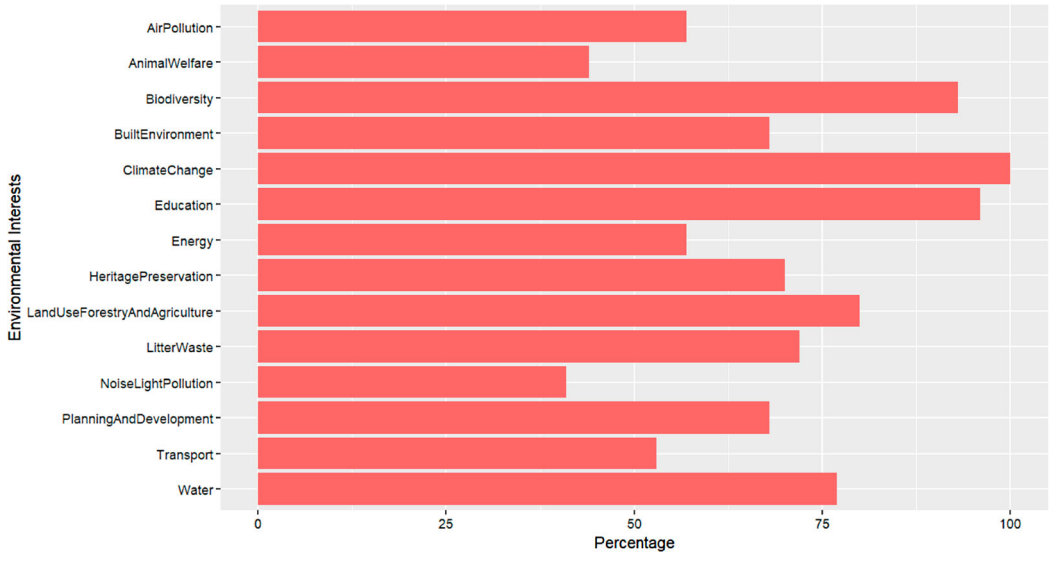

Figure 2. Environmental interests of respondents.

shows that the five most popular issues that groups are interested in are: (i) climate change, (ii) environmental education, (iii) biodiversity (iv) land use/forestry/agriculture, and (v) water (Drinking, Sewage, Marine, Rivers, Lakes, Groundwater, etc.). The only environmental issues that less than half of the local groups were interested in are (i) transport, (ii) animal welfare, and (iii) noise & light pollution.

Education can contribute to increasing the public's understanding of the seriousness of climate change as an issue of concern and for the need for action (Khatibi et al. 2021). Local groups involvement in education reveals that they share a belief held by many policymakers that public understanding of climate change is a necessary condition for government to be able to obtain support for ambitious climate policies. The local groups surveyed face an enormous challenge because, as noted above, their prioritisation of climate change as an issue of importance is not shared by the public (TASC 2021). Respondents' interest in biodiversity is unsurprising, following the issue being declared an emergency by the Irish parliament in 2019. Over recent years, the issue has increased in salience, in media coverage and has been debated in the context of the changing climate and the need for an integrated approach to tackling both issues.

Ideas

Our survey included the 15 items that constitute The New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) scale (Dunlap et al. 2000). Responses that are in an agreement with the eight odd-numbered questions indicates a pro-NEP orientation (5 = strongly agree, 4 = mildly agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = mildly disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree). Responses affirming an agreement with the seven even-numbered items indicates a pro- Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) orientation. The responses to the seven odd survey questions are reversed for the statistical analyses. The fifteen items can be summed together for an overall NEP scale, combined into pro-NEP (odd-numbered items) and anti-NEP "(even-numbered items) subscales. Alternatively, they can be broken down into five facets that shape an ecological worldview: the reality of limits to growth (1, 6, 11), anti-anthropocentrism (2, 7, 12), the fragility of nature's balance (3, 8, 13), rejection of exceptionalism (4, 9, 14), and possibility of an eco-crisis (5, 10, 15).

We obtain a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.74 when testing for the internal consistency of the full NEP scale, thereby providing evidence that respondents hold a pro-NEP orientation. Next, we

investigate if there is evidence that respondents hold the values that align with any of the five different dimensions that constitute an ecological worldview. Results show that only the questions related to the possibility of *eco-crisis* (0.62) component reveal an acceptable level of reliability. The Cronbach's alpha value for the *limits to growth* subscale is 0.56, for the *anti-anthropocentrism* subscale it is 0.43, for the *balance of nature* value subscale it is 0.39 and for the *anti-exceptionalism* subscale it is 0.46. To further investigate the possible existence of dimensionality, we apply principal components analysis using varimax factor rotation to the data. We find five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, which when combined explain 61% of the variance in the data. The first component explains 24% of the variance and captures all the facets of the NEP. This finding indicates the presence of one major factor and supports the internal consistency of the NEP Scale. These results are similar to what has been found elsewhere – that close to all the NEP items cross-loaded on to more than one component (Dunlap et al. 2000, Figure 3).

The presence of a "pro-ecological" worldview among respondents is related not only to a strong environmental awareness, but also to an overall understanding and belief in the significance of the natural environment as a commons requiring protection because of its fundamental value. The possibility of a major ecological catastrophe scores highest score among the components of the NEP scale, closely followed by anti-exceptionalism and humans' responsibility for an eco-crisis. These are important elements that shape the results of the NEP scores. In particular, the dominance of the ecocentric worldview signals that the PPN members support the idea of a safe operating space for integrated and entangled humans and non-human systems, as argued in Pickering, Bäckstrand, and Schlosberg (2020). The pro-ecological worldview contributes towards explaining respondents' preference for institutional arrangements that emphasise the role of the state in tackling the climate, such as participation in forums and lobbying, rather than the market. Moreover, this aligns to an approach to climate change mitigation that supports long-term pathways and goals that require rapid and just responses to climate change, and that demand that public deliberation on climate governance be informed by ecological values and interests.

Participation in institutions

Figure 4 shows that two types of insider strategies, participating in forums (87% of respondents) and lobbying (81% of respondents), are the two most common ways that groups participate in local

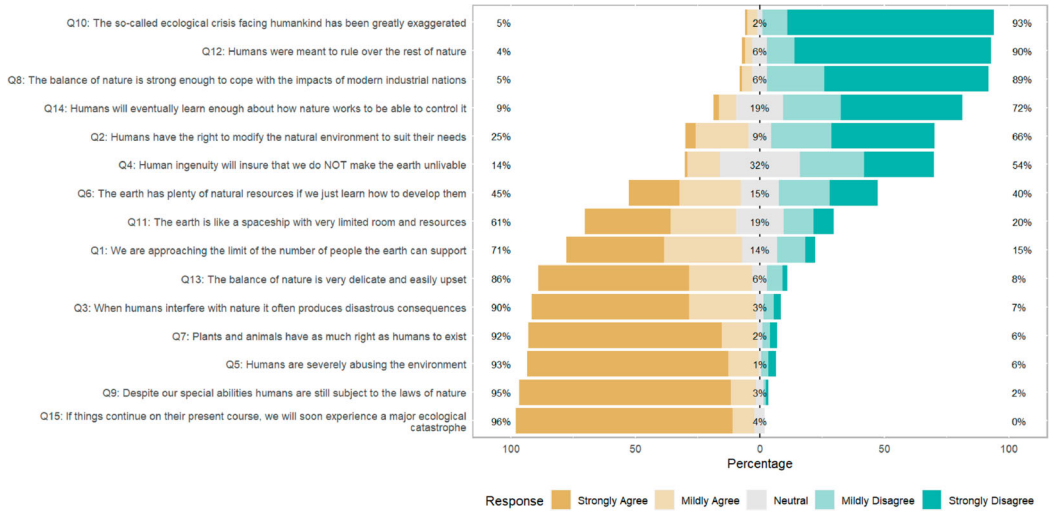

Figure 3. Survey responses to new ecological paradigm scale.

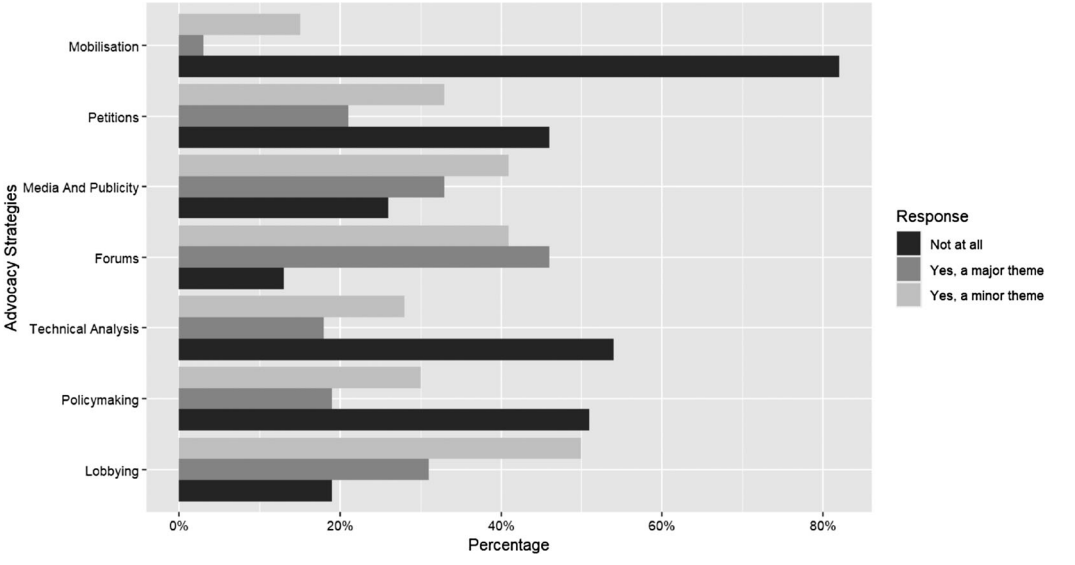

Figure 4. Survey respondents use of advocacy strategies.

policymaking institutions. Given the small membership size of nearly all of the respondent groups and their voluntary nature, it is not surprising that the other types of insider strategies - technical analysis, and policymaking - are less commonly used. Very few of the respondents indicated that they participate in street demonstrations, mass meetings, or non-violent direct action to bring attention to an issue (mobilisation). Over half the groups reporting using petitions and 74% reported advertising their positions through press releases or at press conferences.

Policy change is a complex process, and the ability of interest groups to influence decision-makers is often limited by their lack of power and resources. To increase their influence, groups can use advocacy strategies. While some groups adopt a more moderate stance tending to use conventional insider strategies; others take a more confrontational approach (Extinction Rebellion, for example). In our study, the groups participating in the PPN clearly advocate under a "pro-formal institutions strategy". There are several possible explanations for this. First, the moderation of strategies can be explained by institutionalisation (Tarrow 1994, 171), since dependence on external funding in many cases requires moderation of an organisation's political objectives and strategies (Brulle 2000, 257–264). Second, specific factors that allow for moderation can vary greatly depending on type, history, and environment of groups (Suh 2011). The PPN's organic support for public participation in environmental governance puts conventional strategies at the forefront under a centralised state coordination. Thus, while strategies vary a little among organisations – some of them do mobilise via protest – the majority tend to use strategies that may help them gain support through collaboration with state actors. Third, groups may participate in formal institutions with a view to reconfiguring them in a way that enhances their chances of achieving their objectives. And fourth, despite the limitations, the Irish government met some of the demands of PPN members by democratising access to policymaking via forums, while also enabling networking which is useful for lobbying. In a nutshell, respondents prefer to follow a mostly "insider" non-confrontational approach, albeit with a limited twist of "outsider" strategies (Binderkrantz 2005). Insiders act as interlocutors, representing and channelling movement causes and demands to influence policymaking and legislation (Suh 2011). These findings suggest that public participation in local climate governance in Ireland has followed a trajectory similar to other European countries (see Wejs (2014) on Denmark and Zimmermann, Boghrat, and Weber (2015) on Germany, for example).

Interaction with the environmental pillar

Figure 5 shows that acquiring information is the primary way that local environmental groups interact with national ENGOs. This is a particularly weak form of engagement as it does not require any interpersonal communication. *An Taisce* and *Birdwatch Ireland* are the two most popular sources of information, followed by the *Friends of the Earth Ireland*. The first two are Ireland's best resourced ENGOs, while the latter is the country's most well-known climate activist organisation. The data also shows that very few groups collaborate with the organisations that constitute the Environmental Pillar or participate in any forums that they organise. Taken together, these results indicate that there is little interaction between local groups and the official voice of the national environmental movement, and that the ability of local groups to influence climate policy is likely less than it could be because so few of them draw on the resources available from the professionalised NGOs.

Acknowledging that climate change policymaking involves complex national structures and a diversity of actors, national ENGOs interact with a diverse range of actors involved in national climate politics (Wagner and Ylä-Anttila 2018). As such, we might have expected to find more coordination and interaction between them and the local groups that participate in PPNs. The fact that few survey respondents report connections with the national ENGOs suggests that national climate policy development probably occurs without much input from or participation of local groups. Indeed, this lack of public involvement at the local level is evident in the country's first national climate action plan (Wagner, Torney, and Ylä-Anttila 2021). This practice ignores the "local" as an important space of governance and knowledge production. Thus, instead of a productive bridge between the government, other agencies and even international organisations, the relationship between national NGOs and PPN members is mostly limited to information sharing. This severely limits the involvement of local actors in climate change policy formulation and implementation. This is to the detriment of the development and implementation of effective climate policy. For example, recent work has found that local, issue-specific climate related policy campaigns in Ireland are important, local groups can teach national organisations how to develop policy support and leverage that to lead to more coordinated action among groups (see McKenzie and Carter 2021).

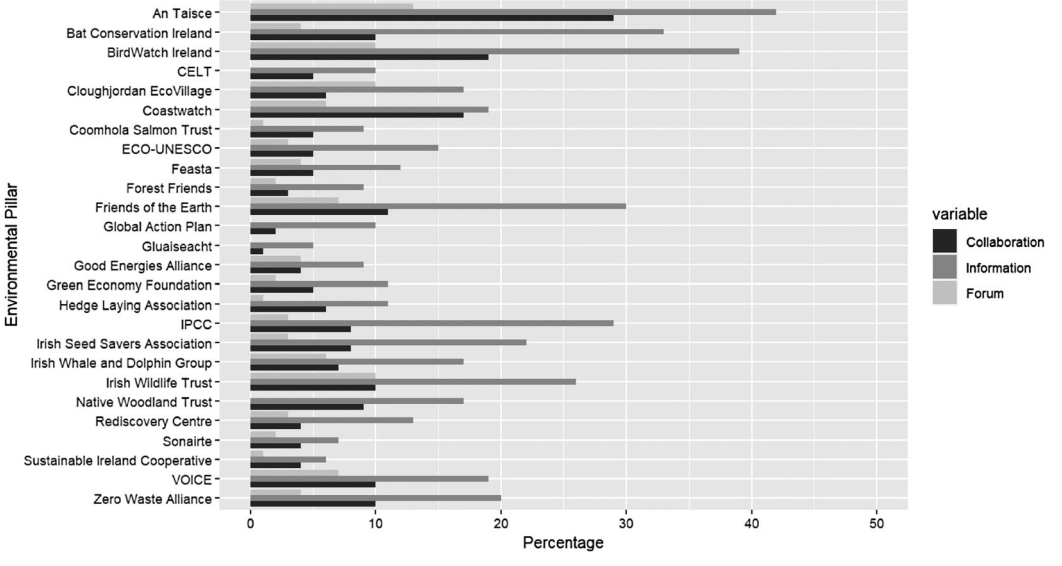

Figure 5. Interactions with environmental pillar organisations.

Conclusion

The existing literature on climate politics brings to light the relevance and importance of new governance models and new actors that have emerged at both local and national-levels. This study adds to this literature by focusing on local climate politics in Ireland, posing questions to ascertain the interests, ideas and institutions that shape public participation in local climate policymaking processes. Our results show that the majority of the local groups are small, rural, voluntary, hold pro-ecological beliefs, have an interest in a range of different environmental issues, and that most groups use a "pro-formal institutions' advocacy strategy while limiting their interactions with "official environmentalism" to the acquisition of information.

This study contributes to the literatures on the role of interests, ideas, and institutions in local environmental policymaking processes in three ways. First, it contributes to the interest-based perspectives on local governance by determining the characteristics of the groups that participate and by ascertaining that groups do not focus on one issue, but instead have a variety of environmental interests. Second, by examining the ideas of the participating groups this article contributes to contemporary debates in the ideational literature about the importance of ideas in policymaking processes. The most interesting finding is that the groups that participate in local Irish climate politics endorse a pro-ecological worldview, indicating a dearth of groups that have a dominant social paradigm orientation. This pro-ecological likely drives their activism, informs their agenda, and shapes their participation in the fora organised to inform local climate policy. Although their worldview likely to be considered a radical by many in positions of power, it has not deterred the groups from using insider strategies to gain access to local policymaking spaces. This finding on advocacy behaviour speaks to the principal way in which this study contributes to the literature on how institutions structure participation, that is, our finding that local groups with pro-ecological worldviews are willing under certain circumstances to use a pro-formal institutions advocacy strategy. Third, this study also contributes to this strand of literature with its finding that local groups' interactions with official environmentalism is limited and that their willingness to adopt an insider approach is restricted to how they participate at the local level.

The findings reported here shed new light on the interests, ideas, and institutions that shape public participation in local climate politics in Ireland, thus contributing to the growing body of research focusing on the role of local groups in advocating for climate action. The present study lays the groundwork for future research to establish whether PPNs act as drivers of greater public participation in Irish policymaking, not only on climate change, but also in relation to social inclusion, community, and voluntary issues. More work is needed to fully understand the implications of PPNs on the Irish political process.

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