

**Research Space**  
Prof Doc Thesis

**Informed, engaged and empowered? : A thicker description of community participation in the setting of coastal adaptation policy in England and Wales**

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## GUIDE TO ACRONYMS

APPG	All Party Parliamentary Group Coastal and Marine
CAPE	Guidance for Community Adaptation Planning and Engagement on the Coast
CC2150	Coastal Communities 2150
CCAG	Coastal Concern Action Group
CDS	Coast Defence Strategy
CSG	Client Steering Group (Isle of Grain to South Foreland Shoreline Management Plan)
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DOC	Defend Our Coast
EA	Environment Agency
EH	English Heritage
FCERM	Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
KSF	Key Stakeholder Forum (Isle of Grain to South Foreland Shoreline Management Plan)
MMO	Marine Management Organisation
MP	Member of Parliament
MPSG	Manhood Peninsula Steering Group
MStaG	Medmerry Stakeholders Advisory Group
NAO	National Audit Office
NE	Natural England
NFU	National Farmers' Union
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NVCC	National Voice for Coastal Communities
POST	Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SMP	Shoreline Management Plan
SOS	Save Our Selsey

UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UKCP09	UK Climate Projections
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

# **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION**

This introductory chapter situates the author's interest, identifies the research problem and the policy context, and establishes the broad geographical and temporal parameters for the study; articulates research questions and hypothesis, and identifies and critically examines key concepts; and, finally, sets out the structure of the thesis and the ways in which the hypothesis will be pursued.

## **The research interest**

Predictions of sea level rise, and sea defence policies bringing the prospect of the abandonment of homes, were a cause of shock and anger to people living around the coast of England and Wales in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The researcher lived in one such location when, in 2007, his family and neighbours learned of a draft coastal management policy that potentially threatened the abandonment of the area to the sea in as little as 20 years. Residents were told they could expect their homes to be lost in the process, with no prospect of compensation as things stood.

Many living in the area agreed that a collective response was required. A letter from the local authority had advised that if residents wanted to challenge the policy they should do so by showing that the decision making process was flawed or that, alternatively, a large consistent objection might initiate a discussion with the government. Although very new to the area, when approached by anxious neighbours the researcher agreed to coordinate a campaign challenging the proposals. He read policy documents and academic studies, and gathered information from his neighbours. What did they think of the recommendations, and the process of consultation? What did they want to

see happen next? People said they felt helpless in the face of what confronted them. They feared financial ruin, and believed that negative effects would be felt as soon as the recommendation, as it stood, became policy. People reported anxiety, sleeplessness and feelings of hopelessness. Some sought medical help.

A petition was launched, and politicians were lobbied. Coalitions were made with rural and environmental campaign groups, the local press was involved, and legal advice sought. Residents also became increasingly conscious of the efforts of officers from their local authority: council engineers provided information and suggested others from whom they might seek advice, resulting in contact with a campaigner on the issue from north Norfolk which revealed that the same problem had descended on people in coastal settlements all around the coast of England and Wales.

The resulting consultation response proposed that managed realignment be deferred to the longer term, and improvements made to defences. Residents explained that they were unimpressed that they had not been fully involved as participants in the policy development process from its early stages. Almost without exception, they were disappointed with the way in which consultation had taken place, with a representative view being that 'minds seem to be already made up and my view does not count'. The consultation process, they argued, bred mistrust and encouraged the belief that ulterior motives were at play.

Representation on this issue was concerted, voluminous and came from many quarters: residents both individually and collectively, the local MP, the local authority, an environmental NGO, and the petition – supported by extensive local and regional press coverage.

The policy was changed to one of continuing to defend into the longer term – a minimum of 50 rather than 100 years. Not long afterwards a sea defence scheme provided limited additional protection for some properties. However, on a neighbouring stretch of coastline, with a similar draft policy



proposal also threatening the longevity of residential properties located there, there was very little recorded response to the consultation and the policy was ratified without amendment. The researcher wondered why this should be, noting in his own case that whilst many had been happy to help with tasks such as seeking signatures for petitions, the task of developing the case against the proposal and dealing with the various parties whose support had been sought had fallen in the main to him. Why should this have been? It had struck him as strange, for example, that of his many retired neighbours, keen to see the proposal changed, none could be persuaded to commit a couple of hours to presenting the petition to the Leader of the local council – in the end, his wife had agreed to take time off work and do it herself. What, he wondered, were the implications of such reticence in terms of sound decisions being made, and might a similar reticence explain the lack of response to proposals in the neighbouring settlement?

## **Background**

In the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the UK government stressed the importance of working in 'partnership' with communities in England and Wales in seeking just outcomes to policies not to defend some coastal areas from the sea in the longer term.

Whilst government acknowledged that some communities would need support in contributing to policy decisions, a critical reading of policy statements and relevant academic literature suggests dissonance between government prescription as stated and the experiences of citizens in terms of their attitudes towards coastal change, their propensity and willingness to make representation through collective action, and in their experience of engagement with authority in this context.

The aims of this thesis are to contribute to a critical understanding of the experiences of people living in coastal locations at risk of coastal erosion in trying to influence sea defence policy, and to discussions around government policy and practice. In so doing, it pursues the premise that socio-economic characteristics, population size, and wider political and social context can be key determinants in the willingness and ability of coastal communities to organize and influence relevant decisions.

The thesis explores both whether larger, well-resourced and better-connected communities are more able than less well-resourced communities to organize as community action groups, form alliances and influence policy decisions; and how socio-economic circumstance informs individuals' willingness and ability to contribute to such efforts. Three broad research questions are posed to this end:

- How successfully do authorities' community participation practices accommodate people's differing needs and concerns?
- To what extent do social, cultural, and economic factors inform the abilities and appetites of people in locations at risk to take action to influence decision-making processes?
- How do community action group representatives experience activism in this context, and what are the implications of this for their effectiveness?

Concerned both geographically and in policy terms with England and Wales, the study covers a period of approximately 13 years (1999-2012), encompassing what O'Riordan *et al* (2006) describe as a paradigm shift in coastal policy away from a stated disposition to defend to one favouring a changing coast, and preference for 'adaptation', and the consolidation of the

concept of 'climate change adaptation'. This period also coincides with a UK policy interest in 'localism', predicated on concerns around public disillusionment with extant political processes, and designed to devolve political power to communities and citizens.

## **From sea defence to Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management**

Portman *et al* (2012) describe the UK coast as playing an important role in the country's history, culture and economy. However, they also identify flooding and erosion as major threats to coastal communities and the country's economy.

As a consequence of policy decisions resulting from the second round of Shoreline Management Plans (SMP)<sup>1</sup> in England and Wales, the issue of coastal flooding and sea defence policy has proven contentious. Whilst the UK government argues that coastal erosion and flooding are not new phenomena (DEFRA/EA, 2011: 6), it acknowledges that flood and coastal erosion risk is expected to increase due to climate change and development in areas at risk (DEFRA/EA, 2011: iii). As such, coastal erosion and flooding, and its implications for some coastal dwellers, has become one of the most visible iterations in the UK of climate change and its effects.

<sup>1</sup> SMPs are 'non-statutory, high level planning documents that provide a 'route map' for managing coastal flooding and erosion risks. They provide the latest information on coastal changes, including social, economic and environmental data and balance these to set sustainable sea flooding and erosion risk management policies for the future' (EA, 2010; p.79). Plans 'set out the approach to achieve long term balanced sustainability of sea flooding and coastal risk management for a specific stretch of coast' with the aim of providing 'the basis for sustainable shoreline management policies over the next 100 years within a natural process unit...' (EA, 2010: 80).

Policy options for each SMP – divided into 'policy units' - are broken down into three time epochs – the short term (0-20 years), the medium term (20-50 years), and the long term (50 to 100 years). In terms of defence options, four possibilities are identified:

- Hold the line – maintain or upgrade the level of protection provided by defences
- Advance the line – build new defences seaward of the existing defence line
- Managed retreat – allow retreat of the shoreline with management to control or limit movement, and
- No active intervention – a decision not to invest in providing or maintaining defences.

Projections of sea level rise inform the 22 SMPs covering the 6,000 kilometres of coastline in England and Wales (DEFRA, 2003). UKCP09 (2012a) forecasts for both London and Cardiff predict that sea level rise (SLR) between the period 1990 and 2095 will fall in the range between 37.3cm and 53.1cm. However, uncertainties are attributed to a lack of knowledge with regard to the rate at which polar ice caps melt, although UKCP09 makes the judgement that the associated 'high impact' range of projections (SLR H++) are unlikely to be realised in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (UKCP09b).

DEFRA makes explicit government's position that it will defend the coast only where it is sustainable to do so, and that it does not plan to compensate individuals for any loss of property – sea defence being a permissive power under the 1949 Coast Protection Act (HMSO, 1949). Whilst for the vast majority of people the SMP process has resulted in confirmation that they will be defended from the sea indefinitely, others have learned that as a consequence of unfavourable cost benefit analysis calculations (DEFRA, 2009d) defences are likely to be abandoned at some point – and their homes with them (DEFRA, 2009b: 7).

This has proven contentious. A 2009 analysis of national adaptation strategies in European countries, referring to the UK, states that:

*The debate about the extent to which sea defences should be strengthened or 'managed realignment' planned for has been very controversial in some places (Swart et al, 2009: 266).*

This was subsequently echoed by The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), which highlighted friction between government policy and local communities, observing that:

*In places where the perceived threat to property and community vitality is high, community action groups have formed to seek policy change or compensation for loss (2010: 4).*

More specifically, many respondents to DEFRA's *Consultation on Coastal Change Policy* (DEFRA, 2009b) observed that government support for communities identified as being at risk would be appropriate on the basis that coastal erosion is exacerbated by man-made climate change (DEFRA, 2010b: 8), with a number arguing for compensation for loss of property. None of the 15 individuals and community groups responding felt that the proposed assistance package (assistance with moving to a new home of up to £1,000 and the costs of demolishing property) was set at the right level (DEFRA, 2010b: 9). O'Riordan *et al* (2006) offer the explanation for conflict that:

*...despite the long-held political and legal position that coastal defence is a discretionary responsibility for central and local government and the various responsible executive agencies, local residents and businesses have come to expect that 'hold the line' is a feasible and preferred option (2006: 11).*

This view, they argue, is challenged by the fact that coastal management policy and practice in England and Wales were going through 'a revolution'. Whereas pre-2004 a presumption to defend the coast held sway, O'Riordan *et al* (2006) point to a new orthodoxy favouring coastal change (with the identified ramifications) rather than blanket defence, with decision-making in the gift of central government rather than local authorities (see Table 1). Government has itself described this approach as a shift from a flood defence doctrine to a policy framework of flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM) [DEFRA/EA, 2008]. The emphasis, it says, is no longer on defending against floods but rather on:

*...actions that can be taken to manage these risks and reduce the impacts on communities (DEFRA/EA, 2011: 1).*

**Table 1: From flood defence to Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM)**

Pre 2004	Post 2004
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold the line</li> <li>• Modest managed realignment</li> <li>• Use of cost-benefit analysis and points scoring system for project justification</li> <li>• Local authority autonomy over coastal protection and planning</li> <li>• Modest use of SMPs, with a general attempt to maintain the status quo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change the coast unless 'hold the line' is unavoidable, or change is politically unacceptable</li> <li>• Make space for water and sediment</li> <li>• Adaptation is introduced</li> <li>• Cost-benefit analysis, risk criteria in multi-criteria analysis and points scoring much more important as guides to project management</li> <li>• Local authorities possibly in a weaker role</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from O’Riordan et al (2006: 19)

### **Adapting to change**

A key concept in FCERM is that of ‘adaptation’. Smit and Wandel (2006) suggest that whilst there are numerous definitions to be found in the literature on climate change, they are mostly variations on a theme:

*Adaptation in the context of human dimensions of global change usually refers to a process, action or outcome (system, household, community, group, sector, region, country) in order for the system to better cope with, manage or adjust to some changing condition, hazard, risk or opportunity (2006: 282).*

In rich countries, the United Nations (UN 2007) suggests, coping with climate change to date has largely been a matter of adjusting thermometers, dealing with longer hotter summers, and observing seasonal shifts. As sea levels rise, it observes:

*Cities like London and Los Angeles may face flooding risks...but their inhabitants are protected by elaborate flood defence systems (2007: 9).*

However, the UN also observes that even those in the richest countries can be vulnerable, and that this is exacerbated when 'impacts interact with institutionalized inequality' (2007: 16).

Swart *et al* stress (2009) that national climate change adaptation strategies in Europe will always involve a mixture of approaches which it classifies broadly as:

- Living with risks/bearing losses - an approach that accepts that certain systems, behaviours and activities can no longer be sustained,
- Preventing effects/reducing exposures - illustrated by the practice of implementing technical solutions, such as sea defences, and
- Sharing responsibility – an approach which implies sharing the responsibility for financial and social losses or exposure to risk with insurances.

The authors assert that different emphases can be noted between countries in relation to how they deal with risk and make decisions about different adaptation options<sup>2</sup>. A comparison of national adaptation approaches is beyond the scope of this study; however, given the post-2004 UK orthodoxy of allowing areas of coast to be lost to the sea (and for homeowners largely to bear the costs of the loss of their homes) it is reasonable to argue that the UK has, to some extent at least, migrated from the second adaptation category of 'preventing effects/reducing exposures' to one of 'living with risks/bearing

<sup>2</sup> In July 2008 the UK published its first national adaptation strategy, *Adapting to Climate Change in England: A Framework for Action* (DEFRA, 2008).

losses', with those losses to be borne significantly by individuals. This position would appear to sit at some odds with Adger's (2010) analysis that if human activities are indeed the cause of climate change, then adaptation must involve issues such as compensation and liability.

By way of mitigation where homes are to be lost to the sea, the UK government (DEFRA, 2009b) states an intention to support communities in adapting to the physical, social and economic effects of change; with a long-term intention that adaptation to coastal change should be part of mainstream decision-making and funding. Local authorities have recently trialled approaches:

*...which seek to support better informed communities able to shape decisions and innovative approaches to build local adaptation solutions (DEFRA, 2009b: 20).<sup>3</sup>*

DEFRA-commissioned guidance for local authorities specific to this purpose – 'Guidance for Community Adaptation Planning and Engagement (CAPE) on the Coast' [DEFRA 2009c] - states that:

*...communities that are most at risk to coastal change (sic) must be informed, engaged, and empowered to take an active part in what happens locally (2009c: 7).*

Just solutions, then, appear to be significantly contingent on the abilities and appetites of people in local settlements at risk to exert influence on decision-making processes, consistent with a pluralist confidence that competitive politics will produce more satisfactory outcomes. Government (DEFRA, 2009c) acknowledges that this requires the building of 'adaptive capacity' and making

<sup>3</sup> DEFRA/EA concludes that, because both flood and coastal erosion risk management and social justice are so multi-faceted, there can be no single model of social justice. Instead, there should be a focus on ensuring that the range of social justice concerns is adequately accounted for in policy and practice. (2008: 15)



good use of communities' knowledge and resources in helping find 'new ways of solving complex problems'.

In targeting those 'most at risk' for engagement, CAPE guidance methodology appears to have potential as a corrective to the dominant utilitarian model of cost benefit analysis adopted for decision-making on where, and for how long, to invest in sea defences<sup>4</sup>. However, in its analysis of impacts on communities affected by coastal change it appears to conflate a community's size with the extent of impact suffered. By this logic few people affected would appear to indicate low impact, raising the possibility that smaller populations may be overlooked. Second, CAPE has it that extensive engagement might be recommended where consultation is characterised by '(potential or actual) high conflict, controversy and uncertainty about the problem' although, again, this is 'most likely to affect many' (2009c: 23). Thus, the guidance appears to assume an awareness and capacity on the part of affected communities that might inform coherent and powerful protest and subsequent involvement in policy deliberation. Both of these points warrant further consideration.

### **Community empowerment and the shift towards Localism**

'Empowerment' of people and communities has been prominent in the policy narratives of early 21<sup>st</sup> century UK governments. For New Labour, the Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) *Communities in Control* white paper (2008) acknowledged growing disenchantment with formal political mechanisms citing declining electoral turnout and political party membership and, locally, a majority who do not feel councillors represent their views. In response, 'empowerment' has been described as:

<sup>4</sup> DEFRA/EA points to an appetite amongst policy makers for utility principles, resulting in inequality in outcomes. As a consequence, the authors conclude: 'the vulnerable are not generally seen as adequately accounted for...in decisions' (2008: ii).

*...passing more and more political power to more and more people...away from existing centres of power into the hands of communities and individual citizens* (DCLG, 2008: 2).

The Conservative Party too (the dominant partners in the 2010 UK Coalition government) [2010: 1] has sought to give people more power, equating growing unfairness with an expanding state and in pursuit of what its 2010 draft election manifesto called 'the post-bureaucratic age'.

Such rhetoric is consistent with a shift from what Held (1987) describes as elitist political theories, that see a relatively uncomplicated (if perhaps unsatisfying) relationship between individual citizen and elected leadership, to a 'pluralist' analysis. Proponents of the latter are interested in what Held describes as the dynamics of group politics arguing that modern democratic politics see relationships between citizen and state mediated by groups such as community associations, religious bodies, trade unions and others which cut across people's lives and connect them in complex ways to a variety of types of institution.

Through such arrangements, he tells us, pluralists argue that modern democratic politics are more competitive and consequently more satisfactory.

In the context of coastal planning and development, DEFRA is responsible for developing national environmental policies, while the EA is responsible for the strategic coordination of FCERM. Conservation of natural habitats and biodiversity is the main role of Natural England, which collaborates with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) in establishing and managing marine conservation zones. However, a tension between central and local prescription was created in that local authorities were given greater say in local planning and the implementation of flood risk management measures under the 2011 Localism Act, with Statements of Community Involvement prescribing how communities should be involved in the making of such decisions (Portman *et al*, 2012: 65).

'Community' is a key word in policy considerations relevant to coastal change. For example, government's current FCERM strategy (DEFRA/EA, 2011) yields around 70 such references in the main copy. These occur in a variety of contexts - there are references to 'community-level' and 'property level' action, people, individuals, businesses, householders, community groups, representatives of communities at risk and community volunteers. However, these various 'units' of description tend to be subsumed under simple references to 'community' in discussions of policy deliberation and action. FCERM policy proposes that:

*The risk management authorities should work in partnership with communities to understand the community perspective of flooding and coastal erosion...and encourage them to have direct involvement in decision-making and risk management actions (DEFRA/EA, 2011: 14).*

Whilst perhaps understandable for purposes of readability, this statement raises questions such as whether government is right to assume single community perspectives, under what conditions local perspectives translate into an appetite for action, how such populations go about defending their interests and the resources available to them in this regard, and whether resulting interactions with government might justifiably be characterised as 'partnership'.

'Community' is an elusive concept. Smith (2001) observes that the relevant literature has focused variously on geographical area, on groups of people living in a particular place, and on community as an 'area of common life'. However, he cites Lee and Newby in pointing out that physical proximity does not necessarily mean that people share perspectives or even have much to do with each other, and Bott, who argues for the importance of social relationships in understanding 'community'. Associated with this, Blaug *et al* (2006) highlight a crisis of trust in government – that a politically disinterested public is hard to

mobilise in pursuit of public services and that apathy and mistrust of government threaten a 'legitimation deficit'.

With regard to any realisation of the anticipated benefits of localism, Corry and Stoker observe that a 'genuine transition to devolved and decentralised government' is yet to be achieved and that 'the centre still has a large hand hovering over the tiller' (cited by Blaug *et al* [2006: 24]), whilst Amin sees the 'discourse of community' to be attended by unrealistic assumptions (cited by Blaug *et al* [2006: 29]). A Joseph Rowntree Foundation 'round up' of findings drawn largely from its Government and Public Services research programme (Foot, 2009) suggests conflicting views as to how far communities and citizens can exercise substantial influence over decisions about public services with the author proposing that involvement in such processes (and any benefits accruing) are not equally distributed.

Whilst government acknowledges that some communities may need support in contributing to policy deliberation, the terms on which such support might be required or allocated are not made clear. Perhaps more fundamentally, it is worth asking whether any such requirement for support may preclude local people mounting the kind of action necessary to trigger the consideration of authorities in the first place. We might ask, therefore, whether engagement between citizens and government on the setting of coastal policy ameliorates social inequalities, as intended, or reproduces them.

## Thesis structure

Exploration of these issues, guided by the stated research questions, is explored via the following thesis structure:

**Table 2: Thesis structure**

Chapter		Content summary
1	<b>Introduction</b>	Establishes the issue, policy context, key concepts, research aims and hypothesis, and research questions.
2	<b>Methodology</b>	Describes research approach, design and methods; discusses epistemology/ontology; and considers issues around rigour.
3	<b>The involvement of communities in UK coastal governance</b>	Reviews academic and policy literature, and establishes theoretical framework for further enquiry.
4	<b>The setting of local coastal policy</b>	Describes socio-economic and geographic features of local cases, explores the incorporation of local concerns in deliberative processes, and considers how findings might be applied to similar contexts.
5	<b>Mobilizing interest at local level</b>	Considers how people in local case studies mounted collective action in pursuit of influence, with reference to socio-economic context.
6	<b>Mobilizing interest at national level</b>	Describes the formation of a national-level lobbying group and the nature of its engagement with government, and appraises the results.
7	<b>Experiences of activism</b>	Considers socio-economic differences in exploring the motivations, roles and experiences of action group representatives, and implications for effectiveness of collective action.
8	<b>Conclusion</b>	Explores the utility of different renderings of social class in analysis of the effects of socio-demographic factors on collective action, and implications for policy and

		practice.
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## **Chapter 2: METHODOLOGY**

This study seeks an understanding of the role of socio-economic profile, size and wider political and social context in determining the willingness and ability of people living in coastal locations identified as being at risk to organize and influence coastal planning and related adaptation decisions. It explores whether larger, well-resourced and better-connected communities are more able to organise as community action groups, form alliances and influence policy

decisions; and how socio-economic circumstance informs individuals' willingness and ability to contribute to such efforts. These interests are pursued via three broad research questions:

- How successfully do authorities' community participation practices accommodate people's differing needs and concerns?
- To what extent do social, cultural, and economic factors inform the abilities and appetites of people in locations at risk to take action to influence decision-making processes?
- How do community action group representatives experience activism in this context, and what are the implications of this for their effectiveness?

A multiple case study approach is employed in considering the actions and experiences of people in distinctive contexts. Two – those of the setting of specific coastal policies and associated collective response on the Isle of Sheppey (Kent) [hitherto referred to as Sheppey] and at Selsey (west Sussex) – are undertaken for purposes of comparison. A third, that of the National Voice of Coastal Communities (NVCC), explores collective grassroots efforts to influence policy at national level and, in so doing, extends consideration of action at local level (see Figure 1).

***Figure 1: key study locations***



The study adopts an approach to inquiry that, in the conduct of applied qualitative research, seeks accommodation between the potentially distinctive ontologies of positivism and constructivism, and in terms of method favours the gathering and analysis of people's stories in their broader social context. Such an approach brings dilemmas that must be addressed if findings are to be defensible. Accordingly, this chapter both details and problematises research methods and approach, with a view to satisfying Seale's imperative that:

*good practice... can be achieved through...showing the audience of research studies as much as is possible of the procedures that have led to a particular set of conclusions...* (cited in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 272).

Particular attention is paid to issues of rigour as they apply to the researcher's own experience of activism in the context studied.



Finally, this chapter makes a case for generalisation appropriate to the research approach employed, and useful in developing ‘thicker descriptions’<sup>5</sup> of the involvement of communities in policy deliberation than those available hereafter in policy prescription and academic literature.

## **Research approach**

The intended outcome of the study is a better understanding of how policy aspirations and actions are experienced and acted upon by people collectively, and the implications of this for the pursuit of just social outcomes. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) observe that the study of the social world has always been attended by philosophical debates, with a key question concerning the existence of a ‘captive social reality’ and how it should be constructed.

Positivism, associated with the ‘standard view’ of science, has researchers seeking consistent relationships between variables in pursuit of causal explanation of natural world phenomena (Robson, 2002). Central to this approach are the ideas that objective knowledge can be had through experience or observation, that this is best delivered through quantitative experimental research, that the neutrality of the researcher is essential and, importantly for our purposes, that these same principles apply to the social sciences (Snape and Spencer, 2003).

However, tenets associated with positivism have been criticised from a number of philosophical standpoints. For example, the notion of the neutral researcher has been challenged, with the counter-argument offered that what observers see is determined by their own qualities as well as the characteristics of

<sup>5</sup> The term ‘thick description’, commonly associated with Geertz, can be traced to Ryle’s distinction between thinner and thicker descriptions of actions. Olson (1988) explains that ‘...description can be thickened by reflecting on purpose...by considering situation...We have to interpret activity to know it’ (1988: 3-4).

what is being observed. Critical researchers point to analysis generated via asymmetric power relationships between researchers and the researched. Interpretivist approaches, associated with qualitative methods, reject the natural science model with its emphasis on causal generalisation in favour of a focus on understanding and rich description (Snape and Spencer, 2003), with concerns expressed around the idea that replication of research exercises is appropriate in qualitative research, given the complexity and dynamism of social phenomena (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). More fundamentally, interpretivist researchers have taken issue with the idea of an objectively knowable reality, suggesting instead that in human affairs meaning and knowledge are constructed by people located in specific social contexts, and are best revealed through methods such as interview and observation (Robson, 2002).

A significantly, although not exclusively, interpretivist approach is compatible with the overriding aim of this study, which is to contribute to the understanding and resolution of a contemporary issue. Snape and Spencer (2003) argue that such applied research lends itself to qualitative inquiry which, they assert, is consistent with understanding context or process. Whilst there is no dispute with the idea of an external reality, or with a range of 'materially' established facts – for example, concerning issues of geography, socio-demographic composition and decision-making processes – any interest in how people respond to the challenges presented by the policy process requires an understanding of their values, beliefs and experiences.

Thus, the research approach taken is predicated on the interpretation of Snape and Spencer (2003) that:

*...the social world does exist independently of individual subjective understanding, but...is only accessible to us via the respondents' interpretations...we believe that the external reality is diverse and multifaceted...and our underlying aim is to apprehend and convey as full a picture as is possible of the nature of that multifaceted reality" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 19-20).*

This, in turn, might be bolstered critically by Plummer's (1983) assertion that:

*...we must acknowledge that experiencing individuals can never be isolated from their functioning bodies and their constraining social worlds... (1983: 54).*

## **Research design**

The conceptual and theoretical framework for this study – drawing upon Tilly's (1978) framework for the analysis of collective action and Bourdieu's (1983) theory of capitals – posits a world inhabited by a plurality of motivated actors, exchanges between whom inform decisions and actions. An appraisal of the utility of these frameworks/theories is undertaken in Chapter 3; relevant to considerations of methodology, however, is that the research aims of the study and its theoretical approach are compatible in that they encourage what Yin (1994) – discussing the merits of the case study approach – describes as the investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. In other words, we are principally interested in the attitudes and experiences of actors within wider, dynamic institutional contexts, each populated by diverse interests, which makes a case study approach eminently suitable.

Accordingly, a multiple case study approach is employed with a view to exploring, describing, comparing and even explaining the actions and experiences of people in distinctive contexts – informed by a review of secondary sources, and interviews with activists, politicians (operating at national, local and parish levels), local authority coastal engineers, relevant central government Executive Agency staff, and others with salient perspectives to offer.

What constitutes a 'case study' has been subject to contest. Whereas definitions have variously cited 'individuals', 'organizations', 'processes', 'programs', 'neighbourhoods', 'institutions' and 'events' as major foci, Yin

considers the case study to be an approach that is not tied to a particular topic or unit of analysis, and does not favour any particular research method or type of evidence. This places the approach in some contrast to others which, he suggests, are less suitable for capturing and making sense of the ‘messiness’ of human affairs as they unfold.

However, Yin warns that questions that do not lead to the favouring of one unit of analysis over another are probably either too vague or too numerous; thus, a challenge lies in identifying discrete and comparable units when a guiding theoretical premise is that the actions of groups and the individuals that comprise them only make proper sense through interactions in the wider, and even societal, context. Accordingly, at various times the study considers decision-making systems as a whole, activities and trajectories of various interest groups and the relationships between them, and the experiences of sub-groups and individuals that comprise them (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Research questions and units of analysis – an approximation**

	Research questions	Units of analysis		
		Micro	Meso	Macro
1	How successfully do authorities’ community participation practices accommodate people’s differing needs and concerns?	X	X	X
2	To what extent do social, cultural and economic factors inform the abilities and appetites of people in locations at risk to take action to influence decision-making processes?	X	X	
3	How do community action group representatives experience activism in this context, and what are the implications of this for their effectiveness?	X		

## The cases

Selection of the two local studies sought to follow Yin's recommendation that, within multiple case studies, cases should be selected either because they predict similar results, or contrasting results but for predictable reasons.

**Table 4: Local case study sites – key contrasts and commonalities**

	<b>Selsey</b>	<b>Isle of Sheppey</b>
<b>Population (approx.)</b>	12,000	40,300
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Predominantly white	Predominantly white
<b>Educational achievement</b>	Poor	Poor
<b>Industrial base</b>	Service sector  Seasonal employment	Distribution, hotels and catering  Tourism  Prisons
<b>Age profile</b>	Older population	Age profile in line with England
<b>Indices of Deprivation</b>	Middling	Swale within most deprived 35% of local authorities. 11 of Borough's 15 most deprived Super Output Areas on Sheppey.
<b>Housing tenure</b>	High levels of owner-occupation	High levels of owner-occupation
<b>Extent and nature of public response to draft coastal policies</b>	Extensive, initially hostile, collective	Sparse, hostile, individual.

Besides offering convenience (in terms of respondent access in the Selsey case, and physical proximity in the Sheppey case), these two cases were selected on the basis of the extent of known local response to what appeared to be a common issue – the predicted loss of homes under preferred coastal policies. With contrasting outcomes established, the task of the study became one of establishing the reasons. Table 4 offers broad points of comparison with which to test this study's broad proposition – that larger, well-resourced and better-connected communities are better able to organise as community action groups, gather the necessary resources, form alliances and influence policy decisions. At first glance, Selsey appears to be less deprived and older, but not dissimilar to Sheppey in terms of its industrial and employment profile. However, it also appears to be significantly smaller in terms of population, and an obvious question concerns whether or not this fact confounds the part of the proposition concerning size.

Selsey and Sheppey are distinct as units of analysis for at least some comparative purposes. First, the risk to homes under draft preferred policies in each case does not apply to all in the area under study: not all homes in Selsey were at risk, and in only two settlements on Sheppey did the draft SMP identify the likelihood of such a loss – at Leysdown and Warden, with a ward population of 3,019 (ONS, [no date]d), and Minster Cliffs with 7,513 (ONS, [no date]e). Testing of the central thesis as it concerns the size of communities makes comparisons between distinctive locales within each study, then, as well as comparing the case study areas themselves.

On Sheppey, a problem arose in terms of determining a useful boundary to the study in that there appeared to be very little public response at all to the draft SMP – and certainly no grassroots collective action – that might be linked specifically to areas where homes were identified as being at risk. However, extending the case to include the island as a whole (whilst remaining mindful of

distinctive locales within it), and taking in recent action related to sea defences but not tied specifically to the setting of the SMP, proved enlightening in terms of understanding the public response.

To conclude on the selection of the case study areas, whilst coastal plans relate ultimately to geographies, their settings involve actors operating within disparate institutional contexts, corresponding to distinctive geographies which can, themselves, be contentious and fluid. We will see, for example, that in the Selsey case the geographical notion of a coastal 'frontage' as a unit of analysis for the setting of the Pagham to East Head CDS (EA *et al*, 2008) became a point of deliberative contention. Nor do the geographical areas covered by coastal planning efforts map neatly onto local authority or other administrative boundaries. Thus, whilst Selsey and Sheppey are doubtlessly problematic as geographically-bounded cases, they are arguably no more so than any alternatives. Perhaps more important is that geography might usefully be seen as a *starting point*, with the locus of interest lying more usefully in interactions between interested actors in the relevant institutional settings.

Whilst different from Selsey and Sheppey cases, the NVCC case can assist with a broader understanding of collective action across the whole. We will see, for example, that a key activist in the Selsey case was also heavily involved with NVCC as part of local collective action that extended beyond the local to addressing a grievance at national level. Similarly, another informant explains how national-level lobbying helped to bolster his credibility with others at local level. There is no such involvement from the Sheppey case, and consideration of the difficulties NVCC experienced in recruiting local groups assists with an understanding of the influence of social, cultural and economic factors on collective action. Finally, the NVCC case offers distinctive evidence of the experiences of activists, not least in helping to both extend and triangulate those reported at local level.

## **Data gathering and analysis**

Data gathering was undertaken in two main phases:

### 1. Literature review

A review of academic and national-level policy literature, conducted using Internet and on-line academic library searches, covered:

- Historical analysis of UK coastal defence and flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM) policies.
- Critical appraisal of modes of governance, and as they relate to community engagement in general and to climate change adaptation and FCERM in particular.
- Critical appraisal of the utility of Tilly's (1978) framework for the analysis of collective action and Bourdieu's (1983) theory of capitals for conceptualisation and explanation in this context.

### 2. Case studies

- Across the three cases a total of 17 formal interviews were undertaken, along with four annotated meetings on Sheppey (with an activist, a local authority officer, a parish councillor and a journalist) and one in Selsey (with an activist). These were augmented by two site visits each to Sheppey and Selsey.
- Case specific literature review was also undertaken, covering policy documents, minutes of meetings and events, submissions made in consultation exercises, media reports, and other written commentaries by activists. Annotated participant observation took place at project



workshops, held on Sheppey, for the European Union-funded Coastal Communities 2150 research project<sup>6</sup>. All annotations were recorded in the researcher's journal, which also logged details of his own activism during the period 2007-13.

The principal means of gathering primary data in each of the three cases, Robson (2002) describes the interview as a flexible, adaptable and direct way of finding things out and answering research questions. With two exceptions, interviews were held with individuals on their own. In the remaining two cases, an activist was interviewed with his wife, with her participation encouraged; and in the other, at their request, a group interview was held with Environment Agency (EA) officials.

Data analysis was undertaken as two distinctive exercises:

- Literature review saw critical reading aligned to systematic cross-referencing of themes and actors, paying particular attention to issues of social justice and modes of governance – both generically and in relation specifically to coastal change at both national and local levels.
- For case studies, data analysis saw the use of qualitative data analysis software in both theoretical and generative coding of themes – derived from close reading and annotation of verbatim interview transcripts and supporting documentation. Theoretical coding drew upon *a priori* concepts implicit in the theoretical framework for the study and derived from literature review, whilst 'free' codes reflected attention to cases,

<sup>6</sup> Funded by INTERREG 2 Seas Programme and European Development Funds. Partners involved Environment Agency, Kent County Council, Alterra (Stichting DLO), Province West-Vlaanderen and Agency for Maritime and Coastal Services – Coastal Division (EA, 2013: 1)

respondent categories, narrative and discourse features, and emotional components (Bazeley, 2007).

Overall, the analytical strategy saw mixed approaches applied to the development of pattern codes in service of a broadly phenomenological approach (Bazeley, 2007).

## **Methodological issues**

To adopt an approach to inquiry that accommodates interpretivist orthodoxies is to inherit dilemmas that must be addressed if findings are to be defensible to mainstream audiences.

Yin (1994) observes that the case study approach has traditionally been considered weak among social science methods, and is regarded as having insufficient precision, objectivity and rigour. This demands that particular attention is paid to issues of reliability and validity, and especially with accounts that deviate from the positivist orthodoxies associated with the natural sciences, or the realist tradition within the social sciences.

## **Reliability and validity**

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), reliability is:

*generally understood to concern the replicability of research findings and whether or not they would be repeated if another study, using the same or similar methods, was undertaken (2003: 270).*

Whilst this makes clear sense for research paradigms associated with controlled experiments, the authors raise the objections that for constructivists there is no single, discoverable reality to capture (let alone reproduce), and that the idea of replicability is further rendered naïve given the complexity and

context-specific nature of phenomena being studied. Accordingly, their interest shifts to consideration of whether what is found within the original data would recur outside of the study population, with an associated consideration around whether the constructions placed on the data are rigorously derived.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) highlight:

*debate amongst qualitative researchers about the extent to which triangulation is useful in checking the validity of data or whether it is more a means of widening or deepening understanding of a subject through the combination of multiple readings (2003: 275).*

Snape and Spencer (2003) assert that, unlike the natural sciences, where the purpose is to produce law-like propositions, the aim in the social sciences is to understand subjectively meaningful experiences. Of the former, Robson (2002) proposes that:

*...if we can explain, we can predict, and vice versa. But in open systems...while the future cannot be predicted, the past can be explained by establishing the particular configuration which was in existence (2002: 41).*

Whilst predictive generalisation is beyond the scope of this study, exploring and explaining patterns within what has happened in the cases with a view to better understanding what may be happening in similar cases is a realistic aim. To this end, two distinctive forms of triangulation are employed in pursuit of a quality of understanding as advocated by Ritchie and Lewis (2003): *triangulation of sources* (comparing data from different qualitative methods such as observations, interviews and documented accounts); and *theory triangulation* (looking at data from different theoretical perspectives).

With regard to validity in essentially constructivist research inquiry, Ritchie and Lewis suggest that the primary question concerns whether phenomena under study as perceived by the study population are reflected accurately. This, they propose, requires scrutiny of sample coverage with an eye

on bias and criteria for inclusion, and consideration of the environment in which data was gathered – in other words, whether interview questioning was sufficiently effective for participants to fully express/explore their views.

### **Sampling strategy – selecting informants**

An original schema for the selection of informants for the local cases (Table 5) proved hard to achieve, for two main reasons. First, and perhaps most significant, is that the plan assumed a common degree of concern amongst local people across the two cases that, in the event, did not obviously materialise. On Sheppey, locating individuals associated with grass roots collective action was difficult: conversations with elected representatives, officials and others offered no encouragement that local groups of any kind had formed around the issue of houses at risk under SMP draft policies. The second issue was one of access to informants: whilst, in the Selsey case at least, it may have been possible to find local residents fitting the profiles described in terms of tenure and risk, in practice this proved difficult. People had moved away from the area or even died, and as will become clear in the following chapters, many ceased to maintain an interest. The principal result of this was to render impractical any detailed examination of how housing tenure and perception of risk interacted to form attitudes, although this is partly mitigated as the subject arose in other testimonies.

**Table 5: Original informant scheme for local cases**

	<b>Selsey</b>	<b>Sheppey</b>
Policy officials		
Local political representatives		
Community allies		
Activists		
(heavily involved)		
(marginally/previously involved)		
Residents		
(Home owner – home at risk)		
(Home – home not at risk)		
(Renter – home at risk)		
(Renter – home not at risk)		

Accordingly, the idea of seeking testimony from residents *uninvolved* as activists was abandoned. However, a simplified scheme maintaining aspects of the original plan was developed (see Table 6) that sought to differentiate between, on the one hand, elected representatives at various levels, government officials at various levels, and activists (as interested members of the public). This, it was rationalised, broadly represented key groups of actors in terms of deliberative processes.

**Table 6: Revised informant scheme for local cases**

	<b>Selsey</b>	<b>Sheppey</b>
Executive Agency officials	2	
Local authority coastal engineers with policy setting responsibilities	1	1
National political representatives		1
Local authority councillors		2
Town/parish councillors and officials	2	2
Activists	1	1

As with the geographical framing of local cases, the fit between categories and actors proved to be less than watertight in practice. An issue arising was the discovery that some of the respondents either occupied more than one category at the outset of the study, or moved between categories over the duration of their interest in the issue. For example, one informant began his ‘career’ in coastal change activism as a founder of a grassroots group before being elected as a local authority councillor, whilst his colleague went on to become chair of his local town council. Elsewhere, a borough councillor also had a role as a parish councillor – whilst there is no obvious tension between these two roles, evidence taken from interviews suggests significant differences in the two functions (for example, with regard to their inclusion as key stakeholders in deliberative processes).

Such categories are important for purposes of comparison, but are hard to establish definitively for the reasons given. Accordingly, actors were categorised by the capacity in which they were *first approached*, with any ambiguities or changes in their situations identified and considered at appropriate points.

The revised informant schema for the two local studies, for which efforts were made at achieving optimum symmetry across the two cases, was successful up to a point, although the apparent absence of collective grass roots action on Sheppey made this difficult to fulfil.

In the light of this a revised strategy was developed for Sheppey – in short, given that there appeared to be no grassroots activists on the issue under consideration, interviews were sought with those who had attempted to mobilize others on this or related issues, and those well placed to comment on mobilization in other contexts, and on the political interests, skills and appetites for collective representation of the local population.

Potential informants were identified from policy and related literature or by 'snowball sampling', or were already known to the researcher – for example through activity with NVCC. However, in neither case was gaining access to desired interviewees straightforward. In the Selsey case, unsuccessful attempts were made to obtain interviews with various activists and officials. In the Sheppey case, some local politicians – both at borough and parish level – proved equally reticent. More pertinently, although contact was made with homeowners at Shell Ness whose properties were at risk, repeated attempts to gain interviews proved fruitless. Nonetheless, an overall spread of respondents for the two cases was achieved that, whilst not representative in any statistically meaningful sense, can be said to represent actors in each case salient to the research questions.

Identifying informants and gaining access was a more straightforward proposition for the NVCC case, as the main protagonists were known to the researcher who had been closely involved in the group's activities. This being a purposive study of activity involving, for the most part, a discrete group of people, the sample might be said to have been largely self-selecting. All but one of those who might have been considered central NVCC actors agreed to an interview, although it is of note that the one who did not was female – not least because across the spread of interviews women's voices proved to be a relative rarity. In addition to NVCC members, an interview was also obtained with an officer of the non-governmental organisation with which it worked closely. However, efforts to obtain interviews with central government and Executive Agency officials who might have been able to lend useful perspectives on government's expectations, and experience, of dealing with NVCC, were unsuccessful as officials had either left their roles or did not respond to requests for interviews.

### **Interviewing strategy**

Digitally-recorded semi-structured interviews were undertaken in each case, informed by a schedule of questions<sup>7</sup> for different categories of respondents both within and across cases. Robson (2002) warns that any departure from the full standardisation of questions associated with structured interviews comes with a concern over reliability – for example in the shape of interviewer bias. However, in following interview schedules in the way described, a degree of reliability was assured, although not at the expense of flexibility; where necessary, the order of the schedule and degree of depth allowed for each question was adapted to fit the interviewee's narrative, allowing unanticipated insights to emerge. As a further guarantee of reliability, reflection on interview planning and practice was

<sup>7</sup> Examples in Appendix A.



recorded as interview notes (made as soon as was practical after the conclusion of interviews), which proved particularly useful in considering issues of researcher positionality.

### **Positionality and bias**

Geertz's (1975) observation that anthropological writings are themselves second or even third order interpretations draws attention to the researcher's potential influence on findings – problematic, of course, in natural science and related settings. Much appears to fall on the ability of the researcher to use data even-handedly, and to exercise self-awareness and – arising from this – 'self-management'. Gillham (2005) stresses the need to avoid serving ideological or populist purposes whilst conceding that is hard to avoid when we are blind to aspects of our attitudinal make-up.

Interest in the questions under consideration here was born from the researcher's experience of community representation in this context, with part of the rationale a desire to help effect change to government policy and related practice. Given that the study has, in part, drawn upon data gathered from activists working in community action groups, a world in which the researcher was closely involved for a number of years, considerations of positionality and bias require particular attention. Thorne, quoted by Blee and Taylor (2002), describes a:

*...problematic balance, a dialectic between being an insider, a participant in the world one studies, and an outsider, observing and reporting on that world (2002: 97).*

For some of the time that fieldwork was being undertaken, a challenge lay in the maintenance and management of both pre-existing working and research relationships with some informants. For example, as will become apparent, a proportion of fieldwork was undertaken at a time of uncertainty over

the constitution and priorities of NVCC – a process in which the researcher was closely involved as a member, and which formed an area of interest for research.

Simultaneously, the researcher continued to maintain contact, and even working relationships, with officers from the EA and a local authority represented in this study. Such relationships pertained to the researcher's own activism with regard to questions of sea defence and associated decision-making; thus, research activity was attended by concerns not to disrupt what in some cases were already fragile relationships, whilst posing meaningful questions.

Participant information sheets detailing the purpose of the project and arrangements pertaining to ethical considerations were prepared for informants, each of whom signed a consent form. Discussion of the ethical implications of participation was encouraged, and some interviewees sought, and were granted, assurances concerning the timing of publication and the institutional capacities in which they were quoted. Worthy of mention in this regard was the development of an approach to interviewing that saw interviews prefaced with an explanation to respondents of the genesis of the research interest, including reflections upon the researcher's own experiences as an activist. The rationale was that such an approach would a) provide useful context for questions and, no less importantly, b) make explicit the question and nature of the researcher's positionality, with a view to both allaying any concerns that interviewees might have harboured, and encouraging a reciprocal candour.

### **Data management**

Data collected on interviewees was securely stored, in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and in accordance with European Directive 95/46/CE.

Interview and personal material stored electronically was anonymised using a

coding system and is accessible only to the researcher. Any data held in paper files was also stored securely, with access again limited to the researcher.<sup>8</sup>

## **Generalisation**

Snape and Spencer (2003) assert that in the natural sciences, the purpose is to produce law-like propositions whereas in the social sciences, the aim is to understand subjectively meaningful experiences. Writing about comparative analysis in the context of social movement research, Della Porta (2002) favours the pursuit of 'thick descriptions' of a few cases leading to 'causality linked to specific contexts', and cites Mair in observing that recent comparativists have contented themselves with a relatively middle-range or even a low-level abstraction, with context a crucial determinant. She goes further still in suggesting that comparative analysis:

*...allows us to shift...towards understanding more clearly the causality and meaning of a certain situation for the actors involved (2002: 307).*

To conclude on the subject of generalisation, broadly interpretive accounts of social phenomena might be said to involve an intellectual trade-off, with a reduced ambition in terms of knowledge generation allowing for the application of a different order of rigour. This sits comfortably with the broad aim of this study in exploring, comparing – and perhaps even explaining – the experiences of communities, action groups, individuals and authority actors *in distinctive contexts* as they seek solutions to the problems posed by sea level rise, and associated coastal planning.

<sup>8</sup> Examples of participant ethical and data management compliance information sheets in Appendix B.

A broad focus on understanding the phenomenon under scrutiny resonates with this study's interest in developing 'thicker descriptions' than those hitherto available in policy prescription and academic literature as it applies to England and Wales – not law-like propositions, but instead what Patton, cited in Ritchie and Lewis (2003) sees as modest speculations on the likely applicability of the findings to other situations under similar, but not identical conditions with a focus on the logical, thoughtful and problem-oriented rather than statistical or probabilistic.

### **Chapter 3: THE INVOLVEMENT OF COMMUNITIES IN COASTAL GOVERNANCE**

By the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the UK government had come to stress the importance of working in partnership with communities in seeking just outcomes to issues presented by policies not to defend some coastal areas from the sea in the longer term, and not to compensate people for the resulting loss of their homes. This thesis explores the proposition that such encounters are both structured by, and propagate, social inequalities.

Whilst government acknowledged that some communities would need support in contributing to policy decisions, a critical reading of policy statements and relevant academic literature suggests dissonance between such government prescription and the experiences of citizens in terms of their attitudes towards coastal change, their propensity and willingness to mount and participate in collective action, and in their experience of engagement with authority.

Evidence – here organised using Tilly's (1978) framework for the analysis of collective action – is largely pessimistic as to the degree of influence people are able, or inclined, to exert on decision makers. Housing tenure and associated loss emerges as a key interest around which social action might coalesce on this issue. However, the literature encourages further consideration of the ways in which social class informs individuals' decisions as to whether and how to participate in collective action, the ways in which resource deficits manifest themselves and are addressed, and the ways in which affected populations organize themselves in defence of their interests. Bourdieu's (1983) Theory of Capitals is employed in exploring the experiences of 'communities' – and the people who comprise them – as they respond to the threats posed by

climate change and associated policy, with a view to further critiquing government's essentially pluralist version of its interactions in this context.

## **Environmental campaigns, networks and the role of the individual**

Contention around coastal management, with its respective emphases on change, environmental protection and shelter and people's quality of life, suggests that collective action might usefully be understood through the prism of environmental justice.

*Environmental justice is about social transformation directed toward meeting human need and enhancing the quality of life – economic equality, health care, shelter, human rights, species preservation and democracy – using resources sustainably.* (Dodds and Hopwood, 2006: 271)

The environmental justice movement can be traced to the United States in the 1970s, and concerns around the inequitable distribution of environmental risks – significantly those associated with waste management (Dodds and Hopwood, 2006; Watson and Bulkeley, 2005). The 1990s saw a growing recognition of environmental justice in the UK, with a focus on issues of justice, inequality and decision processes – arguably at the expense of examination of the struggles and lessons to be learned (Dodds and Hopwood, 2006). This mirrors what appears to be a divergence in focus on distinctive efforts at achieving environmental justice – on the one hand as a generic campaign of NGOs translating easily into the discourse of governments and, on the other, locational issues concerning the siting of high risk facilities.

Social movement literature links successful protest mobilization to both the levels of material resources available to communities and the density of pre-existing networks (Walsh *et al*, 1993) – both salient given evidence around the inequitable distribution of environmental risks. Where resource in a particular

locale is hard to find, Foot (2009) observes that people need to make alliances. Dodds and Hopwood (2006) see grassroots action as crucial to gaining justice, but they stipulate that successful struggles start with local action in reaction to a local issue but go on to build alliances, gain a wider understanding of the causes of injustice and seek solutions. However, Rootes (1999) asserts that potential allies are only likely to act to enhance the effort if the goals and strategies employed by local campaign groups are compatible with their own, and appear achievable.

Resource issues may partly explain why there has been no prominent campaign against waste incineration in the UK, or effective linking of local campaigns (Rootes, 2009). However, another compelling explanation lies in the struggle to transform local discourse based around a grievance, and open to charges around NIMBYism and self-interest, into one rooted in consideration of the public good. Walsh *et al* (1993) argue that the framing of protest ideologies in this way is more important in determining the outcome of grassroots protest than are considerations of socio-economic profile and the degree and nature of organization.

Rootes (1999) reports tense and complicated relationships between established environmental movement organizations and emergent groups. A distancing from some actions on the part of the former is ascribed to the need to be seen by those in power as 'responsible' in the interests of maintaining policy access; such constraints upon support are not always understood by those seeking it.

Perceptions of NIMBYism, or clashes between discourses, are especially problematic given the terms of admission to deliberative exercises framed in liberal constitutional terms. Rootes (1997) argues that whilst the perceptions and values of the rest of the population are important in response to collective action, they are less so than those of elites who can shape official

reaction. Instead, universalist arguments about the public good are required, thus placing an onus on communities to reframe discourses (Kurtz, 2003). Doing so may require external help – Zsomboky *et al* (2011) have suggested that coastal adaptation activities in the context of climate change (of which efforts to influence public policy must be considered a part) sit well down the list of priorities for disadvantaged communities. Conversely, we might ask whether garnering support from beyond an affected locality is *per se* contingent on the ability of local campaigners to themselves reframe the discourse in more universalist terms. Either way, developing networks might be considered in part an exercise requiring intellectual as well as other resources.

### **Collective action and the individual**

Community activism is demanding. Dodds and Hopwood (2006) observe that participation can involve extensive reading and preparation and attending meetings – unpaid, and on top of family commitments, and with typically limited access to resources and any kind of long-term independent support structures. Such sacrifices, they propose, usually go unrecognised by those in power.

Writing in the context of community resilience in response to emergencies including climate events, and primarily for policy audiences, Collingwood Environmental Planning (2009) reports that individuals can be very influential in terms of community action, and that their effectiveness depends on them enjoying the respect and trust of local people, of them being well-established in the community, and having both good social skills and a vision of what change should look like. They must also be situated in ‘supportive systems’. This is not the place for a discussion of notions of ‘resilience’: suffice to say, it is a more conciliatory rendering of collective action than that typically associated with environmental justice. Nonetheless, it directs attention to the



range of skills, attributes and resources required of individuals: a state of affairs thrown into some relief by evidence that the considerable demands associated with collective action tend to be borne by few people.

Writing in the context of the Labour government's New Deal for Communities regeneration programme, Robinson *et al* (2005) find that only a small number of residents have the confidence, interest or time to get involved, and that it is unrealistic to assume that many will want to take on such a responsibility – irrespective of the degree of affluence in the area. Rootes (1997) confirms that participation in collective action is a minority activity and one skewed in its over-representation of the highly educated and relatively young.

An associated concern for Robinson *et al* (2005) is that community representatives don't tend to represent the diversity of their communities and tend to focus on what they know and what concerns them, with representative bodies open to being hijacked by cliques.

Thus, literature on environmental justice encourages attention to the importance of resource mobilization from both within affected locales and beyond and, as part of this, the wherewithal to transform the discourse from a local grievance to one with a universalist resonance, which in some deliberative contexts is a key to participation. To this end we must be especially alert to the effects of socio-economic inequalities, whilst evidence that the burden of collective action invariably falls to the few encourages close examination of the experiences of individuals in shaping and undertaking collective action.

## **Analysing community involvement**

Tilly (1978) proposes a framework for the analysis of collective action, which he suggests consists of people acting together in pursuit of common interests. The framework comprises five essential components: 'interest', 'organization',

'mobilization', 'opportunity', and 'collective action' itself (see Table 6). Tilly

continues:

*The interests which concern us most are the gains or losses resulting from a group's interaction with other groups...The organization which concerns us most is the aspect of a group's structure which most directly affects its capacity to act on its interests...mobilization is the process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action. Those resources may be labor power, goods, weapons, votes, and any number of other things...Opportunity concerns the relationship between a group and those around it...Collective action...results from changing combinations of interests, organization, mobilization and opportunity (1978: 7).*

In conceptualising collective action in this way, Tilly seeks to combine causal models of constraints with purposive models of choices among available courses of action. He explains:

*We may choose to consider the action of an individual or of a group as a resultant of forces external to the individual or group ...Alternatively, we may consider the individual or group to be making choices according to some set of rules, implicit or explicit (1978: 6).*

**Table 7: Conceptualising collective action**

Component of collective action	Description	
<b>Interest</b>	<i>Gains or losses resulting from a group's interaction with other groups</i>	
<b>Organization</b>	<i>Aspect of a group's structure which most directly affects its capacity to act on its interests</i>	
<b>Mobilization</b>	<i>The process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action</i>	
<b>Opportunity</b>	<i>Concerns the relationship between a group and those around it</i>	<p><i>Opportunity</i> has three elements:</p> <p><i>Power</i>: the extent to which the outcomes of the population's interactions with other populations favour its interests over those of the others.</p> <p><i>Repression</i>: the costs of collective action to the contender resulting from interaction with other groups...an action which lowers the contender's cost is a form of <i>facilitation</i>. <i>Political repression</i> and <i>political facilitation</i> apply to the relationship between contender(s) and government(s).</p> <p><i>Opportunity/threat</i>: the extent to which other groups, including governments, are either (a) vulnerable to new claims which would, if successful, enhance the contender's realisation of its interests or (b) threaten to make claims which would, if successful, reduce the contender's realisations of its interests.</p>
<b>Collective action</b>	<i>Results from changing combinations of interests, organization, mobilization and opportunity</i>	

Source: adapted from Tilly (1978)

Two related models serve this conceptualisation – the Polity model and the Mobilization model. The former is concerned with what Tilly calls a ‘population of interest’, and is concerned with interactions between groups within that population, comprising one or more of the following:

- *Government*: an organization which controls the principal concentrated means of coercion within the population.
- *Contender*: any group which, during some specified period, applies pooled resources to influence the government. Contenders include *challengers* and *members of the polity*. A member is any contender which has routine, low-cost access to resources controlled by the government; a challenger is any other contender.
- *Polity*<sup>9</sup>: consists of the collective action of the members and the government.
- *Coalition*: a tendency of a set of contenders and/or governments to coordinate their collective action. (1978: 52)

Tilly explains:

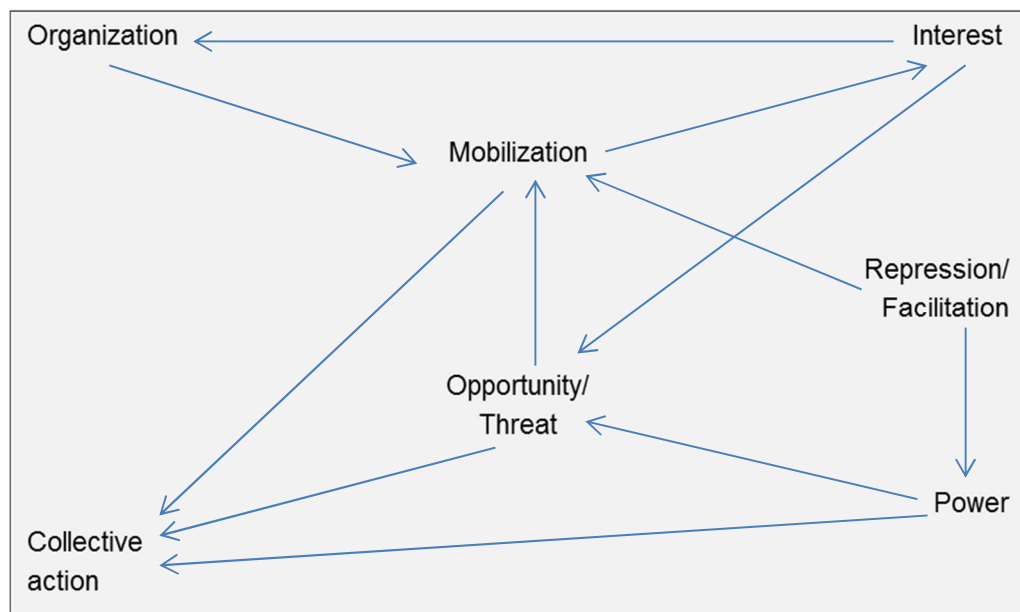
*...contenders are attempting to realize their interests by applying pooled resources to each other and to the government. They vary in the success with which they get back resources in return; the biggest division in that regard separates the high-return members of the polity from the low-return challengers...all contenders (members and challengers alike) are struggling for power (1978: 54).*

<sup>9</sup> Polity: ‘A generic term for the set of political institutions within a society’ (Abercrombie *et al*, 2000: 267).

His second model – the Mobilization model (see Figure 2):

*...declares that the main determinants of a group's mobilization are its organization, its interests in possible interactions with other contenders, the current opportunity/threat of those interactions and the group's subjection to repression (1978: 56).*

**Figure 2: Tilly's Mobilization model**



Source: adapted from Tilly (1978)

A small number of UK studies (see Table 7) has considered coastal change and related governance arrangements. Whilst it is important to be wary of generalisation, they have potential for shedding light on – and prompting further questions about – how coastal groups are constituted, and fare in their interactions with power and competing interests. The studies span the decade 2002-2011, and so cover the period during which the coastal governance paradigm changed from one of a presumption to defend from the sea to FCERM. Some of the studies are directly concerned with establishing the efficacy or otherwise of particular approaches to decision-making (it is these that are

broadly categorised<sup>10</sup> according to the process employed in Table 8), whilst others yield salient points whilst having different research objectives.

<sup>10</sup> The categories employed – ‘Participative’ and ‘Representational’ – are the subject of conceptual and theoretical scrutiny, although here they are employed simply as broad markers of the approach taken.

**Table 8: Coastal change studies 2002-2011**

Author(s)	Relevant research interest(s)	Research design	Decision making model (where relevant)
Myatt-Bell <i>et al</i> (2002)	Locals' perceptions of flooding, their awareness of the managed realignment scheme and issues they consider to be important.	Case study (Brancaster West Marsh) underpinned by questionnaire survey of visitors conducted at managed realignment exhibition.	
Myatt <i>et al</i> (2003a)	Whether local residents are more accepting of a managed realignment scheme that is fully established rather than at its inception or under construction.	Case study (Freiston Shore, Lincolnshire) underpinned by postal questionnaire survey of local households.	
Myatt <i>et al</i> (2003b)	Whether local residents are more accepting of a managed realignment scheme the longer it is the public domain.	Case study (Orplands, Essex) underpinned by postal questionnaire survey of local households.	
O'Riordan <i>et al</i> (2006)	Existing arrangements of coastal governance in England including effective stakeholder involvement.	Case study (north Norfolk coast) underpinned by literature review, observation of facilitated meetings, stakeholder interviews.	<i>Participatory</i>
Few <i>et al</i> (2007)	Local capacity for strategic response to climate risks with a focus on issues surrounding coastal defence.	Case study (Christchurch Bay) underpinned by documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and workshop discussions.	
Fletcher (2007)	The relationship between stakeholder representatives and their constituencies of interest within the context of coastal partnerships.	Multiple case study (Medway Swale Estuary Partnership, Moray Firth Partnership, Sefton Coast Partnership, Solent Forum) underpinned by semi-structured interviews with respondents from distinctive stakeholder categories.	<i>Representational</i>
Milligan <i>et al</i> (2009)	The character and reasoning behind changing management policies and governance practices in England.	Single case study (Winterton-on-Sea, Norfolk) underpinned by literature review and involvement in consultative forum events	<i>Participatory</i>
Zsomboky <i>et al</i> (2011)	How disadvantaged communities are vulnerable to climate change.	Multiple case study underpinned by literature review, interviews with policy officials, and focus groups involving residents.	

Whilst Tilly's (1978) conceptual framework can help us to organize this literature (see Figure 2), this comes with a caveat. Tilly's Mobilization model suggests fluidity in the ways in which these concepts interact, with collective action resulting from 'changing combinations of interests, organization, mobilization and opportunity' (1978: 7). This makes it difficult to locate evidence neatly under discrete headings although what follows offers at least a rough idea of trends.

## **Interest**

As already established, interest is a key concept for Tilly in that collective action fundamentally consists of people acting together in pursuit of their common interests, with those of greatest concern the gains or losses resulting from a group's interaction with other groups. So how, if at all, is interest manifest in these studies?

Zsomboky *et al* (2011) research 'disadvantaged' communities (those at risk of the physical impacts of climate change and which already suffer from high levels of deprivation or geographic isolation with case studies involving five coastal communities, defined as any local authority area that adjoins the sea and/or the coastline. Thus, the study appears to explore the vulnerability of communities that are carefully defined in terms of pre-existing socio-economic profile, but arguably homogenous in terms of exposure to the physical impacts of climate change and the nature of any additional risk faced.

In their Orplands study, Myatt *et al* (2003b) also pursue a geographical analysis in hypothesising from their preceding Freiston and Brancaster case studies (Myatt, 2003; Myatt-Bell *et al*, 2002) that public awareness of managed realignment projects decreases with distance from the respective area (with the obverse implication that those closest to the scheme will have highest awareness of it). However, the authors observe that the area under scrutiny is relatively rural and modestly populated, and that those closest to the scheme are



in fact least aware of it. This reinforces the point that there may be merit in looking beyond geography as the locus of interest in responding to coastal change.

Beyond Zsamboky *et al*'s (2011) study with its focus on communities facing significant socio-economic challenges, we do not learn a great deal from this body of literature about the composition of populations in the relevant locations, although what little analysis there is of how this informs attitudes and actions, or plays out in the setting of policy, would suggest that this may be useful. For example, for many respondents in Zsamboky *et al*'s study climate change is considered less pressing a risk than low incomes or unemployment, which raises the question as to whether the link between exposure to climate change impacts and contentious social action is as straightforward as has been assumed. We might ask whether such a group of people would make it onto government's radar, given CAPE's requirements for 'extensive engagement'.

Elsewhere, respondents in Myatt *et al*'s (2003a) Freiston Shore study are mostly either professional or retired, which the researchers equate with widespread club membership and a willingness to take on local issues. By contrast, Myatt *et al* (2003b) report on comments from respondents in the Orplands study, where there is a more even occupational split, about a lack of leisure time due to work and family commitments. Accordingly, these researchers suggest a link between an occupational rendering of social class and awareness of and attitude towards change and its implications, and strength of orientation towards social action.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, residential property is also a potential locus of interest, reflecting concerns about reduction in housing value as reported by Zsamboky *et al* (2011) and reinforcing the more general points made by POST (2010) and DEFRA (2010) about the focus of contention as it relates to coastal change. Few *et al* (2007) report that the most vulnerable stakeholders are

residents, home owners, and business owners with property located in the at-risk zones. Myatt-Bell *et al* (2002) suggest that 38% of respondents in the Brancaster study identified impacts to their property as a consequence of change as a very serious issue, although precisely how and to what extent is not made clear given that the authors also stress that few properties are potentially affected.

We might ask, then, how important such factors are in determining interest, with regard to the formation of attitudes towards coastal change and willingness to mobilize in pursuit of such interests.

## **Mobilization**

For Tilly (1978), mobilization is the process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action. Those resources may be labour power, goods, weapons, votes, and any number of other things. Groups attempt to realise their interests by applying such resources to each other as contenders, and to government.

Interviews with local residents raise questions about the motivation and capacity of local people to consider long-term issues (Few *et al*, 2007), with Zsomboky *et al* (2011) identifying a lack of adaptive capacity in agencies and, in turn, ascribing to institutional failure the finding that coastal communities may lack the necessary adaptive capacity to respond to climate change and that a lack of clarity on actions needed may be leading to local apathy.<sup>11</sup> Milligan *et al* (2009) characterise some stakeholders as 'hard to reach'. To use simpler language, some communities appear to lack vital resource in defending their interests, although there are also concerns around appetite for action.

<sup>11</sup> In such contexts it may make sense to consider the capacity of agencies themselves as a resource upon which coastal communities might draw.

Looking beyond studies concerned specifically with social change may be instructive on this point. Foot (2009) observes that when people from deprived neighbourhoods get involved in tackling deep-rooted social problems, they need to persuade those from the more affluent and socially influential neighbourhoods to ally with them. Given this finding, we might consider what happens when communities are unable to mobilize such resource and, as is suggested in Zsomboky *et al's* (2011) study, authorities lack the adaptive capacity themselves to compensate to some degree.

On a related point, and returning to the coastal literature, Milligan *et al* (2006) stress the need for consideration of potential costs to those active in participative decision making; in representative settings, Fletcher (2007) suggests that negativity on the part of stakeholder representatives may be unsurprising given the reported significant additional workload implied. However, aside from findings by O'Riordan *et al* (2009) that local stakeholders having attended meetings and given their points of view feel they have wasted their time and effort, the resource burden for 'community-side' participants in decision-making processes are not considered beyond the broad links made by Myatt *et al* (2003, 2003a) concerning occupational status, available time, club membership and willingness to take on local issues. This may be an apposite concern for those active within coastal residents groups involved with responding to SMPs and related policies, and is worthy of further investigation.

## **Opportunity**

Whilst considerations of interest, organization and mobilization are best accommodated by Tilly's (1978) Mobilization model, consideration of opportunity

– with its emphasis on interactions between diverse interests<sup>12</sup> – leads us to his Polity model. This encourages the consideration of relationships in terms of power, the costs of action, and the extent to which groups are either vulnerable to competing claims, or are able to enhance the realisation of their own interests. The typology proposed by Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (see Table 9) might help us to further demarcate (albeit crudely) the different renderings of ‘polity’ pursued in the literature – in terms of both intention and effect.

The involvement of people in coastal planning takes place in a variety of contexts – from structured and facilitated deliberative events involving local people in formal ‘stakeholder’ capacities, to citizens’ interests largely being represented in decision-making fora via local elected representatives, to more ‘hands-off’ involvement such as attending public exhibitions.

Viewed through the lens of Tilly’s (1978) Polity model, we might observe that participatory approaches appear to offer groups membership of the polity with the attendant benefit of low-cost access to government resources. However, despite the identification of clear gains, the literature suggests that this does not necessarily translate to the realisation of interests.

O’Riordan *et al* (2006) and Milligan *et al* (2009) explore the potential of participatory approaches<sup>13</sup> to involving local people in the setting of coastal policy, and report improved relationships and greater understanding between the various parties involved. Milligan *et al* (2009) suggest potential for finding a successful common vision for the Winterton-on-Sea case study area, whilst O’Riordan *et al* (2006) report a willingness by participants in the

<sup>12</sup> For example, SMPs: ‘set out how maritime Local Authorities and the EA (the operating authorities), work together with other foreshore owners to reduce the risks to people, property and land from sea flooding and coastal erosion. In developing SMPs a range of partners and the public are extensively consulted and involved in the decision making processes’ (EA, 2010: 80).

<sup>13</sup> What Arnstein might categorise as ‘partnership’ – see Table 9.

north Norfolk study to engage in debate, with a raised awareness of the issues emerging alongside the bringing together of various facets of coastal management (2006: 12).

However, this is contradicted by evidence that locating common ground between actors is a problem – Milligan *et al* (2009) find that local and official cultures are neither aligned nor likely to be in the future, with one problem lying in the limits to what people are able to understand. This latter point might also be considered a mobilization issue in Tilly's terms.

Difficulties are also presented by the need to balance the sometimes conflicting objectives of a wide mix of stakeholders (Milligan *et al*, 2009). O'Riordan *et al* (2006) point to the importance, on one hand, that participants' expectations of the degree of influence on decisions should be managed and, on the other, their desire to have ownership of the outcomes – a tension possibly exacerbated by concerns that agencies and authorities are unwilling to give up power to negotiated results. It is perhaps telling that the researchers identify the very need for public acceptability as a blockage to the effective delivery of managed realignment schemes.<sup>14</sup> This, in turn, invites analysis of the nature of the participation experienced by local people. The broad categories in Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Engagement pose the question as to whether the nature of deliberation in this case might be better described as 'citizen power' or 'tokenism'.

<sup>14</sup> Myatt *et al* (2003a) see public relations as a means through which authorities might alleviate public scepticism, and as having a role in the promotion of managed realignment. This would appear to see engagement as having a persuasive rather than simply democratic purpose potentially at the expense of discourse around conflict, legitimacy and social justice.

**Table 9: Conceptualising citizen participation**

<b>Citizen control</b>	People demanding the degree of power (or control) over community resources and services which guarantees that participants or residents can govern a programme or an institution, be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which outsiders may change them.	Citizen power
<b>Delegated power</b>	Negotiations between citizens and public officials can result in citizens achieving dominant decision-making authority over a particular plan or programme.	
<b>Partnership</b>	Power is redistributed through negotiation between citizens and powerholders who agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities. Partnership can work most effectively when there is an organised power base in the community to which the citizen leaders are accountable; when the citizens group has the financial resources to pay its leaders for their time-consuming efforts; and when the group has the resources to hire and fire.	
<b>Placation</b>	At this level citizens begin to have some degree of influence though tokenism is still apparent. An example of placation strategy is the placing of a few hand-picked people on boards or panels. If they are not accountable to a constituency in the community, however, and if the traditional power elite hold the majority of seats, they can easily be marginalised	Tokenism
<b>Consultation</b>	Inviting citizens' opinions, like informing them, can be a legitimate step toward their full participation. But if consulting them is not combined with other modes of participation, this offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account. The most frequent methods used for consulting people are attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings, and public hearings	
<b>Informing</b>	Informing citizens of their rights, responsibilities, and options can be the most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation. However, too frequently the emphasis is placed on a one-way flow of information - from officials to citizens - with no channel provided for feedback and no power for negotiation.	
<b>Therapy</b>	Under a masquerade of involving citizens in planning, the experts subject the citizens to group therapy. Common examples may be seen in public housing programmes where tenants are brought together to help them adjust their values and attitudes to those of the larger society.	
<b>Manipulation</b>	In the name of citizen participation, people are placed on rubberstamp advisory committees or advisory boards for the express purpose of 'educating' them or engineering	Nonparticipation

	their support. Instead of genuine citizen participation, this signifies the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by powerholders.	
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Source: adapted from Arnstein's *Ladder of Citizen Participation* (Arnstein, 1969)

Whereas O'Riordan *et al* (2006) and Milligan *et al* (2009) explore participatory approaches to decision making in this context, Fletcher (2007) looks at coastal partnerships which employ a different approach. Whilst such arrangements have the potential for local people to participate, the orthodoxy instead appears to be one whereby communities find voice on decision-making bodies via local elected representatives.<sup>15</sup> This study, which explores relationships between the various stakeholder representatives in the relevant polities and their constituencies and the making of decisions/setting of policies through partnerships, points to various issues with the ways in which the interests of coastal communities are understood, the motivations of those who represent them, and how power imbalances come to influence the making of decisions and policies.

Many stakeholders in Fletcher's (2007) study report limited enthusiasm for their role and its value (it is unclear whether this includes those representing the public interest), with very few operating within a formal system to identify any misrepresentation. Interestingly, Fletcher reports that those participants representing the public interest have no direct method of seeking the views of the public except for informal *ad hoc* routes.<sup>16</sup> This, it might be assumed, is likely to raise the costs for at least some local interests seeking to exert influence in such fora.

<sup>15</sup> Held proposes that political representation involves the delegation of government to 'a small number of citizens elected by the rest' (1987: 64).

<sup>16</sup> Concerns that such a model of stakeholder representation may not guarantee that local people are properly represented are echoed by Milligan *et al* (2009: 206).

Doubts are expressed concerning the robustness of decision-making processes, with opportunities to influence agendas considered poor and concern expressed over how contributions were received from the wider community of stakeholders. In each of the partnerships studied, a degree of inequality of influence over decision-making is perceived by respondents, with funding, chairing and hosting of partnerships all seen as important in this regard. Here we might observe that local interests sit very much outside the polity, with those charged with representing the public interest themselves experiencing issues with aspects of opportunity.

### **Further enquiry**

What does this research tell us in terms of the amelioration or otherwise of social inequalities, and where do they lead us to in terms of further enquiry?

There are clear issues that arise from the literature on coastal change regarding the ability of local people to influence state-led efforts to make related policy – whether that should be as a consequence of a reluctance on the part of authority to submit their interests to negotiated outcomes, the effectiveness of elected representatives, the power that various actors are able to bring to bear on making decisions and setting policy, or irreconcilable expectations of local influence on decisions.<sup>17</sup> Tellingly, given government's confidence in participatory decision making, those researchers with a particular interest in that mode of engagement are lukewarm in their final assessments, with O'Riordan *et al* (2006) observing that arrangements for coastal policy in terms of funding and governance are unstable and inconsistent, with Milligan *et al* (2009) declaring that there is 'no participatory panacea' (2009:210).

<sup>17</sup>More fundamentally, a recurring theme in these studies is that managed realignment is seen by local people as politically controversial – especially where radical change is proposed.



Overall, evidence from this body of literature would appear broadly to support the work of (Foot, 2009), which explored the experiences and perceptions of communities, councillors and public officials involved in a range of governance processes. This suggested conflicting views about how far communities and citizens can exercise substantial influence over decisions about public services – whilst community respondents expressed positive feelings about the potential benefits of engaging (citizens reported a benefit in involving communities in governance in that it creates links and networks between communities and service providers, and between different communities), there was also frustration about the barriers that limited their involvement.

To conclude, whilst offering some solace to pluralists and their confidence that a more competitive democratic landscape will bring more satisfactory outcomes, the relevant literature would appear to support the scepticism of the neo-pluralists who, according to Held (1987), are:

*...reluctant to assume the existence of fixed unalterable patterns of political relations and outcomes, and stress the need to examine the particular interest constellations, institutional context, resources and tactics brought to bear on any given issue...(1987: 205).*

More specifically, Held quotes Bachrach and Baratz (1962) in observing that:

*...classic pluralists failed to begin to grasp those asymmetries of power – between classes, races, men and women, politicians and ordinary citizens – which were behind, in large part, the decay of what they called ‘consensus politics’ (1987: 200).*

With an interest in how local populations seek to exert influence on government decisions in the context of coastal change, analysis of the relevant literature using Tilly’s (1978) action framework prompts both reflection and further enquiry – particularly concerning findings under the headings of

'Interests', 'Mobilization' and 'Organization'. We might further interrogate these findings via the prism of Bourdieu's (1983) Theory of Capitals with a view to exploring potential 'asymmetries of power' as they apply to ways in which citizens mobilize and organize around their interests.

## **Bourdieu and capitals**

Bourdieu (1983) identifies a related trio of types of capital – economic, cultural and social (between them feeding a fourth, symbolic capital) – the distribution of which, he proposes, represents 'the immanent structure of the social world. This turns on his reclamation of a broadly Marxian concept of capital concerned with the maximisation of profit and economic self-interest, and which posits non-mercantile exchange as beyond its boundaries. This, he maintains, disguises the ways in which power reproduces itself.

By this analysis economic capital is that which is immediately and directly convertible into money, whilst cultural capital includes the things we know, our dispositions and attitudes, the things we own and guarantees of cultural capital in the shape of, for example, educational qualifications. Social capital is the:

*...aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – in other words, to members of a group (1983: 248).*

Thus, power becomes manifest, for example, in the things that we know, and the people with whom we mix. Key to Bourdieu's conceptualisation – and important for the purposes of this study – is the observation that capitals are not evenly distributed. For example, an individual's social capital is dependent on

the size of his or her networks of connections and the extent of the capital – of all types – possessed by those in the network. This is important, as Bourdieu's conception allows for the conversion between different types of capital. Both cultural and social capital can be converted into economic capital and, in turn, are reliant on economic capital in the shape of time and labour in their development. Thus, there is potentially a hard economic cost to other capitals, with their efficacy related to the resources individuals and collectives are able to muster in its construction, maintenance and reproduction.

Through considerations of 'field' and 'habitus', Bourdieu proposes a reflexive relationship between social structure and individual agency in any analysis of social activity (and the accumulation and exercise of capital) that would appear to allow for nuanced examination of the social actions of coastal dwellers within their populations and, in turn, the collective actions of such populations in deliberation with authority. 'Field' refers to territories of social practice – each with its own specific logic or principles which structure the choices and preferences of individuals in these contexts (Abercrombie *et al*, 2000: 31). Related to this, individuals acquire a 'habitus' encompassing their dispositions with regard to the world – for example, through beliefs and preferences. Ideas of field and habitus sit well with Tilly's broad conceptual framework. For example, findings such as those of O'Riordan *et al* (2006) and Milligan *et al* (2009) which report improved relationships and greater understanding between the various parties involved, might be understood in terms of a field that is more navigable for the various parties, possibly, as a consequence of modified habitus for all concerned. In contrast, Milligan *et al* also find that local and official cultures are neither aligned nor likely to be in the future follows the same dynamic, although more pessimistically.

## **How does interest translate into attitudes and collective action?**

In the literature on coastal change interest is broadly understood via either occupation/social class, exposure to physical impacts, or threats to residential or other property – or as a combination thereof. However, it is not always clear how such interests translate into attitudes and social action.

Recent decades have seen reevaluation of 'traditional' structural interpretations of collective action in the context of industrial societies. Della Porta and Diani (2006) propose that a decline in industrial work in favour of administrative and service occupations and an accompanying new middle class, a shift away from stable and protected forms of work, migration to the stronger economies and the entry of women into the labour force have all contributed to a muddying of the water in terms of class relations and conflicts, with the consequence that it has:

*...affected lines of definition and criteria for interest definition within social groups, which were previously perceived as homogeneous (2006: 39).*

Touraine (1980) goes further in proposing that:

*We are living through the transition from industrial society to programmed society and hence experiencing the decline of a certain type of class relations and conflicts... (1980: 9).*

In contrast to industrial society, which he says should be defined in terms of production relations, programmed society is characterised by 'human government' and its propensity to shape social and cultural behaviour.

So where does this leave the question of 'common structure and shared beliefs' as the basis of identity in this context? Della Porta and Diani echo Tilly in proposing that identity construction remains an essential component of collective action, whilst acknowledging that identity feelings are frequently elaborated in

reference to specific social traits such as class, gender, territory, or ethnicity – however, they are unable to identify any new cleavage as a primary basis for social conflict.

Perhaps more useful, given the centrality of state decision-making to coastal change is Touraine's (1980) proposal that the crucial cleavage now is:

*...between the different kinds of [state] apparatus and user – consumers or more simply the public – defined less by their specific attributes than by their resistance to domination by the apparatus (1980: 6-7).*

Taking up this theme, Taylor-Gooby (1986) describes the development of the state and its involvement in people's lives as a striking feature of the post-war political economy and describes as important attempts to understand the relevance of these developments for political consciousness through the idea of 'consumption sectors':

*...the division between groups in society who share common interests based on division in access to the means of consumption (1986: 592).*

Saunders (1990) observes that an obvious candidate for such a new fault line is housing tenure<sup>18</sup>, with a decline of class voting appearing to coincide with the growth of working-class home ownership – apposite given what is at stake for those who stand to 'lose' from coastal change. Kemeny, Ronald (2008) tells us, conflates private ownership with the development of a reserve of housing wealth that, amongst other things, offsets pension shortfalls in old age; whilst between the world wars the expansion of working class ownership was considered:

<sup>18</sup> As of 2009, 37 per cent of households in Great Britain were buying their homes with a mortgage, 32% of homes were owned outright – a level of home ownership of 69%. (Randall, 2011: 3)

...a potential antidote to both the decline in the private rental sector, on one side, and labour-union agitation, social unrest and demands for the expansion of citizenship rights on the other (2008: 22).

In post-war Britain, Ronald identifies an assumption that homeownership would improve civic responsibility and encourage support for conservative political parties. By this analysis, home-ownership has multiple potential effects. It appears to offer individuals a means for wealth generation; whilst for the state mass home-ownership has been associated with a shift away from state welfare provision, and with the fostering of conservative political attitudes militating *against* collective action. Might we expect housing tenure, then – running down the fault line of a consumption cleavage – to form a locus of interest around Tilly's common structure and shared beliefs in a more compelling way than occupational position?

Whilst home-ownership is an example of *individual* consumption according to the consumption cleavage thesis, the provision of sea defence – which, despite recent reforms, continues to be funded principally by the state – is an example of *collective* consumption<sup>19</sup>, and one that is politically contentious in that its benefits are not to be universally enjoyed. Put crudely, the majority living on the coast will have their individual assets (and means of welfare) protected by a (largely) collectively-funded and managed 'good' for the foreseeable future, whilst a minority will not. Thus, it can be argued that the interests of people in coastal communities might be structured by their consumption position – although not to the exclusion of consideration of traditional occupational class structure. Touraine (1980) argues that industrial class relations do not disappear with the emergence of class relations of programmed society, whilst Saunders

<sup>19</sup> Dunleavy writes that: 'Collective consumption...is typically concerned with services provided by the state apparatus...In exclusively individualized forms for consumption, location continues to be determined by household incomes...'. Collective consumption processes, he tells us, 'create an inter-subjective-basis for the development of political action', in part due to 'the directly politicized context of provision' (1979: 418-9).

(1990) stresses that class position, consumption sector location and housing tenure are all closely interrelated. This surely warns that there may be no straight line between a homogenous interest (coinciding with Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus') for coastal 'losers' and collective action, and alerts us to the possibility that populations – and even individuals – may be prey to competing urges towards conservatism on one hand, and collective action on the other. Further enquiry, then, might seek to see how individual interest and habitus impacts on mobilization and collective action in distinctive social contexts.

### **Social class and resources for collective action**

If it is the case that in line with Bourdieu's (1983) analysis the various capitals are unevenly distributed in the contexts under study, we might enquire as to the effects of this in terms of mobilization. More specifically, we might ask how (if at all) local populations seek resource from outside their boundaries, and with what results.

For Tilly (1978), mobilization is the process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action, and findings from the literature on coastal governance would appear broadly to support Bourdieu's thesis that such resources – in the shape of various capitals – are unevenly distributed.

Zsomboky *et al's* (2011) finding that disadvantaged coastal communities may lack the necessary adaptive capacity to respond to climate change might direct us towards a lack of economic capital. Whilst 'adaptation' is not here associated with any specific activity, and so can not be said to refer to or even include collective social action, a broad connection is proposed between a lack of economic resource and an inability to respond to the impacts of climate change. On this question, Foot (2009) proposes that when people from deprived neighbourhoods get involved in tackling deep-rooted social problems, they need

to persuade people from the more affluent and socially influential neighbourhoods to ally with them – consistent with Clark *et al's* (2002) conclusion that activism is a middle-class, middle-aged preoccupation.

This resonates with Myatt *et al's* (2003) Freiston Shore study, and the researchers' equation of the largely professional/retired status of respondents with widespread club membership and a willingness to take on local issues. Here we might pay particular attention to social capital, with individuals' membership of clubs and networks both drawing upon and feeding the various capitals that comprise them by Bourdieu's (1978) analysis. This sits in some contrast to findings from the same researchers' Orplands study (2003b), where a different economic/occupational profile saw a lack of leisure time due to work and family commitments and less emphasis on social activity. Besides relationships between occupational/economic status, free time and the appetite for social action, we might also consider populations' ability to generate the cultural capital to mount such action on the back of a familiarity with, for example, relevant modes of professional conduct or even specialist knowledge – potentially salient given findings that in 'participatory' settings local representatives can struggle to understand expert/technical perspectives.

We might also ask how such considerations are affected by the size of the populations concerned. Klandermans (1993) proposes that 'mobilization potential' – that is expectations about the number of participants, and about the probability of success if many people participate – is an important element in each individual's motivation to participate themselves, which would make the extent of the population salient to successful mobilization. Mobilization potential determines maximum possible levels of participation in a movement, although Klandermans stresses that this may well not be reached as it remains to be converted into actual participation, adding that mobilization potential is of little use if social movements do not have access to networks through which to reach



people – placing a premium on the social capital of those involved. The stronger and more extended the group's 'alliance system' – that is, those groups that are well-disposed towards the movement's aims - the higher the proportion of the mobilization potential that will participate. Reaching potential participants requires networks, then, whilst at a wider level participation is reliant in part on the strength of the movement's alliances. By way of illustration, we might again observe that respondents in Myatt *et al*'s Freiston Shore study (2003a) appear better placed in such respects than those in their Orplands study (2003b) in ways that Bourdieu's capitals might usefully explain.

### **Organization and the capacity to act on interests**

There is very little to be found in the literature on coastal governance as to how local people organise themselves into groups, beyond simple references to 'community stakeholders' (O'Riordan *et al*, 2006; Milligan *et al*, 2009) and 'representatives of the local community' (Milligan *et al*, 2009). Who these people are, how they come to represent their 'communities', and the nature of responsibilities and their relationships with others both within and outside their communities, is not explored.

Given the importance Tilly (1978) ascribes this aspect of collective action to the realisation of interests and, perhaps more importantly, the pivotal function of contention to influencing government, further insight would be valuable. To this end, the wider literature may be instructive. Foot (2009) reports that a fundamental question for Maguire and Truscott (2006) lies in establishing whether those who take part can legitimately be seen to represent the communities they speak for which, in turn, draws attention to factors such as how local groups are constituted, the strength of mandate enjoyed by their representatives, and the ways in which group decisions are made.

Looking beyond the literature on coastal governance, factors related to social class would appear to determine who gets the opportunity to influence decision making in deliberative settings. Those who are already involved in such processes tend to get more involved – Skidmore *et al* (2008) argue that such people are often sought out and valued by authority, presumably lowering the bar in terms of Tilly’s ‘opportunity costs’. By contrast, Foot (2009) suggests that others exclude themselves or are not invited to join because they find it difficult to deal with bureaucracy, they ‘don’t fit’ or they feel they can have more effect as an outsider. Given this finding, it is hard not to wonder at the capitals required of those ‘community stakeholders’ and ‘representatives of the local community’ mentioned by Milligan *et al* (2009) and O’Riordan *et al* (2006), or to consider what happens when communities are unable to mobilize such resource in seeking to realise their interests and, as in Zsamboky *et al*’s study (2011), authorities lack the adaptive capacity themselves to compensate to some degree.

If on the one hand authorities prefer to deal with people who are ‘one of us’ and, on the other, disadvantaged people feel compelled to recruit middle class allies, we might ask whether there is a danger that ‘justice’ remains in the gift of ‘professional types’, and that representative legitimacy is simply code for ‘middle class’. Again, such possibilities might be explored in terms of potential dissonance between individual habitus and field, and any play of capitals therein.

## **Conclusion**

Conclusions from this body of literature will be used to both contextualise and interrogate empirical evidence arising from this study, with the intention of developing clearer understandings of the nature of contention on this issue, and the obstacles to effective collective action faced by people operating in distinctive social, economic and cultural contexts. This may help to address the research

gaps identified, shed light on key areas of policy and prescription and, importantly, be of use to coastal communities as they seek just responses to the effects of climate change and related policy prescriptions.

## **Chapter 4: THE SETTING OF LOCAL COASTAL POLICY**

This chapter has three purposes. First, to offer a narrative description of key geographical and socio-economic features of Selsey and Sheppey (see Table 10). It describes the success with which the interests of people who might be placed at risk as a consequence of coastal planning decisions were incorporated by the Pagham to East Head draft coastal defence strategy as it applied to the Manhood Peninsula (and primarily Selsey) and by the Isle of Grain to South Foreland Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) as it applied to Sheppey. Explored, in turn, are the means by which policies were made, practical steps taken by the relevant authorities to ensure that people knew about the proposed policies and their implications, the nature and extent of people's responses, and how such representations were subsequently accommodated. In so doing, accounts are rendered more or less chronologically.

Second, to employ Tilly's Polity model (1978) as a means for calibrating and comparing data with a view to understanding the efficacy of deliberative processes in accommodating the needs and concerns of local people likely to be affected by resulting policies. To recap, Tilly's Polity model sees contenders attempt to realise their interests, but varying in the success with which they are rewarded with resources. The biggest division, Tilly notes, is between the high-return *members* of the polity and the low-return *challengers*.

As such, these two purposes might be said to serve the development of a *macro* view of the process and its actors as a whole, with a third purpose to reflect upon relevant findings and questions posed by the literature discussed in Chapter 3. Finally, the two ‘local’ studies are configured to support, to an extent, what Ritchie and Lewis (2003) describe as inferential generalisation (transferring findings to other settings and contexts).

**Table 10 – Key socio-economic indicators**

	<b>Selsey</b>	<b>Sheppey</b>
<b>Population(s)</b>	12,000 approx.	40,000 approx.
<b>Commerce and industry</b>	Narrow industrial base – reliant on service sector	Distribution, hotels and catering  Public administration, education and health (Swale)
<b>Employment</b>	Highly seasonal  Unemployment high relative to rest of district  Professional and managerial occupations under-represented	Prisons, tourism major sources of employment on Sheppey  Low demand for skills from employers
<b>Skills and education</b>	Low educational achievement	Low educational achievement  Poor skills profile
<b>Demographics</b>	Relatively elderly population  Predominantly white	Age profile broadly representative of England  Predominantly white
<b>Deprivation</b>	Middling position in Indices of Deprivation	Many pockets of severe deprivation
<b>Housing tenure</b>	High levels of housing owner occupation	High levels of both registered social landlord stock and housing owner

		occupation.
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A coastal typology of settlements, developed by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) [2011] as a set of 'categories' to be used by marine planners at national level as a starting point to understand the socio-economic circumstances, and recent trends, of coastal communities offers useful if necessarily limited guidance on the transferability of findings from these studies. The MMO typology identifies 10 categories of coastal settlement based on geodemographic analysis, broadly outlined in Table 11 below.

**Table 11: MMO categories in England by proportion, compared to the Chichester and Swale local authority areas.**

	MMO categories  (with % of settlement types [England])	Characteristics	Local authority area by % of MMO settlement types	
			Chichester	Swale
A1	Silver seaside  7.5%	Retirement areas – smaller, less developed, older population, part-time employment, home working, self-employment, employment in tourism, few on benefits, low crime.	17  30.4%	6  7.3%
A2	Working countryside  4.9%	Rural, sparsely populated or small settlements, lower skill occupations, away from key amenities, working from home, second homes, few people in flats, below average car ownership, few on benefits.	6  10.7%	6  7.3%
A3	Rural chic  6.0%	Rural, sparsely populated, well-qualified, away from key amenities, bigger houses, jobs growth, self-employed, car owners, low crime, low child/pensioner poverty.	14  25%	6  7.3%
B1	Structural shifters  9.4%	Towns and cities have lost primary markets and struggle to find new ones. Above average employment in manufacturing, benefits, long-term illness. Below average qualifications, employments, jobs growth and flats.	4  7.1%	19  23.25
B2	New towns or ports  12.15	Poor skills, high unemployment, BUT strong economy and located near to areas of economic growth. Above average jobs growth, child and pensioner poverty and benefits claimants. Below average qualifications.	3  5.4%	10  12.2%
B3	Striving communities  12.4%	Deprivation, high rented accommodation, high claimants, high child and pensioner poverty, high unpaid care. Work in wholesale, retail, motor vehicle repair. Low qualifications, employment, jobs growth.	0  0.0%	6  7.3%
C1	Reinventing resorts  6.2%	Tourist economies, high deprivation and diversity, attracting high skill people. High private rental, claimants, degree level education, migration, students, seasonal unemployment, travelling to work, household vacancy, flats and crime. Low house occupation, owner occupation, employment, part-time work.	1  1.8%	2  2.4%

C2	Coast professionals 10.6%	City and market town service centres. High qualifications, levels of full time students, migration, commuting, private rental, crime and flat dwelling. Low levels of pensioners, part time employment, living in houses.	8 14.3%	3 3.7%
D1	Prosperous suburbia 14.7%	Affluent areas on edge of towns. High qualifications, employment, owner occupation. Big houses. Low claimants and child and pensioner poverty. High vehicle ownership.	3 5.4%	11 13.4%
D2	Working hard 16.1%	High employment, industrial work, stable population, owner occupation. Low degree-level education, migration, claimants, self-employment, social rented housing.	0 0.0%	13 15.9%

Source: adapted from MMO (2011)

The document explores the distribution of these categories in England by region, local authority area and major settlement.

## Selsey

### Social, economic and geographical profile

Part of the Chichester district in west Sussex, the town of Selsey is approximately 14 miles east of the city of Portsmouth, and lies at the southernmost point of the Manhood Peninsula (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Selsey and the Manhood Peninsula**



Source: Map data © 2014 Google

Selsey has a population of around 12,000 people, and both local authority wards within it (Selsey North and Selsey South) are described as Town and Fringe – less sparse in terms of Rural and Urban Area Classification (ONS, [no date]a). It is described as a relatively isolated community (for the south east of England) with a narrow industrial base heavily reliant, in employment terms, on the service sector and a number of sectors whose business is highly seasonal with an accompanying seasonality of employment opportunities and high level of unemployment relative to the rest of the district (Chichester DC, 2000). One such employer is holiday park owner Bunn Leisure which employs 300 full time and part-time staff, whilst retailers such as Budgens, Co-op and Somerfield employ around 80 people (Chichester DC, [no date]b).

Selsey has a relatively old population. 45.5% of the population of Selsey North and 47.2% of the population of Selsey South are aged 55 and over, compared to just 28.0% for the whole of England (WSRU, 2011). Ethnically, Selsey is predominantly white – significantly more so than England as a whole (ONS [no date]f, ONS [no date]g).

A high proportion of the population has no formal qualifications, particularly when compared to the rest of the South East. Selsey is under-represented in terms of higher level qualifications, and those working in both higher and lower managerial and professional occupations when compared to Chichester, West Sussex and the South East (WSRU, 2011]. Nonetheless, both Selsey wards occupy a middling position in terms of Indices of Deprivation (of 7,332 wards with No. 1 being the most deprived, Selsey North ranks 3,411 and Selsey South 4,882) [WSRU, 2011], and both Selsey wards have high levels of housing owner occupation in comparison to local, regional and national trends (Chichester DC, [no date]a).

Historically, the Manhood Peninsula as a whole has been vulnerable to coastal erosion and flooding. The 2008 draft Coastal Defence Strategy (CDS)



confirms that since the 1950s, timber, concrete and shingle defences have given protection against the most serious impacts of flooding and erosion, and that previously some areas of the peninsula had eroded at a rate of 8 metres per year (EA *et al*, 2008). Sea defence is a key issue for Selsey, then, with a 1998 tourism audit identifying 10 holiday parks under threat of incursion by the sea if a decision not to maintain the Medmerry shingle bank were taken (Chichester DC, 2000). The effects of just such a policy recommendation, when combined with the potential impacts in terms of employment, economy and housing, formed the basis of a conflict of interests.

### **The setting of the Pagham to East Head draft Coastal Defence Strategy**

The Pagham to East Head draft CDS sets out how the Environment Agency (EA) in partnership with Chichester and Arun District Councils (referred to hitherto for this case as the Operating Authority) proposed to manage flood and coastal erosion risks to the area from Pagham to East Head on the Manhood Peninsula for the subsequent 100 years. In so doing, options were analysed (broadly) in terms of:

- the flood and erosion risk to people and properties;
- predicted sea level rise and climate change;
- how much the option will cost and the value of the assets it will protect;
- effects on the natural environment (EA *et al*, 2008).

Whilst for the initial draft strategy the preferred options arrived at for the majority of urban frontages was to hold the existing defence line, the picture looked rather different at Selsey and Medmerry. For the Selsey Bill frontage, the draft strategy appears to indicate that the preferred option was for no active intervention, with the expectation that the sea would reach the first houses within

50 years, and the possibility of 100 houses being lost over 100 years. At Medmerry, immediately to the west of Selsey, a shingle bank has provided ongoing flood protection to 300 properties and large caravan sites, and to essential infrastructure. The bank has been breached regularly, however, and requires extensive maintenance, and the strategy identified a preferred option of managed realignment. An essential caveat to all preferred options in the strategy was uncertainty with regard to attracting national funding, and the need to explore other alternatives with those communities affected.<sup>20</sup>

In developing the strategy, the Operating Authority was mindful of a local population that was older and unlikely to want to see any changes to the coastline, and the likelihood of the strategy eliciting an emotional response. Consensus was seen as potentially difficult to both identify and achieve. Nonetheless, the Operating Authority made clear that whilst it wanted to inform the community of how their initial consultation responses had been considered, it was not 'asking for input'. And whilst it sought to inform key stakeholders such as residents groups and encourage their understanding of decisions and co-ordinate work with local authority work on spatial plans, this did *not* involve collective decision making.<sup>21</sup>

Finding a definitive account of how the draft policies were introduced to the public and feedback sought, and the supporting rationale, is difficult. EA officer B (Selsey) describes two formal consultation periods in which the Operating Authority sent letters to everybody on the whole peninsula asking them to comment, and directing them to whether or not they might like to see the

<sup>20</sup> Environment Agency in partnership with Chichester and Arun District Councils. 2008. *Planning for the Future: Pagham to East Head draft coastal defence strategy. Summary Document.*

<sup>21</sup> Arun and Chichester District Councils and the Environment Agency. 2007. *Pagham to East Head draft Coastal Defence strategy stakeholder engagement plan. Version5.* Arun and Chichester District Councils and the Environment Agency.

summary documents. He explains that the Operating Authority had to recognise that its previous strategy in 2000 had not got anywhere, with his colleague EA officer A (Selsey) stressing that:

*We had to start by informing people where we were up to, and then coming up with some very draft recommendations, allowing people to comment on that and influence the outcomes, and then coming back with our recommendations in the light of people's input.*

Whilst EA officer A (Selsey) describes a balance between communicating with people and getting their feedback, and not being able to give them anything definitive, Local Authority coastal engineer A (Selsey) – closely involved with policy development on a day-to-day basis – offers a rather different interpretation of the guiding rationale in suggesting that the original proposals were designed as an act of 'devilment' to arouse local public interest, and get them involved. As becomes clear, issues around vagueness of proposals resonate through both literature review and accounts from respondents in both cases, whilst threat appears to have had potency, albeit unpredictable, for getting people's attention.

Activist A (Selsey), who was heavily instrumental in initiating collective local action through two new local interest groups and later to become a local councillor, offers yet another distinctive account. He maintains that the publication of the draft strategy elicited a weak response, with an initial public meeting attracting only about 20 people. This, he attributed to poor publicity on the part of the Operating Authority – despite the plan having what he saw as serious local consequences. He explains:

*We were told that a large part of the caravan park, which is our main employer, was going to be destroyed by flooding, because they weren't going to protect it any more, and something like 300 homes were probably going to fall into the sea over time as well.*

By Local Authority coastal engineer A (Selsey)'s analysis this was never the plan's intention, and he laments giving people the erroneous impression that the authorities were planning not to defend, with the consequence that the Operating Authority was already into an argument before the consultation had even started. In step with this account, EA officer B (Selsey) describes a public response to the draft CDS that was both numerically substantial and hostile and, despite evidence of a subsequent rapprochement, a degree of lingering unease and mistrust emerges from accounts from officials and those who had taken up issues with them out the outset.

In Selsey, defence arose as one of the key geographical issues. EA officer A (Selsey) alludes to conflicting interests in recalling that:

*One of the things that one of the groups wanted, they wanted us to build a sea wall around Selsey, and it was pretty clear from the early economic assessments we did that that simply wasn't going to be an option. By the same token there were other groups who were very concerned about making sure that the ecology and environmental benefits of the area should not be damaged or lost.*

These various interests, he suggests, were pursued by 'stakeholders' occupying divergent positions in terms of representational accountability and the zeal with which their respective agendas were promoted:

*There are members of the public, there are councillors, there are people of groups which might be publicly-funded. There are other groups – the RSPB for example – which are private groups, but have objectives and an agenda which they are seeking to move forward.*

The ways in which such interests were incorporated by the policy process, and with which respective parties pursued their remits, is important. In the Sheppey case we will see that a numerical sway was held by an environmentally-orientated interest closely aligned to the central government-led 'policy owning' group. In the Selsey case, one grassroots response raised concerns about what it considered to be the centrality to the process of

organisations keen to see land given back to the sea, whilst legitimate community voices were marginalised.

Perhaps more subtly, in the Selsey case observations by relevant officers as to what was achievable in terms of continued sea defence [as with EA officer A (Selsey)'s judgment that a sea wall at Selsey 'wasn't going to be an option'] were sometimes made in rather opaque terms that, arguably, concealed a dominant interest. For example, Local Authority coastal engineer A (Selsey) speaks of the desirability of 'sensible dialogue' with concerned local people, whilst EA officer B (Selsey) offers the view that people involved in the Medmerry Stakeholders Advisory Group (MStAG) felt that the solution reached had been 'pragmatic'. These ideas are worthy of closer scrutiny: 'sensible' has various meanings according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, with one encompassing: 'having or showing good sense, reasonable, judicious, moderate, practical'<sup>22</sup>. Dealing with matters 'according to their practical significance or immediate importance' is one of various possible definitions of 'pragmatism' (as distinct from the philosophical school) according to the same dictionary, whilst Merriam Webster offers as its key definition:

*...dealing with the problems that exist in a specific situation in a reasonable and logical way instead of depending on ideas and theories.*<sup>23</sup>

Thus, we might argue that stress is placed by officers on the practical and the immediate, with the risk of the marginalisation of more abstract considerations – for example, of what is fair or just.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, Local

<sup>22</sup> Oxford. 1982. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>23</sup> Merriam-Webster. [No date]. *Pragmatic*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pragmatic> [Accessed 8 February 2013].

<sup>24</sup> This evokes Habermas' concern that science as applied in the 'political public sphere', which he suggests, occurs when 'public discussions concern objects connected with the practice of the

Authority coastal engineer A (Selsey) strays into ethical territory at one point, observing that:

*There is a real danger government will say 'You pay for your own defences'. Whilst in fairly well-off areas that's an option, we've got to be careful that not everybody can find additional money just like that.*

He concludes on this point, in what appears to be a reference to government not defending in the future what it had defended in the past:

*Society has provided this wall, and society has said 'You can build behind it guys, that's alright' – society has an obligation to maintain that bloody wall as far as I'm concerned.*

This hints at fundamental tension in the work of local authority officials (and as we will see in the Sheppey case, elected members also), with Local Authority coastal engineer A (Selsey) explaining that his role on the strategy was both very closely involved around setting policy and trying to sell that policy to other people and, simultaneously to make sure that residents get 'a fair crack of the whip'.<sup>25</sup>

Activist A (Selsey) and others opposed to the plan were instrumental in setting up the pressure group 'Save our Selsey' (SOS)<sup>26</sup> – formed to 'alert and inform residents and businesses to the proposals, and to 'campaign for a fair solution to our coast defence, that considers the people who live and work here'. SOS sought guarantees for funds to protect the town's main road and services, that existing defences be maintained until the new strategy is agreed, that it be

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state...' (1989: 231) has lost focus on what *should* be done, leaving us with what Sensat describes as 'an exclusively technical perspective' (1979: 18).

<sup>25</sup> Here we might observe a tension in balancing a rights-based discourse with an official governmental requirement for 'pragmatic' and 'sensible' outcomes. Accordingly, central government FCERM policy must be understood as an interest, although obscured by technocratic discourse and unique in it is not being subject to the same disciplinary process of mediation as other interests.

<sup>26</sup> Save Our Selsey (SOS). [No date]. *Save Our Selsey Campaign for Coastal Defence*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.saveourseley.org/index.htm> [Accessed 6/2/13].

involved in realignment planning at Medmerry; support and funding for private investment in coast defences; and clarity over how the preferred options would be paid for.

At around the same time The Manhood Peninsula Steering Group (MPSG)<sup>27</sup> was established, with Activist A (Selsey) and the MP for Chichester as co-chairs. The former explains that whereas SOS was unrestrained in its criticism of policy decisions, MPSG was designed to be more cooperative and committed to a strategy of attracting funds for regeneration projects that might strengthen the local economy and so make a stronger case for sea defence investment in the future. Nonetheless, MPSG was highly critical both of certain proposals contained within the CDS, and of the ways in which the views and needs of local people had been accommodated in their formulation. The formation, mobilization and organizational strategies of both groups will be considered in more detail in Chapter 5.

In a representation to the National Audit Office (NAO), which holds government bodies to account for their use of public money (NAO, [no date]), MPSG argued that the Stakeholder Engagement Plan for the strategy could not deliver the community's balanced view of the initial proposals to the project team. In contrast, it argued that non-community organisations with a nature conservation remit (National Trust, Natural England (NE), English Heritage (EH), and Chichester Harbour Conservancy) were given a very strong role. These organisations, the submission argued, all had a background of advocating managed realignment,

<sup>27</sup> MPSG is a voluntary alliance of residents, businesses and elected representatives that works to ensure that coastal areas from Pagham to East Head are protected from coastal erosion and flooding where this is in the social and economic interests of the local community; supports measures which make the Manhood Peninsula a more attractive place to live, work and visit, thereby improving the case for appropriate coastal protection; to work closely with other similarly affected coastal areas and statutory agencies, to improve government policy, raise awareness and understanding of coastal issues and the importance of supporting coastal communities; to encourage the goodwill and involvement of the wider community; and to encourage civic pride and foster community spirit. (<http://mpsg.org.uk>)

without bearing any responsibility for its socio-economic consequences. The submission went on to complain that:

*Where legitimate community stakeholders are included, regardless of size or mandate, similar weightings are given to peripheral interests as 'core' interests. For instance, Selsey Town Council gets the same degree of involvement ... as the Selsey Dog Park; and only one private landowner is granted involvement<sup>28</sup>.*

Investigating the strategy, the NAO concluded that while the Operating Authority *had* listened to local concerns, it could have sought opinion more effectively. Greater clarity, it concluded, would have helped the general public understand the issues better, thus adding fuel to concerns around the policy containing somewhat amorphous propositions. More specifically, the NAO ascribed a low response rate to a questionnaire issued in part to a proportionally large retired population that was unlikely to use the Internet<sup>29</sup> – one of many observations, to be found in both cases, that link demographics and the development and mobilization of interest, and with implications for how authorities seek to involve people in the development of policy.

A redrafted CDS<sup>30</sup> stated that the Operating Authority had taken account of people's wishes by joining some of the frontages together, for example, by combining the three around Selsey giving them a single management option. The revised policy of 'Hold the Line' was however tempered by the observation that the most important issue for Selsey was its current low priority status for national funding, with the clear implication that, despite the change to the plan, those in the locality would have to pay for defences in the future. For Medmerry, the strategy recommended that a policy of managed realignment might both

<sup>28</sup> Manhood Peninsula Steering Group (MPSG). 2007. *Submission of Further Evidence to the National Audit Office Regarding the Pagham to East Head Coastal Defence Strategy*.

<sup>29</sup> Hooper, M (National Audit Office). 2008. *Potential Managed Realignment at Medmerry, West Sussex* [letter, 25/4/2008].

<sup>30</sup> Environment Agency in partnership with Chichester and Arun District Councils. 2008. *Planning for the Future: Pagham to East Head draft coastal defence strategy. Summary Document*. Environment Agency in partnership with Chichester and Arun District Councils.



protect the road and utilities whilst also providing compensatory habitat to replace losses resulting from schemes to manage flood and erosion risk at other sites in the Solent such as Portsmouth. It also explained that local caravan site owners Bunn Leisure were investigating potential ways to improve coastal defences for their sites.

The MPSG consultation response to the redrafted strategy indicates ambivalence with regard to the processes by which decisions were made. On the one hand, it acknowledges that consultation had been a great improvement from the earlier draft consultation, particularly the efforts made to engage with business and community representatives, but on the other stressed that change was being forced through.

Activist A (Selsey) explains that by that stage MPSG had made an assessment that it had got as far as it could possibly go with the things that it wanted to get done – whilst it had lost the argument over realignment at Medmerry, it had made sure that a local farmer would be compensated and that nobody would lose their homes. Confirming a change of mobilization strategy for MPSG, he adds:

*It looked like we would be able to get much better public access through there and it might help improve our economy, so we wanted to open the door to influencing positively the managed realignment.*

Subsequently, and with specific reference to the managed realignment scheme at Medmerry, the EA supported the formation of the Medmerry Stakeholder Advisory Group (MStAG)<sup>31</sup>, comprising a group of ‘key local stakeholders’ which, although not a decision-making body, had a remit to ensure the community was involved throughout the implementation phase. Members

<sup>31</sup> Environment Agency (EA). 2011b. *Draft Terms of Reference for the Medmerry Stakeholder Advisory Group: Implementation Phase*. [Online] Available at: [http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/Leisure/Terms\\_of\\_Reference\\_MStAG\\_Mtg\\_Feb11\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/Leisure/Terms_of_Reference_MStAG_Mtg_Feb11_pdf.pdf) [Accessed 14/2/13].

were sought from all local councils affected by the proposal to ensure that all residents were officially represented, with a balance of different interests additionally sought to include businesses, landowners, recreational interests, agriculture and horticulture, fishing, and community and environmental groups. EA officer A (Selsey) explains that, through MStAG, the EA tried to make it fair and balanced, so that nobody felt excluded and allowed participants as much as possible to have a share in how the process was taken forward. Activist A (Selsey) agreed that:

*We had a good opportunity to hammer home the points that we wanted in the fine detail, and the EA made quite a lot of effort to try and engage with local people.*

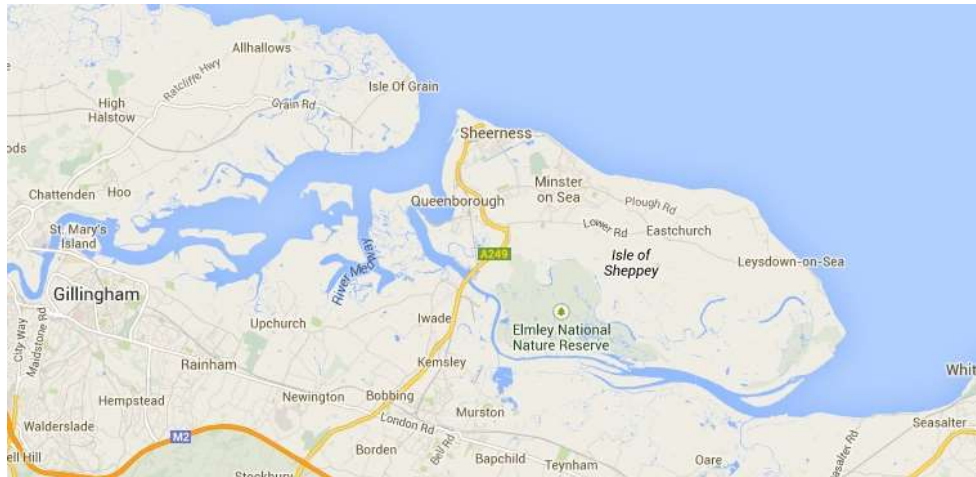
In terms of the influence over policy that local people were able to bring to bear, Town/parish councillor (Selsey) considers the efforts of the groups with which he had been involved such as SOS and MPSG, as well as Selsey Town Council, to have been successful in terms of changes that people had wanted to see made to the strategy. Significant amongst these, he suggests, was turning round the idea of managed realignment so that it was acknowledged that the primary purpose was coastal defence rather than compensatory habitat, and would be maintained as such. Activist A (Selsey) cites as a 'key win' the revision to the strategy that saw the Selsey urban sea front reconsidered as a single frontage with a policy of 'Hold the Line' and the fact that the owner of Bunn Leisure had been allowed to build his own defences (albeit at his own cost). Whilst he considers dealing with decision makers to have been very difficult and continues to have misgivings in this regard, he also points to an improvement in terms of the involvement of local people in relevant decisions. He describes MStAG as 'excellent', although his endorsement comes with the caveat that the main battle had already been lost, and that such 'proper' engagement was essentially over the terms of the defeat.

## **Sheppey**

### **Social, economic and geographical profile**

Sheppey lies in the borough of Swale on the Thames Estuary in north east Kent. Swale comprises three main areas focused on the towns of Sittingbourne, Faversham, and Sheerness on Sheppey; and is bounded by Medway district to the west, by Canterbury to the east, Ashford to the south and Maidstone to the south west (Swale BC, [no date]c: 1). The population of Swale is 137,700 according to figures for June 2012 (ONS, [no date]h. This study places a particular focus on two areas on Sheppey (population 40,300) [Swale BC, {no date}d] – Leysdown and Warden, with a ward population of 3,019 (ONS, [no date]d), and Minster Cliffs with 7,513 (ONS, [no date]e).

***Figure 4: The Isle of Sheppey***



*Source: Map data © 2014 Google*

Swale is predominantly rural, and there is a close association between the nature of the countryside and agriculture (Swale BC, [no date]b: 2), with around 80% of land managed through agriculture. (Swale BC, [no date]b: 11) For employment, Swale's main industrial sectors are distribution, hotels and catering (24%) and public administration, education and health (22%), with proportions broadly similar to the regional and national averages. The largest private sector employers are in the industrial and transportation sectors, whilst another important local employer is the cluster of prisons on Sheppey. The tourism sector is also a significant provider of local jobs through, for example caravan parks on Sheppey and bed and breakfast accommodation (Swale BC, [no date]c: 2).

The age profile of Swale is broadly in line with those for the South East and for England as a whole (ONS, [no date]k), whilst ethnically the borough is predominantly white – more so than the South East, and significantly more so than England (ONS [no date]j).

Only 18.6% of working age residents in Swale hold a degree or higher qualification, significantly below the regional (30.8%) and national (28.6%) averages, whilst the proportion with no qualifications (19.2%) is double the regional average (9.6%), and also above the national figure (13.1%) [Swale BC, [no date]c: 5]. Though improving, Swale's poor skills profile is related to an

employer demand which, historically, has not tended to require the high skill levels that are increasingly in demand nationally. In August 2011, 3.8% of Swale's working age population were receiving Jobseeker's Allowance, similar to the national figure although slightly higher than those for Kent and the South East (Swale BC, 2011: 8).

**Table 12: Top 15 most deprived Super Output Areas in Swale according to the Index of Deprivation 2007**

Rank	Ward	Rank of IMD
1	Sheerness East	899
2	Leysdown & Warden	1040
3	Murston	1451
4	Sheerness West	1576
5	Sheerness West	2345
6	Queenborough & Halfway	2780
7	Sheppey Central	3162
8	Sheerness West	3473
9	Milton Regis	4738
10	Davington	4814
11	Leysdown & Warden	5231
12	Sheppey Central	5416

13	Sheerness East	5911
14	Kemsley	6198
15	Sheerness West	6390

*Source: adapted from Swale BC, [no date]a: Appendix A).*

Swale is amongst the most deprived boroughs within Kent, and sits within the most deprived 35% of local authorities nationally (Swale BC, [no date]a: 29). Nine Super Output Areas (ONS, [no date]b) on Sheppey are within the 20% most deprived areas nationally (Swale BC, [no date]a: 30), and Sheppey is home to 11 of the 15 most deprived SOAs in Swale (see Table 12). Two of these are in the ward of Leysdown and Warden (Swale BC, [no date]b: Appendix A). Swale has high levels of both registered social landlord stock (14%) relative to the South East average (8.7%), and housing owner-occupation (77.88%) compared the England average (69%) (Swale BC, [no date]a: 15).

Twenty six per cent (approximately 10,900 ha) of land in the borough is designated either for its international or national value for biodiversity (Swale BC,

[no date]b: 2). Natural processes have a strong influence on the area, with large areas of land subject to coastal erosion and tidal flooding (Swale BC, [no date]b: 18) – most notably in 1953 and 1978 (Swale BC, [no date]b: 20). Sea-level rise is expected to lead to increasing ‘coastal squeeze’ (Swale BC, [no date]b: 16).

## **The Isle of Grain to South Foreland Shoreline Management Plan**

Formally approved in 2010<sup>32</sup>, the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for the Isle of Grain to South Foreland is a ‘high level document’ that provides a large-scale assessment of the risks associated with coastal processes and presents a long-term policy framework to reduce these risks to people and the developed, historic and natural environment in a sustainable manner (Defra, 2003). The SMP explains that for much of the coastline the recommended plan is to maintain existing defences in the long term. On Sheppey, however, the final plan identifies losses under preferred policies at Policy Unit 4a04 (Minster Slopes to Warden Bay) with the accompanying assessment that one property is at risk in the medium term (2025-2055), and 20 in the long term (2055-2105)<sup>33</sup>, and at Policy Unit 4a06 (Leysdown-on-Sea to Shell Ness) where ‘set back’ under a preferred policy of managed realignment would involve the loss of houses at Shell Ness (Canterbury CC, 2010a: 69).

Commencing in the Winter of 2005-06, the SMP was developed through a Client Steering Group (CSG) made up of local authorities, the EA and other key bodies including NE, EH, and representatives from consultants to the

<sup>32</sup> Willison, T (Environment Agency). 2010. *Shoreline Management Plan Review (SMP) Isle of Grain to South Foreland* [letter, 31/8/2010].

<sup>33</sup> Canterbury City Council (Canterbury CC). 2010a. *Isle of Grain to South Foreland Shoreline Management Plan Review*. Canterbury City Council.

project.<sup>34</sup> Whilst this group had overall responsibility for the delivery of the SMP, a Key Stakeholder Forum (KSF) was intended to act as a focal point for discussion and consultation for the project, with members providing representation of the primary interests within the study area. To this end, stress was placed on the KSF including representatives of those significantly affected by the outcomes of the SMP review process including representation of the public.<sup>35</sup> Members of the KSF included EA staff, local authority members and staff, consultants, environmental groups, non-departmental public bodies, industrial and commercial interests, and bodies with a specific coastal interest (e.g. a coastal architect).

‘Other stakeholders’, including parish and town councils, coastal landowners, and residents associations, were *not* included in the KSF, although it was intended that these should be contacted by the project developers at the start of the process, and as consultees on draft decisions.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it might be observed that those who risked the loss of their homes under any resulting plans were significantly reliant on their interests being represented effectively by key stakeholders and elected members during policy development, and subsequently through public consultation once the draft plan had been finalised.<sup>37</sup> However, consultation responses made with regard to the resulting proposals questioned the effectiveness of the consultation process; and an analysis of relevant policy literature and media coverage, and interviews with local politicians, invite further

<sup>34</sup> Canterbury City Council (Canterbury CC). 2010b. *Isle of Grain to South Foreland Shoreline Management Plan Review. Appendix A: SMP Development*. Canterbury City Council.

<sup>35</sup> Canterbury City Council (Canterbury CC). 2010c. *Isle of Grain to South Foreland Shoreline Management Plan Review. Appendix B: Stakeholder Engagement*. Canterbury City Council.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Canterbury City Council (Canterbury CC). 2010c. *Isle of Grain to South Foreland Shoreline Management Plan Review. Appendix B: Stakeholder Engagement*. Canterbury City Council.



consideration of how effectively the process as a whole incorporated such interests.

A process of policy development saw regular meetings of the KSF, and elected members were informed that at one such meeting representatives of the Friends of North Kent Marshes and the National Farmers' Union (NFU) had proposed contacting anyone directly affected by the policy decisions to give them the opportunity to be involved, and that it may also be necessary to meet with them. However, the chair of the Elected Members Forum – himself a local politician – expressed concern regarding personal levels of public consultation on the grounds that 'objections may have a major impact upon the final SMP document and policy choices'.<sup>38</sup>

Such a response appears to conflate awareness of proposals with objection, and objection in turn with threats to a successful policy. It also raises questions concerning the orientation of elected members to, respectively, the interests of their constituents, and central government policy in this process – mirroring, and even amplifying, the dilemma attending Local Authority coastal engineer A (Selsey)'s role in the Selsey case.

We might also usefully pay attention to the constitution, in terms of interest, of KSF meetings – arguably the principal vehicle by which particular interests might shape the direction of the SMP. The first such meeting was devoted in part to attendees considering what was important in the future management of the coast, which they did in two groups. The first of these groups (comprising representatives from consultants Halcrow, EA, NE, RSPB, Kent Wildlife Trust, NFU and Kent Wildfowlers Association) appears to have had a significantly pro-environmental conservation flavour. The second group comprised a local politician, a representative each from transport infrastructure

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

and utilities companies, and two EA officers.<sup>39</sup> From these two groups combined, the attendees from central government agencies number five of thirteen (nearly 40%), and with the inclusion of a consultant to the project the proportion rises to nearly half (46%).

For the second KSF meeting, 10 of 38 attendees were either from the EA or NE, augmented by no fewer than seven consultants. Again, then, nearly half of those in attendance (44.7%) were associated with organisations holding key project ownership or advisory positions via the CSG. By contrast, only one elected member was present – incidentally, the same one who had advised against personal consultation with affected parties. For the third and final KSF meeting, of 39 attendees just under a quarter (nine) were from with the EA or NE, with a further three consultants. Again, only one elected member was present, raising the question as to how effectively any relevant balance of interests was brought to bear via such an arrangement.

Whilst unmediated input from those directly affected was discouraged at this point, Local Authority coastal engineer B (Sheppey) recalls there being objections to aspects of the draft policy from the farming community, and it is of note both that the NFU was a key stakeholder involved in the relevant meetings, and that Local Authority councillor A (Sheppey) – closely involved in key stakeholder meetings – agrees that perhaps as a farmer he emphasised the agricultural with regard to deliberation.

Local Authority coastal engineer B (Sheppey) explains that where there was conflict in the setting of the policy, resolution generally came through assessing what the objectives of the SMP were and applying them accordingly although, he stresses, not necessarily to the satisfaction of all. Whilst it would appear to make sense that disputes should be resolved in this way, we might

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

observe first that the polity in this case had acted to *limit* the likelihood of particular disputes, and second that Local Authority coastal engineer B (Sheppey) and others had concerns over the weighting of relevant interests in decision-making – reflected, as we have seen, in the numerical composition of the main deliberative forum. In a statement echoing those voiced by MPSG in the Manhood Peninsula case, albeit in less strident terms, Local Authority coastal engineer B (Sheppey) explains:

*The environmental side, particularly when frontages are an internationally designated area, does seem to score quite highly, and everyone says ‘Oh, well, can’t do much about it – European law says we’ve got to protect this, or improve it’, and that’s got higher weighting, possibly even, than the community interest.*

Canterbury City Council’s formal consultation response to the draft strategy (whilst having no representative role with regard to Sheppey), makes reference to various issues, including that of effects on homeowners it associates with:

*...the rush to try to set back as much of the coast as possible under the environmental lobby.<sup>40</sup>*

Completion of the draft plan saw the commencement of public consultation. According to the Operating Authority, this involved press notices and briefings, the development of briefing packs and leaflets, posters, letters to the extended stakeholder group, copies of SMP documents in both hard and digital formats, consultation response forms, and the organisation of public and stakeholder meetings. Letter drops by local authorities to properties on parts of the coastline, including Sheppey, where properties were considered to be

<sup>40</sup> Canterbury City Council (Canterbury CC). 2007. *Isle of Grain to North Foreland SMP Review – Consultation Response*. Canterbury: Canterbury City Council. Whilst signed by the portfolio holder, it may be relevant that the name given for the contact for the submission is that of Local Authority coastal engineer B (Sheppey) himself. It is not unreasonable to suggest, then, that disputes were settled with reference to a set of guidelines, supported by national policies, that were considered less than satisfactory by key parties and so of questionable value for providing useful mediation.

directly affected by the proposed policies, were also reported, whilst face-to-face meetings in such cases were proposed, although only if stakeholder response indicated that they were required.<sup>41</sup> Local Authority coastal engineer A (Sheppey) explains that on Sheppey it was done:

*...by informing as best we could all the residents who were likely to be affected and anyone else in the general area, and then having a small public exhibition.*

Discussion with officials and written comment were both encouraged. He makes the judgement that this approach worked fairly well although, again, the response was less than he had hoped for.

Concerns around compensation and blight for those with property in areas likely to be 'realigned' and the effectiveness of the consultation process were identified by the Operating Authority as key themes to emerge from consultation. However, when compared to other areas identified for potential loss of homes by the draft plan, public responses from the two Sheppey frontages must be considered limited. Minster-on-Sea Parish Council objected to the policy at the Minster Slopes to Warden Bay frontage, as did individuals who, in observing that they were sure that other residents would agree if they knew of the plan, raised the wider question as to how the interests of residents as 'other stakeholders' had been accommodated in all stages of the planning. There were no responses of any kind from the public with regard to the Leysdown-on-Sea to Shell Ness frontage.<sup>42</sup>

How might this be explained? A reading of case-specific policy literature and interviews with local authority councillors concerned about the implications

<sup>41</sup> Canterbury City Council (Canterbury CC). 2010c. *Isle of Grain to South Foreland Shoreline Management Plan Review. Appendix B: Stakeholder Engagement*. Canterbury City Council.

<sup>42</sup> Canterbury City Council (Canterbury CC). 2010c. *Isle of Grain to South Foreland Shoreline Management Plan Review. Appendix B: Stakeholder Engagement*. Canterbury City Council.

of SMPs attest to efforts on the part of the local authority and the EA to inform local people of the plan and its implications for them and, on the other, a range of factors that may have inhibited both awareness and response.

A number of public meetings devoted to the SMP took place in the Swale area, and on Sheppey in particular, and these saw the expression of concerns. At a Swale Rural Forum meeting in August 2006 issues were raised over how areas of coastline to save might be identified, and the likelihood of homes being lost in the future due to coastal erosion.<sup>43</sup> More recently, a Swale Rural Forum meeting in Eastchurch, Sheppey, in January 2013 featured a presentation on the realignment of sea defences from EA staff.<sup>44</sup>

Local Authority councillor B (Sheppey) stresses the opportunities presented by these and similar public meetings (indeed, he requested the relevant agenda item at the most recent). He explains:

*The problem is they don't get enough people out there to come, and that when they do they just don't bring it up regarding realigning the sea defences.*

He goes on to argue that whilst EA presentations on the SMP are 'fairly clear', they are vague on specifics. He is unsure as to whether there has been concern over people losing their homes as nobody had approached him, stressing that when people did find out it would be of great concern to them.

Local Authority councillor A (Sheppey) gives a rather more positive account of attendance at public meetings:

<sup>43</sup> Swale Borough Council (Swale BC). 2006. *Swale Rural Forum: Minutes of the Meeting held at the De Lacey hall, Broadway, Sheerness on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> August 2006 from 7:04pm to 9:05pm.* [Online] Available at: <http://www2.swale.gov.uk/dso/download/7442C0F41EC943B381C05E008D51CC32.pdf> [Accessed 20 February 2013].

<sup>44</sup> Swale Borough Council (Swale BC). 2013. *Swale Rural Forum: Minutes of the Meeting held at Eastchurch Village Hall, Warden Road, Eastchurch, Isle of Sheppey on Tuesday 8 January 2013 from 7:00pm to 9:13pm.* [Online] Available at: <http://www2.swale.gov.uk/dso/viewminutes.asp?uid=1300> [Accessed 22 February 2013].

*Some of the meetings we ran it was obvious that a lot of them had very particular personal interests. It was the landowners, it was the owners of holiday parks, in some case – particularly in the meeting on Sheppey – it was people whose houses were likely to disappear into the sea over the course of the next hundred years.*

However, he counters this by observing that it is very difficult for the ordinary man in the street, or even the parish council, to feel that they have a genuine influence and, tellingly, from his informed position of polity membership in the setting of the SMP, he adds:

*You do sometimes get the impression that the decisions are made and then communicated to you.*

Despite the presence of the press in the strategy's communications plan, little use appears to have been made of local newspapers for the purpose of encouraging awareness of and responses to the implications of the draft SMP. Whilst a 2009 article in the Sheerness Times Guardian reported that there were around 7,500 residential and industrial properties on Sheppey at risk of flooding, and explained that an SMP was being compiled (Grove, 2009), no mention was made of any risk that Sheppey residents might lose their homes.<sup>45</sup>

It is possible, of course, that people at risk on Sheppey were aware of the SMP and had no issue with what was proposed and its implications. Local Authority coastal engineer B (Sheppey) explains that a follow-up exhibition, held in Eastchurch on Sheppey in May 2013 and devoted to the Minster/Warden Bay frontage – most of which, he explained, had never been defended, and where erosion was to be allowed to happen – was very well attended. He offers the possible explanation for such interest that people realised that the authorities

<sup>45</sup> A field trip to Sheppey included a conversation with the journalist who had written the article in question. Research notes record that whilst she stressed that it was a long time ago and that she didn't have a special journalistic interest in the subject, she did tentatively venture the view – apparently corroborated by a colleague – that authorities would generally make more noise around a major consultation, and that she thought she would have remembered had that happened. Though admittedly anecdotal, this account appears broadly to support the argument that the local press was not best used for the purposes of raising the awareness and interest of local people.

meant what they had been saying, and so were more prone to coming forward with their comments. If so, this would seem to support the idea that the perception of threat to people's personal interests – advanced by Local Authority coastal engineer A (Selsey), and reinforced by Local Authority councillor A (Sheppey) – can be key to people becoming active on the issue. Such a thesis is also in step with the suggestion that, arguably, the exhibition made the implications of change more explicit than had previously be the case. Difficult to calibrate, however, is Local Authority coastal engineer B (Sheppey)'s expression of surprise that:

*...the vast majority of the comments was: 'Well, yeah, OK we accept it's got to happen, but there's things we'd like you to do to help us, including indications of time, and in some places some diversion of private roads and these sorts of things'.*

However, a fresh perspective might be usefully sought in considering how different responses from local residents have been in the respective cases to a similar order of threat. And in terms of the involvement of local people in the making of policy, we might wonder at the wisdom of the Operating Authority not making early and meaningful contact with those likely to be affected on Sheppey with a view to prompting precisely the kind of interest it appears to have been so keen to avoid.

To conclude on the Sheppey case, as with Selsey, there is evidence to support the view that social characteristics, combined with a distinctive cultural make up, may together inform the pattern of representation – if indeed that is the right word to use. Local Authority coastal engineer B (Sheppey) observes that:

*It is generally people over 65 who respond. A married couple with a couple of young kids it is almost impossible, because they don't have the time.*

Such a prescription must be taken in tandem with a judgement by the MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey from 1997-2010 (MP [Sheppey]) who

graphically describes a constituency fundamentally lacking what he considered to be the skills required for effective representation. Tellingly, he qualifies this already worrying judgement with the observation:

*I was shocked at the lack of understanding in Sittingbourne and Sheppey – especially on the island.*

## **Discussion**

Selsey and Sheppey offer commonalities and contrasts concerning the nature and effectiveness of local efforts to influence policy and their relationship to the socio-demographic composition of the locale. Both have relatively narrow industrial and commercial bases that appear reliant on the service sector and, significantly tourism; they also share poor educational achievement and a relatively low employer demand for skills. Both are significantly ethnically homogeneous, with high levels of home-ownership relative to national figures.

At both sites, draft proposals were developed that suggested the loss of homes, and then publicised. Consultation literature suggests that in neither case was the early and direct involvement of the public encouraged. Rather, draft policies were developed 'behind closed doors' with public interests pursued through elected representatives. In terms of Tilly's (1978) Polity model, citizen groups might best be categorized as 'low-return' challengers, albeit with potential for influence through their representatives' polity membership.

In both cases the limiting of opportunity in this way gave rise to negative responses via the respective consultation processes, consistent with Foot's (2009) finding about frustration with the barriers that limit involvement. It is also of note that, consistent with Fletcher's (2007) findings, one elected representative active in the Sheppey case, and with a responsibility for public representation, expressed concerns over the robustness of decision-making



processes, and specifically inequality of opportunities for local people to influence decision-making (2007: 618).

Following the setting of draft policies, in both cases attempts were made to raise public awareness of proposals through consultation exercises and feedback sought, although with limits in each case as to the nature and extent of possible changes to draft policies. Comparable dissemination methods were employed to this end, with public meetings and exhibitions at both sites successful to at least some degree in attracting attention from those concerned about loss of homes.<sup>46</sup>

For all of these commonalities, there was a stark disparity between the nature and volume of formal consultation responses from this specific interest between the two sites. In the Selsey case, authorities acknowledge a large and hostile response to initial draft strategy proposals from locales that considered themselves to be at risk – to the extent, arguably, that through concerted collective action residents' interests appear to have grabbed the attention of policy makers counter to the prescriptions of the original plan. By way of contrast, very little was heard from similar areas in the Sheppey case at a similar stage in the process.

Of potential relevance is that the two locations offer contrasting age profiles. In line with findings from Myatt *et al* (2003, 2003a) a greater response from the older Selsey population may be predictable – in line with the working assumptions held, albeit with qualifications, by the local authority coastal engineers in each case. In addition, the two sites differ in terms of relative deprivation; Selsey occupies a middling position in the IMD, whilst Sheppey

<sup>46</sup> We might observe, then, a broad parity in terms of opportunity for local interests to exert influence in each case. In terms of calibration using the 'Conceptualising Citizen Participation model adapted from Arnstein (Table 9), both appear to belong in the broad category of 'Consultation', as a variant of 'Tokenism'. Whilst this can be a step towards genuine citizen participation, it is itself no guarantee of influence.

stands out as markedly deprived. To this end, it is perhaps predictable that Selsey mounted what was widely considered to be effective representation through carefully coordinated collective action in that it resulted in changes to the draft CDS, whilst the response from Sheppey was muted, where it existed at all.

This appears to be in step with Zsamboky *et al's* (2011) argument that in disadvantaged communities low incomes or unemployment are considered more pressing than issues of coastal change, and that communities may lack necessary adaptive capacity to respond to climate change. To recast using Tilly's terms, we might ask whether the costs of influence for citizens as challengers was simply too high.

By this reading, such a deficit places an onus on institutional capacity – in this context, the ways in which institutions as polity members seek to ensure that the relevant people are included in decision-making processes. In addition to processes that relied on the proxy representation of interests, and which in the Sheppey case discouraged early communication between elected representatives and constituents, we might also highlight as an institutional failing the fact that policy proposals were considered hard to understand – especially so on Sheppey – with evidence in support of Zsamboky *et al's* (2011) argument that an absence of clarity contributes to apathy. However, in the Selsey case, Local Authority coastal engineer A's account has it that explicit threat was employed by authorities as a means of arousing public response, with self-interest broadly considered the a 'trigger' for attention in both cases amongst those officers and elected representatives with responsibilities for raising public awareness.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Here, local elected representatives and officers occupy roles in the setting of policy that appear nuanced to the point, at times, of appearing contradictory. On the one hand, they have a responsibility to constituents in ensuring their interests are represented and, on the other, to the 'safe' passage of the policy.

Finally, and supporting Milligan *et al's* (2009) observation around the difficulties in balancing conflicting objectives, a major finding has been the relative power of interests active within the polity, with concerns expressed that powerful environmental interests both proliferated and enjoyed privileged, 'low-cost' positions of influence as key stakeholders. Perhaps less visibly, there is also an argument to be made that operating authorities themselves acted as both mediators of process and proxies of a dominant and demonstrably controversial central government interest. In both cases operating authorities expressed contentment that objections were handled and disputes resolved according to the terms of reference for the respective processes, and faith in the deliberative method. And in both cases, these same methodologies were challenged, as were the central government rationales and policies that underpinned them. However, unlike other relevant interests, these were not disciplined by any process of mediation as part of the planning process, but instead represented non-negotiable parameters to which operating authorities made appeal through ideas of what was 'pragmatic' or 'sensible'.

### **Transferability**

Whilst MMO categories are not sufficiently fine-grained to map directly onto the settlements under consideration in these case studies (there is no analysis against Super Output Area, for example), they are adequate for making cautious observations as to the broad applicability of evidence to other parts of the country where coastal change with loss of homes is anticipated. For example, the Chichester district (of which Selsey is a part) features nearly one third of settlements typified by the MMO as 'Silver Seaside' (four times the regional average) – retirement areas that are, for example, smaller, less developed, reliant on tourism and non-standard employment arrangements. As such, we might note the symmetry with Selsey, and also that there may be some read-

across to the south west of England, for which 12.6% of settlements fall into the same category, and where the EA's 'best estimate' envisions the loss to erosion of 136 homes over 20 years and nearly 800 over 100 years (see Table 13).

**Table 13: Erosion property counts for the south west of England – buildings affected under SMP preferred policies**

Local authority	Region	20 yrs			50 yrs			100 yrs		
		5%ile	50%ile	95%ile	5%ile	50%ile	95%ile	5%ile	50%ile	95%ile
North Somerset	SW	3	3	3	4	3	3	9	8	6
South Gloucestershire	SW	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Cornwall	SW	93	76	44	171	132	86	478	273	160
Torbay	SW	2	0	0	10	7	3	13	12	9
Isles of Scilly	SW	6	1	1	34	24	11	49	41	38
East Devon	SW	0	0	0	5	3	0	73	62	5
North Devon	SW	0	0	0	2	1	1	5	4	2
South Hams	SW	43	38	34	99	89	50	149	121	100
Teignbridge	SW	3	1	1	6	5	4	9	8	5
Torridge	SW	6	5	5	19	13	7	25	22	20
West Devon	SW	7	7	6	9	9	7	10	9	9
Christchurch	SW	0	0	0	11	7	2	11	7	2
Purbeck	SW	1	1	1	7	3	1	86	78	43
West Dorset	SW	11	4	2	53	34	20	169	94	60
Weymouth and Portland	SW	1	0	0	8	6	3	40	23	8
Sedgemoor	SW	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	15	15
West Somerset	SW	0	0	0	1	0	0	8	1	1
TOTAL		176	136	97	439	336	198	1150	778	483

Source: Environment Agency<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Hardiman, N., nick.hardiman@environment-agency.gov.uk. 2012. *Re: Homes to be lost to the sea.* [Email] Message to C. Blunkell (chris.blunkell@btinternet.com). Sent Tuesday 6 November 2012, 17:14. [Accessed 10 December 2013]. Figures extrapolated from data supplied upon request by the Environment Agency in 2012. No formal methodology was supplied, although an accompanying email explained that the data covered projected loss of homes to coastal erosion in England and Wales (and excluding homes loss to managed realignment), and that the 5%ile, 50%ile and 95%ile figures represented 'worst case', 'best estimate' and 'best case' projections respectively (Hardiman, 2012).

Similarly, we might note that 23.25% of Swale settlements, more than twice the regional average, are adjudged to fall into the 'Structural Shifters' category - towns and cities that have lost primary markets and are struggling to find new ones, characterised by above average employment in manufacturing, benefits, and long-term illness; and below average qualifications, employment and jobs growth. Again, we might observe symmetry with the Yorkshire and Humberside region (MMO, 2011: 27), where the EA's 'best estimate' envisions the loss to erosion of 50 homes over 20 years and over 400 over 100 years (see Table 14).

**Table 14: Erosion property counts for the south west of England – buildings affected under SMP preferred policies**

Local authority	Region	20 yrs			50 yrs			100 yrs		
		5%ile	50%ile	95%ile	5%ile	50%ile	95%ile	5%ile	50%ile	95%ile
East Riding of Yorkshire	YH	56	38	27	130	106	79	291	204	134
Scarborough	YH	25	12	3	109	83	50	281	203	124
TOTAL		81	50	30	239	189	129	572	407	258

Source: Environment Agency<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter 5: MOBILIZING INTEREST AT LOCAL LEVEL**

This chapter addresses questions concerning whether and how people in communities at risk mount collective action in search of influence over coastal planning policies. In so doing, it offers a narrative description of such processes. Previous chapters confirm significant commonalities between the local cases in the approaches to public involvement taken by the respective operating authorities (and attendant issues concerning the clarity of propositions). In neither was the early involvement of the public in the setting of policy encouraged, and issues with regard to the clarity of propositions, and with consultation processes, were raised in both. However, Selsey mounted what was widely considered to be effective representation through grassroots collective action, arguably resulting in a degree of influence, whereas no such action occurred on Sheppey. Thus, we might observe an expression of interest in both cases, but significant divergence in how this translates to organization and mobilization.

Accordingly, the second purpose of this chapter is to explain and compare relevant collective action in terms of socio-economic context. In pursuit of a 'meso' analysis, then, this chapter makes use of two analytical approaches. The first, Tilly's Mobilization model, will be employed in the descriptive study of how, in each case, the interests of local people either translated into action, or did not. The Mobilization model (see Figure 2) has it that the main determinants of a group's mobilization are:

*...its organization, its interests in possible interactions with other contenders, the current opportunity/threat of those interactions and the group's subjection to repression (1978: 56).*

Whereas Tilly's Polity model was employed in considering the practices of government and other key contenders, this chapter is focused more specifically on the ways in which people work collectively in pursuit of opportunity.

Second, this chapter will employ Bourdieu's Theory of Capitals in developing a more nuanced explanation of the interaction and economic, social and cultural factors that may enable or limit the propensities and capacities of people in each case to work together in seeking influence.

Although concerned primarily with evidence from the Selsey and Sheppey case studies, findings from the third National Voice of Coastal Communities (NVCC) case study are also used to inform judgments of contrast and commonality as appropriate, in support of a broader understanding as to how the nature of collective action and any resulting degree of influence might be linked.

### **Coastal change – interest, organization and mobilization**

Sheppey and Selsey share certain socio-demographic characteristics – not least low educational attainment, a reliance on a low-skilled and seasonal work, and a relatively high reliance on state support in one form or another. They also share above average levels of owner-occupation. Another similarity concerns their relative geographies – a shared urban-rural classification, and a historical vulnerability to flooding and coastal erosion. And although Selsey sits on the mainland as part of the Manhood Peninsula whilst Sheppey is an island, both have been significantly reliant on a single road for their main physical connection to the rest of society, and we will see that this theme of outside contact is highly salient. In short, we might argue that people in and around Selsey succeeded in

mobilizing resource from beyond their geographical boundaries in their efforts to exert influence over coastal policy, while Sheppey did not.

### **Mobilizing interest – Selsey**

Town/parish councillor B (Selsey) explains, in the context of negotiation over the Medmerry realignment scheme for the provision of an alternative route for emergency vehicles, that there is only one road into Selsey. However, we might observe that the single road has been well used by activists, metaphorically, for the purposes of mobilizing resources – not least in the form of coalitions – from beyond Selsey’s geographical borders.

During the period in which the draft Pagham to East Head Coast Defence Strategy (CDS) [EA *et al*, 2008] was first made public, efforts to mobilize support for action in and around Selsey attracted significant support. A group of concerned individuals was able to bring to the attention of local people a synopsis of what was proposed, accompanied by a call to action. Save Our Selsey (SOS) was formed at this point, and a public meeting was held in the Town Hall – courtesy of Selsey Town Council. Such was the interest, says Activist A (Selsey), that the venue could not accommodate all who wanted to attend, to the extent that a local radio journalist was obliged to stand outside and hold his microphone through an open window.

This first public meeting and the accompanying efforts at articulating and responding to the threat posed by the draft CDS, he says, galvanised people and saw the coming together of a group of eight or nine very committed people who were prepared to ‘tread the streets’ and write letters, amongst other things, to support the cause. A second public meeting was staged in a venue provided by the owner of the Bunn Leisure caravan park, and was attended by 350 people. SOS was able to mobilize existing resources in the shape of a community magazine for purposes of raising awareness and free use of the Town Hall, and



new resource in the shape of funding – amongst other things, the event raised £1,000 including a £500 donation from the caravan park owner, which helped to pay for printing.

The subsequent formation of the Manhood Peninsula Steering Group (MPSG) cemented working relationships with, and representation on, various other bodies. The election of Activist A (Selsey) as a local councillor on the SOS platform offered the promise of an enhanced opportunity for that interest to be represented within the District Council and, given that the Council was a partner, that influence might also be exerted on the CDS. MPSG was also successful in mobilizing the National Audit Office (NAO) in its scrutiny of Environment Agency (EA) consultation practices, whilst membership of NVCC brought the promise of coalition with other grassroots groups from around England and Wales, and access to the corridors of Whitehall and the Palace of Westminster.

However, the mobilization of resource in the shape of skilled and knowledgeable local help was less easy to achieve – as was continued support for action. In Selsey, some older people had offered to help with SOS research. However, Activist A (Selsey) observes that many were not Internet-connected and so were effectively excluded. Nor, he explained, did everybody have the wherewithal to research and write cogently. Thus, a lack of Internet capacity appears to combine with a similar deficit of policy and analytical skills – perhaps consistent with the local demographic profile in terms of employment type and educational profile – in making skilled support difficult to mobilize.

More broadly, Activist A (Selsey) explains that of those happy to become involved, most were more prepared to undertake ‘support’ tasks (such as delivering leaflets) than they were, for example, to staff a stand at a community event and talk to people. Fewer still were prepared to make presentations, or to attend meetings with officials:

*Some people it's time, others are embarrassed as I was to start off with doing something where you suddenly have to approach people you don't know and ask them for things, and try and persuade them about something.*

One such was Town/parish councillor B (Selsey) who, feeling at that time that he lacked relevant skills, offered to deliver leaflets (although upon retiring he joined the committee of SOS and became more involved in policy issues and meetings). We will see that professional experience meant that the wider demands of political activity as outlined here held few terrors for him. In contrast, Activist A (Selsey) observes that those from the adjacent but considerably more affluent community of West Wittering, through its parish council, had been extraordinarily effective in navigating their way around the relevant terrain:

*They're very astute, professional people, probably retired or not quite retired, so they've got that nous of the way things work...and that confidence that they can take on a system and get it work the way they want it to work.*

Not for them, then, anxiety about attending meetings with officials, which invites a more subtle understanding of differential socio-demographic effects upon collective action. Nor, as we will see, did they struggle to mobilize resources in the shape of a sizeable contribution towards sea defences.

Looking beyond the mobilization of *direct* support in the shape of action of some kind, there were also issues around mobilizing a *broad* support for the interests themselves. The SOS argument was that, as well as threatening the loss of 300 homes to the sea over time, the draft plan had catastrophic implications for the town as whole. Activist A (Selsey) explains:

*If you speak to any of the shopkeepers here they say the only reason they survive is because of March to November when the park is open. If you had all that going on – the worst case scenario –you'd be looking at a small coastal town where a third of the properties are either slowly falling into the sea or are flooded by the sea, and its major employer had been wiped out. The shops would all close and all the rest of it.*

At this point he describes the nature of the interest as easy to understand: a strategy that had to be either changed or stopped, and given the extent and hostility of the response it is clear that this rendering of interest had resonance. Nonetheless, Activist A (Selsey) considered a figure of 1,500 people indicating support for SOS's objectives through the group's new website to be underwhelming and, correspondingly, he explains the difficulties of eliciting the interest of those whose homes did not appear to be directly at risk under recommendations as presented in the draft CDS.

Changes to the draft in the light of early representations, whilst welcomed by MPSG, saw a further dissipation of local interest. Local Authority coastal engineer A (Selsey) reports:

*Because we very quickly reached the conclusion that a 'hold the line' policy was viable around the developed area but not for the adjacent stretch, the concern level plummeted.*

Confirming this judgment, Activist A (Selsey) suggests that although the most obviously pressing issue – that of changing the CDS – appeared to have been addressed, the resulting thorny issue of how defences would be funded in the future appeared unlikely to be resolved in the short term. Whereas earlier in SOS's history people had volunteered to do things like deliver leaflets, increasingly activities were left to the original small group. Thus, we might observe that in the Selsey case, the local mobilization of interest beyond the contributions of its originators appeared to coincide with an immediate and focussed threat.

### **Mobilizing interest – Sheppey**

The opening of the road bridge from the mainland at Sittingbourne to Sheppey in 2006 (BBC, 2006), replacing the slow, vertical-lift Kingsferry bridge, itself can be

seen as the result of the kind of collective effort – from grassroots to MP – that appears largely absent in the context under study. MP (Sheppey)<sup>50</sup> represented the constituency of Sittingbourne and Sheppey between 1997 and 2010.<sup>51</sup> The bridge being built, he says, followed him taking groups prior to his election as MP to pitch to the Shadow Secretary of Transport. Of these groups he says:

*They didn't know how to pitch, bless them – had no idea. When we went for the first time, I said: 'You know what? None of these people round the table know where Sheppey is. This is Whitehall – you've got to come in with pictures, roads blocked...'. So we did all that, and we got it – got a £100m bridge.*

In some ways, the facilitation of improved links with the mainland – the result of a coordinated effort to obtain power and resources as illustrated here – appears to run counter to an appetite for isolation. Local Authority councillor A (Sheppey) describes 'an island community with an island mentality', whilst Local Authority coastal engineer B (Sheppey) offers the view that islanders tend to live a bit 'in their own world'. What might be the practical implications of such claims? MP (Sheppey) stresses the need when lobbying government for informed collaboration between people and the various branches of government – from town/parish level, including local authorities, right up to MP. He observes that government won't take any such effort seriously unless people 'are all in it together' in this way, and that a certain set of skills is required.

However, he also explains of his time in office, with reference to his constituency:

<sup>50</sup> Research notes accompanying interview, which was conducted at his suggestion in a central London wine bar, revealed him to be well-spoken, personable, opinionated, and comfortable with displaying his learning and the influential social circles in which he moved.

<sup>51</sup> Wyatt, D. [no date]a. *About Derek Wyatt*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.derekwyatt.co.uk/about-derek-wyatt.aspx> [Accessed 18 August 2013].

*There was just no understanding of how politics worked. It's embarrassing really – we're an hour from London and 300 years away...Well, they are an island race – they'd have UDI if they could.*

The remark concerning UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence) might easily be categorised as entertaining hyperbole, and was initially dismissed as such for research purposes. However, the seriousness of the observation was underlined during a research study workshop at Queenborough, Sheppey, as part of the European Coastal Communities 2150 project (CC2150)<sup>52</sup>. There, during a 'visioning' discussion on climate resilience and energy security, proposals from local people that in the future Sheppey should be independent in terms of its energy provision, and more generally, became increasingly strident – to the extent that UDI was proposed by one participant to nods of approval, only partially softened by the counter-proposal by a parish councillor that contact with the mainland should not be abandoned completely. If MP (Sheppey)'s understanding of meaningful mobilization is to be entertained – broadly, that it requires strong coalitions of interest to be formed including formal representation at local, regional and national levels – then such sentiments surely run counter to it.

Returning to the SMP, the expression of local interest as it applied to Sheppey residents appears to have been significantly contingent on the efforts of local councillors themselves. Whilst there was a small number of written responses from people concerned about the implications of the draft SMP, Local Authority councillor B (Sheppey) had not been approached on the issue in his capacity as a borough and parish councillor, despite the fact that public meetings

<sup>52</sup> Funded by INTERREG 2 Seas Programme and European Development Funds. Partners involved Environment Agency, Kent County Council, Alterra (Stichting DLO), Province West-Vlaanderen and Agency for Maritime and Coastal Services – Coastal Division. (Environment Agency, 2013a: 1)

devoted to the SMP had seen the expression of concerns from a range of interested parties – including those fearing the loss of their homes.

The project manager for CC2150 confirms that efforts to obtain feedback on climate change effects from people on Sheppey for research purposes, a subject that might reasonably be expected to cover sea level rise and coastal erosion (and the consequent threat to homes), had resulted in 1,000 responses, with comments from over 500 people. However, she explains that:

*Any comments we received about issues including erosion and defences were generic and applied to the whole of our study areas. In addition, none were given by people whose homes were directly affected.*<sup>53</sup>

Thus, an effort that might have been expected to pick up any concern around loss of homes (despite not being dedicated to that sole issue) saw no response at all. Why might this be?

Although arguably tangential to the subject in hand, two examples of recent efforts at collective action on Sheppey are instructive on the question of mobilization of interest, and what may either facilitate or hinder it.

Activist B (Sheppey)'s interest concerns coastal amenity and, specifically, the viability of recreational sailing clubs in the light of coastal policy. In the absence of any evidence of directly relevant collective action on Sheppey, his effort to mobilize influence with regard to loss of amenity to beach erosion at Sheerness becomes salient. By way of context, he says of the building of the sea wall at Sheerness in the late 1970s that those likely to be affected were not consulted, and that the local sailing club suffered badly because of the design, losing all of its sea view. More recently, he explains, an EA strategy to remedy

<sup>53</sup> Wissink, C., christine.wissink@kent.gov.uk, 2013. *Re: CC2150 Sheppey*. [Email] Message to C. Blunkell (chris.blunkell@btinternet.com). Sent Wednesday 6 November 2013: 16:14. [Accessed 1 December 2013].

beach erosion by placing rocks in front of the sea wall following loss of shingle effectively forced the nearby catamaran yacht club to close as members could no longer land catamarans on the beach in front of the clubhouse.

Activist B (Sheppey) wrote and submitted reports on the problem to the EA, liaised with local authority coastal engineers, lobbied his MP and made use of the local press. Town/parish councillor A (Sheppey) had been a supporter, however with reference to his efforts at obtaining support from people in Sheerness he explains:

*They don't probably appreciate the problems because it's a gradual process. They agree with me that something should be done, but they're not interested really in giving too much support. It's like a lot of things – you need to speak to other people in similar situations to get support, I think. Unless it affects them directly, I think most people are not bothered too much.*

Such a failure to convert interest to action he ascribes in part to a lack of both affluence and education in the town, and we might note that speaking to other people in similar situations, as undertaken by activists in Selsey and advocated here, is an activity that may sit uncomfortably with any disposition towards insularity.

The second example concerns lobbying for sea defences at Warden Bay – a community that MP (Sheppey) describes as isolated, run down and difficult. Of a campaign that in 2007 resulted in sea defence works to protect a section of cliffs at Warden Bay, he explains that the local parish council 'banged on' about the issue, so bringing it to his attention. Following the clearance of woodland, the top of the cliff had begun to erode badly, and people there, he says could see:

*...that their investment for their children, grandchildren, was going to go down the Swanee. So they were continually at my back, saying 'Help, help, help!'*

MP (Sheppey) succeeded in attracting the interest of a succession of DEFRA Ministers, resulting in central government funding for protection of the

foot of the cliffs. In terms of mobilization in this context, he describes a very active parish council and, in particular, a woman who then became a borough councillor 'out of just being fed up'. He explains:

*We had public meetings – we got everybody: local councillor, county councillor – everybody together. I said: 'Look, you need to bid – I don't do the bidding! Here's the money – go get it!'*

Beside the involvement of the various levels of government, MP (Sheppey) stresses the legitimacy brought to the bid by the involvement of the parish council, and we will see that considerations of organizational constitution and collaboration (notably with formal democratic institutions) can be key to the pursuit of greater opportunity on the part of interest groups. The evidence suggests that this is not necessarily a straightforward proposition, however.

### **Organizational configuration – grassroots and government**

In the Selsey case, interests identified and developed at grassroots level are mobilized, at least in part, by efforts to have them taken up by local democratic institutions. In England and Wales, district, borough and city councils (in the absence of unitary authorities) are usually responsible for services including housing and planning applications. Parish, community and town councils operate at a level below these, are elected, and have jurisdiction over local issues such as the provision of community centres, grants to help local organisations and consultation on neighbourhood planning.<sup>54</sup>

Inspired by what they saw as a lack of interest in the issue by incumbent councillors at the time the draft plan was first announced, such efforts saw Activist A (Selsey) and a colleague from SOS (from a total of five who stood) elected to Chichester District Council in 2007 as Independent councillors for the

<sup>54</sup> [www.gov.uk/understand-how-your-council-works/types-of-council](http://www.gov.uk/understand-how-your-council-works/types-of-council)



Selsey South ward. Given the 'partner' role of the Council in the CDS, combined with the fact that local authorities alone were able to bid for funding provided, for example, through the 2009 Coastal Change Pathfinders programme (DEFRA, 2009e), this development in mobilization strategy appears to have offered greater opportunity for influence through an extension of organizational reach.

However, Activist A's account suggests that the interest he was elected to represent was effectively marginalised through an inability to form coalitions in the local authority context – at least during the early stages of his tenure. First, he ascribes being ignored as being down to party political enmity as a consequence of having displaced a Conservative councillor in a Conservative-dominated council<sup>55</sup>. He explains:

*It's always been Tory here forever and a day, so I wasn't very popular as a councillor when I got in because I'd overturned two of their fellows. That meant that anything we said directly that we wanted they wouldn't want to give us, even if it was a reasonable idea.*

Second, Activist A (Selsey) attributes difficulties with obtaining political traction, within the Council and by extension with the setting of the CDS, to concerns that he and his colleagues were 'single issue' politicians. EA officer A (Selsey) explains that the fact that the final strategy had to be approved by both of the partner local authorities was potentially complicated by that fact that there were councillors:

*...elected not solely, but partly on campaigning for a particular outcome, which wasn't the outcome the Strategy was going to recommend. Clearly that's a difficult debate to have – not just for us, but particularly for the council officers, because of course they are directly subject to the will of the councillors, and if they are supporting a strategy, and the council body as a whole don't support that strategy, then basically that's a difficult situation.*

<sup>55</sup> However, despite initial suspicions, he describes his Conservative MP, who approached SOS and who was instrumental in setting up MPSG, as: "very reasonable".

Implicit in this observation appears to be the idea that what may be considered 'single issue' perspectives, despite having democratic authority, are a threat to the outcomes preferred by the Operating Authority. In the event, Activist A (Selsey) explains that his treatment as a Councillor subsequently improved – partly, he says, because others had come to see that he and his Independent colleague had involved themselves in more than the single issue, but also as a consequence of changes to the leading group of the Council.

Nonetheless, when he sought re-election in 2011 he did so as a Conservative. Importantly, this was accompanied by a growing, if sometimes uncomfortable, acceptance that the interests he was originally elected to represent would inevitably be disciplined through competition with others. He explains:

*If I can carry my Tory colleagues with me, I know that I can get something through for Selsey. If I aggravate them all, then I won't get the thing through, so I've got to try and balance – are there times when I should just stop at a certain point and think 'I'm not going to get this through anyway, I'm better building up the political capital I need to achieve another thing that I want'? There'll be some things that might have to drop off the 'to do list' because they're not going to work, and then at least I can get other stuff done.*

Efforts to redirect mobilization efforts by attempting to propel an interest formally onto the agenda of the local authority in this way direct attention to considerations of organization: as discussed, the local authority has formal and meaningful influence over policies such as the CDS that is beyond grassroots groups. However, the demands of entry to the polity in question appear, in this case, to have required interest being subjected not only to competition in the shape of other interests, but an entirely different (and arguably dominant) constellation of interests in the shape of party political considerations. Thus, we might argue that any alleviation of concerns about 'single issue' politics occurred at the expense of the reinforcement of another. Of this Activist A (Selsey) observes:

*Once you go to District-level and above people are in different camps, so they are going to have fight each other at election times. So they're not just there for their community, they are there for their party and their community, so there's going to be some sort of ambiguity there on what's good for your party and its interests and what's good for your community.*

Revision of the CDS policy for Selsey, and subsequent recalibration of interest and mobilization strategies, saw Activist A (Selsey) and others, consistent with orientation of MPSG, embrace economic regeneration as a paradigm through which to attract government funding for the area.

Perhaps the most tangible example of this was an effort to attract central government Coastal Pathfinder funding, led by the local authority, for the Manhood Peninsula. The resulting bid was successful in attracting funding of £450,000 for 'community engagement', 'adaptation planning' and the 'delivery of adaptive solutions', and involved organisations of various complexions including central government Executive Agencies, local authorities, grassroots organisations such as SOS and MPSG, Selsey Town Council and local partnership fora (DEFRA, 2010c).

As a councillor, he was able to make the necessary approach and outline the potential merits of a bid that he had helped to prepare. As such, it would appear that his membership of the local authority polity had offered greater opportunity than might have been available to him otherwise. However, he contends that the process was fraught with difficulties, and characterised by what he saw as limits placed on his opportunity to influence the final proposal and its interpretation in practice. He contends that the authority then 'pulled the proposal apart' with a view to pursuing the aspects that best fitted the Council's own agenda, to the detriment of the original focus. The upshot, he explains, was that he came to question whether he could trust the authority to keep its word on what it said it would deliver through the grant.

We will see that the apparently torturous negotiation of this process was to have adverse health consequences for Activist A (Selsey). Less dramatic perhaps but still relevant, however, is the observation that, from this account at least, any temptation to conclude that being elected to representative office necessarily results in increased opportunity must be tempered. Instead, his account, overall, suggests that such dealings can also be attended with the low levels of trust characteristic of his dealings with the EA – at least in their early stages – in his grassroots capacity with SOS and MPSG. Thus, his guiding rationale for the shift in mobilization strategy, that being on the ‘inside’ would help to achieve more than might otherwise be possible, appeared to deliver mixed results at best.

With regard to the Sheppey case, there is scant evidence either of collective grassroots action in the immediate context under study, or – despite the efforts of the latter – little evidence of local people approaching elected representatives with their concerns. Accordingly, any account of interest, mobilization and organization in this context must focus on the *absence* of relevant activity.

To this end, evidence of acrimony between the Conservative-controlled local authority and the Labour MP becomes potentially salient, with MP (Sheppey) regularly at odds with the council over the apportion of kudos and blame respectively for what looked to be a bumpy ride over sea defence investment for northern Sheppey – as already discussed. MP (Sheppey) observes of his relationship with the local authority:

*Up until about 2001, it was a Liberal Democrat-led coalition, and they were brilliant. I used to have a monthly or quarterly meeting with the three local leaders – Tories, Labour, Liberal Democrats, with the Chief Exec of Swale BC. We would go through ‘How’s the bridge doing?’, ‘What about the dock?’, ‘What are we going to do about the steel mill?’, ‘How about the by-pass?’ – all of these things, and I would give them an update with all the correspondence, all of the emails, and would say ‘what are you doing?’*

However, of the 2007 project to protect the section of cliffs at Warden Bay, following a change in political control at the Council, MP (Sheppey) expresses disappointment that the Council decided not to bid for Government funding, explaining that:

*This scheme simply wouldn't have happened without my lobbying given the incompetence of the Tory executive at Swale Borough Council.*<sup>56</sup>

Further evidence of such bad blood can be found in MP (Sheppey)'s request that a Conservative borough and parish councillor retract her published claim that he had had nothing to do with the award of a regeneration grant to neighbouring Leysdown under the Sea Change scheme.<sup>57</sup> Without making any kind of judgement as to the rights and wrongs of any such claim, there can be little doubt as to the acrimonious nature of inter-party politics at this level, and at this time. Aside from the question of such effects on the appetites of politicians to participate in coalitions and any related effects on collective lobbying efforts, we might also ask at the requirement placed upon activists to understand the political terrain and the associated imperatives.

### **Town and parish councils**

The Selsey case suggests that parish councils offer a mode of local representation that can side-step some of the difficulties associated with party political interests at local authority and national level. Activist A (Selsey) confirms:

<sup>56</sup> Wyatt, D. 2007. *MP lobbying on Warden Bay scheme pays off*. [Online] Available at: [http://www.derekwyattexmp.co.uk/news\\_item.aspx?i\\_PageID=125897](http://www.derekwyattexmp.co.uk/news_item.aspx?i_PageID=125897) [Accessed 18 August 2013].

<sup>57</sup> Wyatt, D. 2008. *Good turn out at Leysdown to discuss cultural and heritage bid*. [Online] Available at: [http://www.derekwyattexmp.co.uk/news\\_item.aspx?i\\_PageID=126173](http://www.derekwyattexmp.co.uk/news_item.aspx?i_PageID=126173) [Accessed 19 August 2013].

*The fantastic thing about the Town Council is it's not political – there are no party politics in the elections, in fact I don't think any of the councillors were elected because not enough people stood, so they were co-opted.*

Parish councils are the smallest type of administrative area in England, with 'communities' their differently-constituted equivalent in Wales. Councils represent electorates ranging from small communities to major cities; however, not all parishes have a council (for example, where a parish has fewer than 200 parishioners, or if the parishioners do not want one). In such cases, decisions can be taken instead at parish meetings, or small parishes can come together to elect a joint council (ONS, [no date]c). There are around 8,500 town and parish councils in England, with powers to raise their own funds through precept. Over 15 million people live in communities served by parish and town councils nationally – about 35% of the population (NALC, [no date]).

Offered here as an example for comparison, near to Selsey on the Manhood Peninsula, the village of West Wittering demonstrated the capacity to raise significant amounts of money very quickly to contribute to the cost of sea defences.<sup>58</sup> Local Authority coastal engineer A (Selsey) explained of the situation that, whilst there was no implication for homes, significantly prolonged wave action could bring the risk of flooding of a low-lying area leading into the village. By way of response the EA proposed a £1.6m flood risk management scheme, commencing in 2012, to which the community was asked to contribute £650k.<sup>59</sup> Local Authority coastal engineer A (Selsey) explains:

*They have the benefit of group called the Woodger Trust. Mr Woodger left his estate to be spent for the benefit of the residents of West Wittering. The Trust said: 'We'll come up with half of that'.*

<sup>58</sup> In the latest Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) this area was ranked 25,690 out of 32,482 in England, where 1 was the most deprived and 32,482 the least (UK Local Area, [no date]).

<sup>59</sup> Environment Agency (EA). 2013b. *West Wittering tidal flood defences*. [Online] (Updated 28 August 2013) Available at: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/floods/130590.aspx>. [Accessed 10 November 2013].

The rest was raised through contributions from the parish council, local residents and landowner the West Wittering Estate<sup>60</sup>.

Whilst people in other local settlements may have lacked the wherewithal to raise resource in this way, town and parish councils appear, as in this case, to have some potential for helping to mitigate any such deficit. In Selsey, Town/parish councillor B (Selsey) explains that the levying of local taxes meant that the Town Council had been able to set aside funding for sea defences which, although not sufficient to pay for other than minor repairs, allowed it to attract funding commitments from other bodies.

With regard to more general activities, Activist A (Selsey) observes of Selsey Town Council that:

*It has £250,000 a year in precept coming in, for which there's a full-time clerk, another full-time office administrator and a couple of guys who do general works around the place, to which they are now going to add this Town Administrator – so there's a body of staff there.*

At neighbouring Pagham, the parish council was involved in innovating to find solutions to the physical problems they face as a consequence of a rapidly eroding beach – not least with regard to the protection of homes on the seafront.<sup>61</sup> Whilst defence works in 2012 saw the construction of a rock revetment in front of sea-facing homes<sup>62</sup> as part of a CDS preferred policy of 'adaptive management', explained by an EA spokesman as an approach that would see a response to 'each possible outcome', requests from local residents

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Save Pagham Beach. [No date]. *No title*. [Online] Available at: <http://savepaghambeach.com/> [Accessed on 11 October 2013].

<sup>62</sup> Arun District Council (Arun DC). 2013. *Pagham Coastal Protection*. [Online] (Updates 21 February 2013) Available at: <http://www.arun.gov.uk/main.cfm?type=PAGHAMCOASTALPROTE> [Accessed 16 November 2013].

and the Parish Council for a longer-term solution were dismissed on grounds of cost (The Argus, 2014).

Against this backdrop the parish council was active in trying to raise funds through the provisions of the Localism Act<sup>63</sup>, and also in trying to develop a commercial product for application not only at Pagham Beach, but that might be marketed in other locations facing similar problems. To this end, Town/parish councillor C (Selsey/Pagham) explains that the Parish Council had successfully made investment in sea defences a condition of the granting of permissions to developers:

*The support we've had in writing from DCLG has been quite good – that CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) monies coming out of housing can be used for flood defence, even with a pre-existing situation.*

On the subject of the potential of innovative sea defence measures as they applied in the Pagham context, he adds:

*There are problems with siting groynes on the beach: the regulatory authorities objected on the grounds of the coast being dynamic and the danger of them being incorrectly sited. So we want to try building tetrapods<sup>64</sup> – you pile them up on the beach, the shingle washes in and fills the voids, and you've got protection. It cuts the argument that you can't have groynes, because you can move them.*

Again drawing attention to the additional potential of the mobilization of parish councils, and again citing the potential of the Localism Act, he adds:

*There is an element of self-help, community endeavour, which does seem to get the support of DCLG.*

<sup>63</sup> Under the Localism Act: *Local authorities are allowed to require developers to pay a levy when they build new houses, businesses and shops. The money raised must go to support new infrastructure – such as roads and schools...the Community Infrastructure Levy...gives the Government the power to require that some of the money raised from the levy go directly to the neighbourhoods where development takes place* (DCLG, 2011:13).

<sup>64</sup> Multi-legged and interlocking concrete structures used to prevent coastal erosion (Bright Hub Engineering, 2009).



Such a product might generate funding sufficient to exert influence on defence decisions, but requires 'know how' in its development. Town/parish councillor C (Selsey/Pagham) confirmed that Pagham Parish Council boasted specialist engineering expertise), and financial backing in the shorter term. Accordingly, the project enjoyed the backing of a local trust, with trustees, described by Town/parish councillor C (Selsey/Pagham) as 'switched on'.

Thus we might argue that some influence can be exerted by parish councils in these ways on decisions concerning sea defence. However, these appear to be significantly contingent on the size of the achievable levy, and the availability of the various resources – both human and economic – associated with maximising the potential of the system and exploiting commercial opportunities.

More generally, Town/parish councillor C (Selsey/Pagham) describes a prevailing lack of interest in this issue on the part of those not directly affected by it, explaining:

*You think you've got a united community, but you don't really.*

However, consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan<sup>65</sup> prompted the view that the community was perhaps more united and concerned than he had thought. Just over a third of those canvassed responded to a survey, and of those, he explains, 92% wanted action on sea defences and 94% on inland flooding – a mandate for the council's raising and use of funds, in his view.

Thus, consultation in this case appears to have had potential in terms of galvanising rather than simply recording interest. This being the case, we might

<sup>65</sup> Neighbourhood Planning, a power granted to town and parish councils under the Localism Act, allows 'communities, both residents, employees and business, to come together through a local parish council or neighbourhood forum and say where they think new houses, businesses and shops should go – and what they should look like...If the plan is approved by a majority of those who vote, then the local authority will bring it into force.' (DCLG, 2011; p.12)

observe that the creation and subsequent mobilization of such interest (in terms of a local mandate for change) is significantly contingent in this case on the existence not only of a parish council, but an effective one at that.

This appears to be a particularly important consideration in the case of Sheppey, with LA councillor A (Sheppey) pointing out disparities in the quality of some parish councils and the ephemeral nature of their personnel, arguably supported by Town/parish council official (Sheppey)'s testimony as to the lack of enthusiasm of other parishes for taking up Minster Parish Council's offer of help with developing local Emergency Planning strategies<sup>66</sup> – a process it had itself recently undertaken. At the two CC2150 meetings it was observed that the local parish council had no representative present.

Of potential relevance in this regard was the testimony of a borough councillor, participating in the CC2150 visioning workshop, who expressed his frustration at a lack of public response to a recent local authority consultation on setting up a town council for Sheerness<sup>67</sup>. If Local Authority officer A (Sheppey)'s analysis of the response – that of a reluctance of less affluent residents to pay a precept to a town council and to turn their attention away from 'hand-to-mouth' concerns – is correct, this suggests a very real relationship between socio-demographic circumstance and the development of the wherewithal to mobilize, consistent with Zsomboky *et al's* (2011) findings concerning adaptation to climate change effects and the priorities of disadvantaged communities.

<sup>66</sup> Kent Resilience Forum. [No date]. *Community Emergency Planning*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.kentprepared.org.uk/preparing-yourself/community-emergency-planning/> (Accessed 16 December 2013).

<sup>67</sup> In 2013 Swale Borough Council undertook a Community Governance Review, with a view to establishing parishes across the whole of the Borough. Initial matters for consultation, with local briefings and meetings scheduled between June and August 2013, included the establishment of town councils for Sheerness and Halfway. Minutes of a Swale Borough Council Local Engagement Forum held on Sheppey in September 2013 suggested that response had been "quite small" – 104 in total, with the majority coming from Halfway (Swale BC, [no date]e).

By way of redress, in the context of Selsey, Activist A (Selsey) stresses the value of fora such as the Medmerry Stakeholders Advisory Group and MPSPG as vehicles which had helped to mitigate resource imbalances and enhance opportunities for parish councils (amongst others) to exert influence and develop capacity. He explains:

*A recent example is the Marine Conservation Zone consultation<sup>68</sup> – the parish councils there had virtually no influence until they acted like lobby groups, and acting with lobby groups like MPSPG and others.*

This statement appears to encourage the democratically rather counter-intuitive conclusion that in certain circumstances some formal representative bodies can be reliant on the support of informal interest groups in obtaining leverage, and indeed may even be required to act similarly if they are to be heard. Of particular note in this regard is Activist A (Selsey)'s judgment that parish councils relying on district councils to push interests further up the political 'food chain', at least in the Selsey context, does not work.

Indeed, the Selsey case points to the development of a strong coalition formed around the shared interests of Selsey Town Council and grassroots groups such as SOS, with Town/parish councillor B (Selsey) offering the view that the two organisations were politically complementary. Whilst the former had developed the capacity to take the weight from the shoulders of the latter in terms of undertaking some key functions, SOS had retained a licence to be politically 'more boisterous', he suggested. For example, there is evidence of grassroots groups being created strategically, and coordinated, in an effort to counter an environmental conservation lobby that was seen as numerically dominant and, by MPSPG's reading, enjoyed privileged access to decision-makers as part of the CDS process. Town/parish councillor B (Selsey) explains:

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/marine-conservation-zones-consultation-on-proposals-for-designation-in-2013>

*Somebody asked me 'Would it not have been better getting together and just having one organisation?' My answer was no – we made a conscious decision that all of these groups had slightly different emphases, but with an overriding preoccupation with the coastal defence of Selsey. So you'd go to meetings with each of these groups represented: all of a sudden four people around the table who knew the issue – a strategic way to redress the balance.*

## **Discussion**

The Selsey case identifies a group of activists prepared to mobilize wider collective action. Aside from attracting local grassroots support mobilizing around an identifiable and pressing threat to interest, they also succeeded in reaching beyond the geographical borders in encouraging coalition with other, similarly-concerned local groups. The election of activists to the local council brought the promise of greater influence, and a subsequent approach from the local MP saw the formation of MPSG and a coalition of interests involving activists, businesses and parish councils amongst others. This, in turn, saw the mobilization of central government scrutiny of the deliberative process in the shape of the NAO, as well as lobbying representation at national level via NVCC. Thus, we might observe a stark difference to the response from Sheppey where, despite the efforts of local politicians, there was no such mobilization – despite evidence of concern around the relevant interest.

In terms of effective mobilization, MP (Sheppey) stresses the importance of working 'together', not least because local action validates the intervention of those higher up the political ladder. This, he argues, must be instigated locally, and he identifies one 'fed up woman' and an active parish council as being pivotal to one related and successful mobilization effort on Sheppey. If effective mobilization requires the development of coalition beyond geographical borders (to include, for example, a local authority and MP located on the mainland and,

further afield still, Whitehall and Parliament) then an identifiable instinct for isolation on Sheppey surely militates against it.

Whilst activists in Selsey were comparatively successful in mobilizing around the original concern, its evolution as a consequence of change of policy saw a dissipation of both broad and 'hands-on' support. Furthermore, practical support in Selsey had been limited in many cases to relatively undemanding tasks, thus inviting the analysis that a relatively low local skills base and particular demographic had limited the resource available to be mobilized from the outset. Perhaps more subtly, reluctance beyond a small core group of activists to meet officials and others is ascribed to 'embarrassment', with Sayer (2005) echoing Bourdieu in interpreting this as an emotional response to class in social situations where people may be anxious about their position. In Bourdieusian terms, we might describe this as a problem relating to navigating 'social space' in mobilizing extraneous capital.

Such an interpretation is arguably strengthened, in the Sheppey case, by the testimony of the participant in the CC2150 workshop (and a proponent of UDI for the island) who, in the context of an informal discussion about education, ventured that he felt he was intelligent, but that he lacked confidence. Such remarks, invite us to consider how socio-demographic realities quietly inform the choices people make, and the resulting effects. The question 'Do I seek the help of my MP, or not?' may hold no terrors for the resident of affluent West Wittering, but may be a different prospect for the resident of Warden Bay, or Selsey, with potentially negative effects in terms of ability to form coalitions, and exert influence. Whilst such considerations may help us to explain a lack of action on Sheppey and a wider reluctance in Selsey it does *not*, however, help us to understand why it should be that certain individuals who, by their own admission, have suffered such anxiety, should choose to act anyway.

Turning to questions of organizational configuration, local authorities can be essential coalition partners and vehicles through which influence might be pursued. Looking beyond the two case studies that provide the principal focus for this chapter, Activist C (Happisburgh) describes a very constructive working relationship with his local authority, whilst Activist D (Jury's Gap), speaking of the work of DOC at Jury's Gap observes:

*I don't think we'd have got anywhere if we wouldn't have had the backing of the District Councils.*

However, Activist A (Selsey)'s experience suggests that such positive experiences are by no means guaranteed. Rather, he found himself easily marginalised on party political grounds, and treated with suspicion as serving a single issue. Supporting Tilly's observation with regard to the dynamism inherent in his concept of mobilization (in its wider sense), marginalisation, in turn, prompted an evolving strategy characterised in part by the subjection of his interest to wider Conservative party preoccupations. To again use Tilly's concepts, this required him to moderate his mobilization of some interests as the cost of opportunity, with party politics representing a different and arguably more powerful order of interests in this regard. By way of illustration on this point, in Happisburgh, Activist C (Happisburgh) describes a dramatic change in the local political landscape with regard to coalition:

*We've now got a Tory administration which is not prepared to listen to anybody, so I think the good relations we've had for a decade with our local authority are looking shaky at the moment.*

More subtly, perhaps, he observes that MPs' interest in the issue is at least partly shaped by the balance of power in Parliament:

*Most politicians in this country are party motivated. And to give you some idea, an adjoining constituency that suffers major problems coastal-wise, for the bulk of the time I've been doing this they had a Labour MP who was good, but there was a point beyond which he would not go because there was a Labour*

*government, and he wouldn't embarrass his government for fear of endangering his career.*

Town and parish councils appear to offer respite from the entanglements that can accompany party politics, and potentially have the wherewithal to provide valuable practical resource; galvanise, validate and mobilize interest; lead innovation and even raise funds towards sea defences. Caveats, however, are that the existence of parish councils is patchy, their effectiveness is uneven, their formal power in the setting of coastal policy is very limited, their ability to raise funds is significantly dependent on their size, and the expertise at their disposal is related to local socio-demographic composition. As such, they appear able to both reproduce as well as mitigate resource inequalities, and should not be regarded as a ready solution to concerns around weak local representation. However, evidence suggests that such institutions can help to mitigate any inequalities in learning from each other and, perhaps paradoxically, from grassroots organisations, with MPSG as a case in point.

This leads us to the fulcrum of the conclusion for this chapter – that in some contexts motivated grassroots action necessarily underpins much that can be considered to be effective collective action. Whilst it is a simplification to suggest that at West Wittering problems attending sea defence and coastal planning were solved to a large extent with the writing of a cheque supported by a residual political effectiveness, there does appear to be some contrast between locales in terms of the necessity to locate fresh resource and the difficulty with which policy and political terrain are navigated in its pursuit.

In the Selsey case, the bulk of grassroots action was undertaken by a small group of people; in the Sheppey case, MP (Sheppey) cites the importance to the campaign to defend homes of the 'fed up woman'. We will see that, in this context, grassroots action is contingent on the work of the few, in some cases requiring them to recalibrate their understandings of what they are both able to

do and are comfortable doing, and undertaken at a cost to themselves and those around them that is unsustainable.

This raises a dilemma. Threats to the interests of individuals are seen by local authority coastal engineers in both cases, and an elected representative in the Sheppey case, as the key to public attention on the issue. However, in the Selsey case there is also evidence of a particular concern with regard to 'interest' groups. Thus, it appears incumbent upon interests to seek alternative organizational configurations and modes of representation in search of opportunity, each of which bring fresh costs and, as we have seen, brings no guarantee of influence. In the Selsey case, subjection of the interest at hand to the democratic discipline implicit in local authority reputation was not sufficient to allay concerns that 'single issue' politics might threaten the preferred outcome.

Any assumption that a threat to local interests will provoke a response requires reappraisal. In the Sheppey case the Operating Authority orthodoxy was to seek direct engagement with those at risk only where response deemed it necessary to do so. However, silence does not necessarily indicate acquiescence or lack of interest; instead, it may mean more pressing priorities, weak local democratic institutions, or a collective habitus unsuited to the kind of coalition-building both advocated by MP (Sheppey) and others, and conducted to some effect in the Selsey case. Whilst it appears incumbent on the most deprived to mobilize resource from beyond social and geographical borders, the affluent appear to be the more adept in this regard.



## **Chapter 6: MOBILIZATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL**

This chapter is concerned primarily with the National Voice of Coastal Communities (NVCC), and its interactions with government, through formal and structured engagement, from its inception in 2009 until 2011. Extant, although largely inactive at the time of writing, NVCC came into being during 2008 as a website for community action groups and individuals campaigning against government policies on shoreline management, and as a focus of national campaigning.<sup>69</sup> Then, in July 2009 it was reconfigured as a membership organisation with a formal constitution, supported by funding from government to cover the expenses associated with NVCC acting as a conduit between relevant coastal communities and central government at a time when the latter was developing new coastal policy for England and Wales.

<sup>69</sup> National Voice of Coastal Communities (NVCC). [No date]. *About this site*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.nvcc.org.uk/about/> (Accessed 19 April 2013).

The NVCC case is distinctive in that, unlike the Selsey and Sheppey case studies, it is concerned with interaction between grassroots and official interests at the national level. However, analysis of evidence arising from this case also has potential to extend understanding of mobilization efforts at local level: as already discussed, briefly, Save Our Selsey (SOS) and the Manhood Peninsula Steering Group (MPSG) sought coalition with groups from other locations through NVCC, whilst there was no such representation from Sheppey.

Besides describing and contextualising the work of NVCC, this chapter seeks to test a government assumption that community interests are singular in each case, to assess whether the formation of NVCC had potential in ameliorating resource inequalities and capacities as they apply to coastal groups in deliberative settings, and to question whether government's direct engagement with NVCC addressed problems associated with citizens' reliance on proxy representation. In so doing, it looks to both Tilly's Polity and Mobilization models in seeking understandings of how NVCC fared in its efforts to influence central government policy; and how interest, mobilization and organization were calibrated in pursuit of such influence through what appeared to be privileged opportunity. As such, it facilitates analysis at both 'macro' and 'meso' levels.

## **NVCC – origins**

According to its founding chair Activist C (Happisburgh)<sup>70</sup>, the idea for NVCC emerged from a recognition borne of his long work with the Coastal Concern

<sup>70</sup> Research notes record Activist C (Happisburgh), in his late 60s, as cheery, generous, irreverent, and comfortable in being direct to the point of bluntness when he felt the situation required it. During the interview he acted out several exchanges between himself and others in positions of authority, gleefully adopting plummy tones for some officials and politicians that sat in stark contrast to his brusquely comic self-representations. During the interview, conducted in a static caravan in Activist A's back garden, his wife did some ironing, and joined the discussion forcefully at various points.

Action Group (CCAG) [Happisburgh Village Website, {no date}] in Happisburgh, north Norfolk (see Figure 1). He concluded that the village's problems – the recent loss of homes to the sea, with the prospect of more to follow – were in fact part of a national problem and that:

*There are many Happisburghs around this country that government ignores, and simply don't have the power or the voice to make a difference. I knew from very early on that we had to make a national impact, because only by coming together around the coast would we get things changed.*

CCAG came into being in March 1999, when Activist C (Happisburgh) and his wife went to a meeting called by people in Happisburgh at immediate risk of losing their properties on an historically defended but now eroding cliff-top. He explains that nothing was being done in response, and that locals were feeling very exposed and worried. He recalls the meeting as being very heated and disorganised, with everybody blaming the local authority. He was also struck by the degree of interest – that out of a village of 850, 300 people had turned up to an unofficial meeting. At one point during the meeting, he recalls, he raised his hand and said:

*There's an enormous amount of energy here – but you've got to organise yourselves!*

Having subsequently accepted the position of 'Coordinator' of the resulting group, CCAG, Activist C (Happisburgh) called public meetings which he says effectively gave it a mandate to pursue the matter in any way it saw fit. There was only one objective: renew the defences, or compensate people for the loss of their homes.

Activist C (Happisburgh)'s 'Coordinator's Comments', published on the CCAG website between 2002 and 2011, offer an insight into the nature of the work undertaken by CCAG and its interests; the mobilization strategies employed in seeking to influence policy; and its reach, support and the extent of

its influence. It is also evidence of a change over time in the temperature of the relationship with central government which, when combined with growing anxiety in settlements around the coast nationally, saw the evolution of NVCC as Activist C (Happisburgh)'s focus and vehicle.

'Coordinator's Comments' posts place government coastal policy and its discharge, as it applies to Happisburgh and beyond, under the microscope. This body of work, constituting 59 substantial entries made over a period of 10 years, reveals extensive reading, research and writing to various ends – the evidence base on the impacts of offshore dredging on coastal erosion, relevant government policies, how money allocated to flood and coastal defence had been spent, and the Human Rights implications of government policy. Perhaps the most striking example is the development and presentation to policy makers and others of his own proposals for coastal governance.<sup>71</sup>

He writes of the various public gatherings he both instigates and attends, of conferences and fact-finding visits, of trips abroad, of meetings with politicians and others within government, and of journeys to meet people in other parts of the country facing similar problems.

He mobilizes others towards political action – urging people to write to Members of Parliament (MPs), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Deputy Prime Minister; elected members to insist on the satisfaction of social justice considerations before signing off SMPs, neighbours to attend council-led Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) meetings and to make sure that elected members understand their views; and supporters to sign a petition on the CCAG website.

<sup>71</sup> From Coordinator's Comments by Activist C (Happisburgh), and published between 2002 and 2011 on the Coastal Concern Action Group website. Subsequently archived at <http://www.happisburgh.org.uk/comments>.

His comments document the amount of interest shown in CCAG and the situation in Happisburgh – from within his own community and from others at risk, and from all over the country and indeed the world.

Locally, he alludes to coalition-building in documenting repeatedly his gratitude to the officers of North Norfolk District Council and his local MP, whilst taking aim at the local parish council; he thanks the media for bringing to light the plight of Happisburgh; and he commends the resource mobilization activities of local people in raising money to fund campaigning activities.

Revealing for our purposes is his narrative on national politicians and officials, their attitudes and actions, and the resulting policies and decisions. At times he is utterly scathing – he berates them for discriminating against rural/coastal communities, for being ‘hard of hearing’, for ‘blatant spin’, for being ‘divisive and unethical’, and for being incompetent. He describes government’s approach to coastal management as ‘blunt and chaotic’, raises the question of government suppression of evidence, the impartiality and objectivity of certain processes, and asks whether a government Minister has been ‘economical with the truth’. He claims that government is in breach of Human Rights legislation, and describes as ‘scandalous’ and a ‘whitewash’ what he considers to be official indifference in the local SMP response to representations from local people. He derides DEFRA consultants as ‘house trained’ and ‘tame’, and the relevant academic community of giving government confused messages. Central government, Ministers and HM Treasury ‘fiddle while Rome burns’ he writes, and he points to a rapid turnover of Ministers who don’t understand the requirement of the post and are only too pleased to move on.<sup>72</sup>

It is of note, however, that Activist C (Happisburgh)’s tone is not uniformly negative – even though comments appreciative of central government

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

sometimes carry a sting in the tail. He acknowledges Ministerial sympathy for the plight of coastal dwellers (whilst accusing government of intransigence), congratulates DEFRA for its *Making Space for Water* consultation paper, thanks the incoming Minister for agreeing to meet with him, and expresses a 'fervent' hope for:

*...an era of greater understanding on all sides of each others [sic] problems, of much closer and more meaningful dialogue and above all an era of ACTION and co-operation.*<sup>73</sup>

Thus, we might observe a mobilization strategy characterized by notable public hostility towards the polity tempered, tellingly, by occasional comments that allude to his enjoying the confidence of at least some central government officials, and which hint at a certain disquiet in some quarters with regard to policy direction.<sup>74</sup>

Until the closing months of 2008, and especially early 2009, conciliatory remarks from Activist C (Happisburgh) with regard to central government were relatively few. However, it might be argued that a change of mobilization strategy occurs at this point, and that this coincides broadly with the emergence of NVCC in its first incarnation as a web resource. For example, he is gratified that when meeting the Environment Agency (EA) chair the latter acknowledged 'extreme problems' for individuals and communities faced with a change of current coast protection policy and its application, with Activist C (Happisburgh) stressing that it is good to hear from him that he believes the EA must pursue the matter of compensation for those affected.<sup>75</sup> Here we might observe that a shift in mobilization strategy towards a more conciliatory approach coincides with what

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

appears to be evidence, albeit slender, of influence of some kind relating to what literature review indicates may be the key point of contention amongst coastal groups.<sup>76</sup>

Whilst he remains critical of central government, in April 2009 he observes a reduction in local frustration as there is evidence that CCAG had begun to change government's attitude and approach to coast management, and observes that CCAG had become increasingly proactive in seeking change that will benefit all coastal communities, and not just that in Happisburgh. The entry concludes:

*We have been, and remain, committed to fostering a wider understanding by all involved of each others [sic] problems and feel very strongly that we must continue the effort and build on the achievements of the last 10 years...CCAG is committed absolutely to working with everyone irrespective of political party or level of authority to achieve a socially just coastal philosophy and policy which we can all 'buy in to'.<sup>77</sup>*

As well as a retrospective look at the achievements of CCAG – and one that appears to confirm a belief that the group had achieved influence – this reads as a manifesto that formally extends the Group's interest from the local to the national, and confirms a shift in mobilization strategy towards one embracing the need to work *with* central government.

At this point Activist C (Happisburgh)'s commentary for CCAG begins to wind down, although of particular note is mention of government's award of £3 million under the DEFRA Coastal Change Pathfinder project to help communities

<sup>76</sup> In the same report Activist C (Happisburgh) writes about a DEFRA workshop on adaptation measures that he has attended. Going against his usual forthright style, in this case he mentions his purpose in attending and who else was involved – yet with no word as to content or his impressions of what took place or the positions of those present. This, he tells us, is one of number of such events he had attended, and further evidence of a multifaceted approach to mobilization – as well as shifting between being hostile and conciliatory, he also appears to oscillate between public and private exchanges with power. A shifting mobilization strategy, it would appear, coincides with the extent and nature of opportunity to exert influence.

<sup>77</sup> From Coordinator's Comments by Activist C (Happisburgh), and published between 2002 and 2011 on the Coastal Concern Action Group website. Subsequently archived at <http://www.happisburgh.org.uk/comments>.

and individuals in the North Norfolk District Council area to adapt to climate change where defences were no longer to be sustained. Despite misgivings, he describes this as a 'significant step forward' and:

*...a clear indication that the Government 'machine' is beginning to understand some of the problems coastal communities and individuals face when coastal policy is changed.*<sup>78</sup>

Nearly two years later, in what was to be his last 'Coordinator's Comments' posting, he is critical (although perhaps only moderately so in comparison to some previous entries) in observing that government is looking to reduce funding, and that there is no mechanism for adaptation; and observes that people are concerned that consultation is simply a box-ticking exercise. Tellingly, given the low frequency of his posts by this point, he also explains that he has refrained from comment as there has been 'considerable activity behind the scenes' and that he was conscious that any comment could have affected some of the negotiations and events which were taking place.<sup>79</sup> Thus is confirmed a mobilization strategy characterised by private exchanges with power for reasons that are not articulated, and only restrained criticism on points of fundamental importance to the CCAG cause.

This change in rhetorical gear coincides with NVCC becoming properly active, and with accompanying attempts to influence policy through a distinctive organizational configuration accompanied by a significantly enhanced opportunity for coastal groups to speak directly to policy makers.

## **A body that government can do business with**

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



NVCC came into being as a membership organisation on 6 July 2009, at a meeting for representatives of coastal communities held immediately after a half-day conference – ‘Coastal Communities at Risk’, organised and managed by non-governmental organization (NGO) CoastNet on behalf of CCAG and the All Party Parliamentary Group Coastal and Marine (APPG).<sup>80</sup> The event was devoted to consideration of the extent to which ‘community and individual needs are accommodated in adaptation policy’ and ‘the social justice argument from the receiving end’.<sup>81</sup>

In a proposal to Activist C (Happisburgh), CoastNet’s Strategic Director (National NGO official) had earlier explained a motivation to use the meeting to bring together the likes of CCAG from around the country to tell their stories, and the creation of a new national group as an umbrella body – with a focus on both coastal erosion and coastal flooding. With a role of developing and maintaining a common position statement, lobbying government and others and providing a self-support network for affected parties, National NGO official suggested that the group should be a ‘reasonable voice for affected parties’, and a body the government can ‘do business with’<sup>82</sup>. He went on to make a case for government funding for the group which, he suggested, might enable an annual conference, organisation of meetings, and maintenance of contact details; advocacy; networking resources; and technical advice.<sup>83</sup>

The conference was attended by around 70 delegates including MPs, policy makers from central government and its Executive Agencies, local

<sup>80</sup> CoastNet. 2009b. *A Coastal and Marine All Party Parliamentary Group and Coastal Concern Action Group conference: Conference Report, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2009*. CoastNet.

<sup>81</sup> CoastNet. 2009a. *Coastal Communities at Risk*. [conference flyer]. CoastNet.

<sup>82</sup> Midlen, A., alex.midlen@coastnet.org.uk. 2009. *Coastal Communities at Risk*. [Email]. Message to A. Midlen (alex.midlen@coastnet.org). Sent Friday 3 July 2009, 12:28. [Accessed 26 April 2009].

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

government members and officers, and representatives from coastal groups. The agenda included an address from the Minister responsible for flood and coastal erosion management; presentations from representatives of coastal groups; and the voicing of themes and concerns that both reflect Activist C (Happisburgh)'s preoccupations with regard to CCAG, and are useful in considering the formation, development and influence of NVCC.

In her presentation, Activist D (Jury's Gap) of the Defend Our Coast group, Romney Marsh, echoed consultation responses from Selsey and Sheppey in describing how stakeholders were isolated by the SMP deliberative process, adding that her group felt ill-equipped to participate in a very technical debate against people with specialist training and organisations with budgets to pay for research and staff travel expenses.<sup>84</sup> The first of these concerns was acknowledged in subsequent discussion, although there is evidence of some ambiguity in how interactions between community groups and government were understood by those present. A comment from one delegate that 'community engagement is a must', was broadly supportive of the Minister's position that 'government is genuinely willing to engage' and that he 'encouraged people to take part in consultations, telling the community representatives present: 'It's up to you!'.<sup>85</sup> However, contributions from others at the conference hint at how such an idea might be problematic. The APPG vice-chair, spoke candidly of a 'huge disconnect' between those in power and communities who feel they have very little power', whilst a senior Natural England (NE) official acknowledged 'a lack of suitable tools to arrive at achievable solutions' and the need for 'constructive dialogue'. Whilst this latter compound of managerial buzzwords reveals little

<sup>84</sup> CoastNet. 2009b. *A Coastal and Marine All Party Parliamentary Group and Coastal Concern Action Group conference: Conference Report, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2009*. CoastNet.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

about what was considered wrong and what might be required for that to change, both of these remarks at least invite a problematised understanding of encounters between government and communities.

The inaugural NVCC meeting that followed the conference was facilitated by CoastNet and attended by representatives from 13 coastal groups, and saw discussion of the problems that people were experiencing in their respective localities, set objectives for and decided upon leadership of NVCC, and agreed first actions. Reflecting concerns expressed in the preceding conference, objectives covered the sharing of information, with NVCC providing a common point for this purpose; the critiquing of government and other documents and the provision of related technical support; support for members in responding to consultations; and maintaining a common lobbying position on points of common interest upon which there is a consensus. Activist C (Happisburgh) was elected unanimously as NVCC chair, with first actions including a request to the Minister (and others) for funding and the development of a response to the DEFRA Coastal Change Policy consultation.<sup>86</sup>

In February 2010 it was announced that £8,700 was to be awarded from the DEFRA Customer Project Fund to assist NVCC/CoastNet to 'act as a conduit between coastal communities at risk from flooding and coastal erosion, and central government'; and to develop capacity to help communities to 'understand the challenges we face' in 'managing risks' associated with flooding and coastal erosion, and to 'influence the shaping of policy and strategy'.<sup>87</sup> More specifically, the funding was to cover 'proactive outreach to different coastal groups',

<sup>86</sup> CoastNet. 2009c. Minutes from NVCC Inaugural meeting, Portcullis House, Westminster, 6 July 2009. CoastNet.

<sup>87</sup> Midlen, A., alex.midlen@coastnet.org.uk. 2011. Defra customer focus funding – clarification. [Email] Message to M. Kerby (malcolmkerby@btinternet.com), R. O'Brien (roland.anglea@tiscali.co.uk), B. Bass (briggs@briggsbass.com) and C. Blunkell (chris.blunkell@btinternet.com). Sent Friday 5 August 2011, 08:45. [Accessed 2 May 2013].

‘attendance at relevant national meetings’, ‘development of a statement on common issues amongst NVCC members’, and development of ‘basic principles on engagement between NVCC, central government and its agencies’; in return, DEFRA would require reports to be submitted giving updates on progress against ‘delivering’ these outcomes<sup>88</sup>. Noteworthy, here, is the use of the term ‘delivery’ in this context, hinting at an expectation of a client-supplier relationship.

Between November 2009 and October 2012, with CoastNet now formally appointed as its secretariat, NVCC attended various meetings with NE, the EA and DEFRA. These fulfilled two main functions – explaining respective positions, identifying issues, and discussing the basis of a working relationship<sup>89</sup>; and presentations on government policy, strategy and achievements<sup>90</sup>.

The minute of a meeting between NVCC and the EA in May 2010 – the second such since NVCC’s institution as a membership organisation – records robust commentary from NVCC members on a range of subjects broadly consistent with the more general policy points raised by Activist C (Happisburgh) in his CCAG ‘Coordinator’s Comments’ – poor government communication and community engagement practices, lack of compensation for homes lost and funding for coastal sea defences, confusing government structures, concerns around government’s use of evidence, and a lack of public understanding of the subject. However, Activist C (Happisburgh) also reports that there is some sign that government departments are ‘catching up with each other’, and the minute ends with an unnamed EA official reported as saying that they need to start a ‘deep dialogue’. Thus, a tone is set of frank criticism expressed through private

<sup>88</sup> de Grouchy, C. 2010. [Letter], Friday 5 August 2011).

<sup>89</sup> Natural England (NE). 2010. *National England meeting with National Voice for Coastal Communities, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2010: Agenda*. Natural England.

<sup>90</sup> Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)/Environment Agency (EA). 2010. *Minute of Defra & Environment Agency FCERM Stakeholder Forum 10 May 2011*. DEFRA/Environment Agency.

communications, at least partially relieved by a willingness by NVCC to recognise positive change on the part of government, all underpinned by an acknowledgement on the part of government that a serious commitment to continued exchange is necessary.

A subsequent EA event in January 2011 was designed to explain new government Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) funding proposals in advance of consultation and to give DEFRA officials the opportunity to understand the concerns of coastal groups.<sup>91</sup> Themes covered in this latter regard included government overheads and consultancy costs in the provision of sea defences; the lack of time allowed for consultation given the complexity of the subject; concerns that some communities would struggle to raise the necessary financial contributions under the proposed new funding arrangements; that the new proposals made no reference to funding for adaptation; that the interests of coastal communities would not be reflected adequately in proposed new governance structures; and what were seen as the effects of environmental regulation. Commitments to various actions were made by government in response, whilst the EA's minute recorded that 'community groups felt they had a key role to play in encouraging community involvement and delivering bottom-up solutions'.

It was noted that this was the first time that DEFRA had held a workshop of this type with community groups, and thanks were both extended to, and reciprocated by, NVCC attendees. Collaborative as this may sound, the use in the minute of the phrase 'delivering bottom-up solutions' in the context of the (unpaid) activities of a civil society group again surely invites attention to the potentially rather ambiguous nature of the relationship between NVCC and

<sup>91</sup> Environment Agency (EA). 2011a. *Workshop to discuss new funding proposals for flood and coastal erosion risk management: Coastal community groups session*. Environment Agency.

government. This language is the managerial shorthand of the public service delivery orthodoxy, and arguably reflects the expectations and relationships that attend it – which remained a source of concern for some members.

## **Reinventing NVCC**

By the late Spring and early Summer of 2011, alongside evidence of an improving relationship with Executive Agencies, the thoughts of Activist C (Happisburgh) and others had turned to the challenges presented, variously, by the former's announcement of his wish to step aside as chair, the expiry of government funding and, related to these developments, efforts at reconstitution. The recruitment of new members had proven difficult, and the retention of the attention and involvement of existing members was also becoming a cause for concern.

During this period, Activist A (Selsey) and a colleague, on behalf of MPSPG developed for discussion by the NVCC 'hard core' – a reference to Activist C (Happisburgh), Activist D (Jury's Gap) and Activist E (Faversham Road) – a marketing plan for a 'new-style NVCC' with the intention of making a bid for funding direct from NVCC to DEFRA.<sup>92</sup> The document proposed that:

*NVCC has an opportunity to provide...Government with direct and unmoderated access to the grassroots of society affected by national policy on coast protection...NVCC would actually provide the likes of Defra etc. with an open window on their consultations, how they are delivered and received locally, and how communities genuinely feel about the plans and policies destined for them. It would be an immensely valuable engagement mechanism for Defra, EA, etc...NVCC can not only provide members with a tremendous amount of help, guidance, information experience and support but in doing so can also give the policy makers the vision and learning opportunities they need to shape future policy.*

<sup>92</sup> O'Brien, R. (roland.angela@tiscali.com). 2011a. *NVCC – conference call tonight*. [Email] Message to M. Kerby (malcolmkerby@btinternet.com) and C. Blunkell (chris.blunkell@btinternet.com). Sent Tuesday 24 May 2011, 14:39. [Accessed 3 May 2013].

Whilst identifying a funding requirement at that point of around £90,000, part of which would pay the salary of a part-time chair or officer, the proposal sought:

*...to build a model for a national organisation which can become self-sustaining and which may ultimately fund itself through its membership and other sources*<sup>93</sup>.

This prompted discussion as to priorities. In June 2011, Activist E (Faversham Road) wrote that:

*I have thought for some time...that we have been off the pace in terms of capturing the commonality in members' concerns and configuring NVCC, its priorities and its activities around this...If we were to try to articulate the major points(s) on which we campaign, I suspect we might currently struggle...I am concerned that unless we grasp this nettle, then we risk a dwindling membership – irrespective of funding arrangements.*<sup>94</sup>

In response, Activist A (Selsey) observed that if the things current members want NVCC to do will not attract funding, then the group would 'reach a dead end fast'. By reaching out to new members for whom the issue is fresh and who need the sorts of things that government says it wants to deliver, he suggests, then NVCC will have a 'product' that government may want to buy into.<sup>95</sup>

In July 2011 CoastNet circulated the copy of its final DEFRA Customer Insight report. In reporting to government on the various activities against which funding had been allocated, it confirmed that Activist C (Happisburgh) had responded to requests for advice from community groups in Essex, Norfolk,

<sup>93</sup> Cooper, B. & O'Brien, R. 2011. *2011 and beyond – A Two (2) year plan to refresh the NVCC organisation*. Manhood Peninsula Steering Group.

<sup>94</sup> Blunkell, C., (chris.blunkell@btinternet.com). 2011a. *NVCC*. [Email] Message to B. Bass (briggs@briggsbass.com), R. O'Brien, (roland.angela@tiscali.co.uk), M. Kerby, (malcolmkerby@btinternet.com) and B. Cooper (cooperbisset@onetel.net). Sent Friday June 10, 2012, 16:08. [Accessed 2 May 2013].

<sup>95</sup> O'Brien, R (roland.angela@tiscali.com). 2011b. *Re: NVCC*. [Email] Message to C. Blunkell (chris.blunkell@btinternet.com). Tuesday 21 June 2011, 20:27. [Accessed 2 May 2013].

Cumbria and Devon, but observed that it took time to turn local groups around to a different approach, and that one place may have a number of different groups that have different perspectives.<sup>96</sup> Tellingly, National NGO official advances the theory that:

*...there were others out there but they didn't want to put their head above the parapet because of issues within their own community about the impact on property values or starting to talk about these issues in a very open way.*

Such potential conflicts of interest were also to be found in his commentary on efforts to develop the common statement of member issues, with the report explaining that whilst debating and agreeing common issues had helped members to understand each other's situations and perspectives, each local group had different experiences, and expertise and more time was needed to allow the group to develop more unified views. A difference of understanding with regard to the 'rules of engagement' was also hinted at, with the report explaining that the group was behind the 'constructive engagement' approach, but that views still differ within the group regarding how to approach engagement with DEFRA, EA and NE.

A significant portion of an NVCC meeting held in July 2011 was devoted to issues pertaining to the chairmanship of the organization; aims and objectives; resource options and NVCC's future relationship with CoastNet.<sup>97</sup> At this

<sup>96</sup> CoastNet. 2011. *Defra Customer Insight Report – National Voice for Coastal Communities*. CoastNet.

<sup>97</sup> CoastNet. 2009c. *Minutes from NVCC Inaugural meeting, Portcullis House, Westminster, 6 July 2009*. CoastNet. Subsequent to NVCC's inauguration, meetings of the NVCC membership were held regularly in London until October 2011 - in government buildings or at the Working Lives Institute at London Metropolitan University. For as long as funding was available for it, they were arranged, facilitated and supported administratively by CoastNet. Meetings were devoted, variously, to activities related to the 'contract' with DEFRA (such as that in July 2010 devoted to the identification of 'knowledge gaps'; to developing proposals for a new approach to coastal management; to discussing government policy consultation; and to develop working relationships with government organisations. However, a consistent feature of meetings is the discussion of issues and developments in the various localities represented by those present; and the direction, organisation and priorities of NVCC. The latter subject was be almost the exclusive preoccupation of the last three meetings – held between July and October of 2011, and reflected developments that can be traced to May of that year.



meeting, attended as Activist A (Selsey) was later to observe ominously by just ‘the 5 of us’<sup>98</sup>, Activist C (Happisburgh) reiterated at some length what he saw as the benefits and achievements of NVCC – not least changes for the better in relationships with NE and the EA. However, he also acknowledged that the work of NVCC had reached a hiatus, and that it was necessary to discuss the future. He formally announced that he was to take a sabbatical as chair, and a proposal was made that Activist A (Selsey) should step in as acting chair subject to consultation of the wider membership. Funding was identified as a major issue, with a tension between views that NVCC should seek additional government funding and those proposing that it should seek funding independent of government. With the period of funding from government soon to expire, it was also decided that NVCC would not retain CoastNet as a secretariat.

Subsequent to the meeting, Activist C (Happisburgh) advised against seeking direct funding from government, on the grounds that it would be unacceptable to DEFRA and also leave NVCC open to accusations of being ‘in government’s pocket’, although he qualified this with the observation that it was perfectly legitimate to request expenses to be covered because there was an ‘equality of arms’ case to be made.<sup>99</sup> Activist A (Selsey) replied:

*If the consensus is that there shouldn't be a paid officer/chair, and Defra won't pay up, so be it – but it would mean someone else would have to volunteer as chair, rather than me. I simply can't afford to take any more unpaid time off work.*<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> O'Brien, R (roland.angela@tiscali.com). 2011c. *Re: NVCC – obtaining input from members*. [Email] Message to M. Kerby (malcolmkerby@btinternet.com). Sent 21 July 2011, 15:58. [Accessed 2 May 2013].

<sup>99</sup> Kerby, M. 2011a. *Re: NVCC – obtaining input from members*. [email]. Message to R. O'Brien (roland.angela@tiscali.com). 22 July 2011, 11:27. [Accessed 2 May 2013].

<sup>100</sup> O'Brien, R (roland.angela@tiscali.com). 2011d. *Re: NVCC – obtaining input from members*. [Email] Message to M. Kerby (malcolmkerby@btinternet.com). Sent 22 July 2011, 15:00. [Accessed 2 May 2013].

At a meeting of NVCC in September 2011 Activist C (Happisburgh) proposed that it was very much time to reflect, regroup and restructure for the future. Findings of a survey of members, undertaken in July and August of the same year and eliciting responses from 'a significant proportion of the membership', were then presented. The survey had been designed to inform a conversation reflecting on what the group had done together thus far and might do together in the future against the backdrop of Activist C (Happisburgh)'s departure and the end of DEFRA funding. Results confirmed various aims for local groups, and raised the question of potential conflicts between, for example, protecting the environment and protecting communities, and local and national concerns; and the possibility and desirability of finding a coherent NVCC position from such diverse preferences.<sup>101</sup> The survey found NVCC to have been 'helpful to local groups' and that members valued the access that NVCC membership has provided to senior officials. However, it was also noted that this raised questions as to the ends of such opportunities, and asked how NVCC might balance a desire to be constructive with the urge to challenge and protest. Tellingly, Activist C (Happisburgh)'s report of the meeting to the wider membership lamented time wasted on 'the minutiae of local detail which pretty much forestalled the possibility of achieving any constructive work on...reorganising the group' and emphasised that NVCC was not open to individuals who may wish to use it as 'a route to push their own, personal, grievances with Government's coastal policy and approach'.

At the most recent formal meeting of NVCC on 17 October 2011 it was broadly agreed by those present that NVCC must have a national focus, and it was accepted that a challenge lay in seeing how local grievances might relate to

<sup>101</sup> Blunkell, C. 2011b. *NVCC Survey of Members July/August 2011*. [Informal report for NVCC].

necessarily broad principles.<sup>102</sup> Such concern it was felt, might be covered by the wish to: 'put people back into coastal policy', with its implicit suggestion that local coastal people are increasingly marginalised in policy decision making, contrary to government rhetoric. Discussion of involvement in a bid for project funding made by CoastNet saw cautious agreement to proceed. In terms of organizational configuration, merit was also found in Activist C (Happisburgh)'s proposal that NVCC consider forming an executive group, arguably reflecting a growing awareness that the business of the group had fallen to a minority of active members.

Then, in January 2012, National NGO official reported that CoastNet's bid for EU funding for NVCC had been unsuccessful, but drew attention to the Big Lottery Communities Living Sustainably Fund. To paraphrase, he proposed a recommendation of interest on the basis of NVCC liaising with both national and local government and other bodies, to raise awareness of climate change adaptation and mitigation, to assess community vulnerability and capacity.<sup>103</sup>

Response from NVCC members to this late proposal was lukewarm. Activist D (Jury's Gap) expressed disappointment about the unsuccessful bid for funding, as she considered it instrumental to NVCC's future. Perhaps echoing the mood, she continued:

*Despite...endless passion and enthusiasm...most NVCC members are not in a position to fund themselves nor have they the luxury of committing endless and unpaid hours of their limited time to the cause.*<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Blunkell, C. 2011c. *CB notes from NVCC meeting 17/10/11*. [Informal note for NVCC].

<sup>103</sup> Midlen, A. (alex.midlen@oastnet.org.uk). 2012. *URGENT: NVCC funding*. [Email] Message to M. Kerby, (malcolmkerby@btinternet.com), B. Bass, (briggs@briggsbass.com), C. Blunkell, C (chris.blunkell@btinternet.com) and R. O'Brien (roland.angela@tiscali.com). Sent Wednesday 18 January 2012, 15:56. [Accessed 2 May 2013].

<sup>104</sup> Bass, B., (briggs@briggsbass.com). 2012a. *Fwd: URGENT: NVCC funding*. [Email]. Message to M. Kerby, (malcolmkerby@btinternet.com). Sent Thursday 19 January 2012, 19:58. Accessed 2 May 2013.

Activist E (Faversham Road) explained that he had become tired and demotivated, and considered undesirable the prospect of 'the unhappy few shouldering the burden indefinitely'.<sup>105</sup> Mindful of what she described as an apparent lack of enthusiasm displayed by some of its members, Activist D (Jury's Gap) suggested putting NVCC into what she described as 'suspended animation'.<sup>106</sup>

Nine quiet months later in October 2012, at the behest of the EA, Activist C (Happisburgh) and Activist D (Jury's Gap) travelled to London to discuss proposed consultations on the Flood Incident Management Plan and Flood Risk Management Plans. However, in inviting concerns or comments from the NVCC membership in advance of the meeting, Activist C (Happisburgh) explained that:

*...it has been extremely quiet with Government (DEFRA/EA) taking a seemingly intransigent response and until now...unwilling to discuss the revised Coastal policy introduced last year...it is just as we told them in December 2010 – the policy may well be deemed to work by Government because it reduces dramatically funding for the coast but it certainly does not work for the people.*<sup>107</sup>

Following the meeting, Activist C (Happisburgh) explained in an email to NVCC members that:

*...as the general consensus amongst us 'Stakeholders' is that consultations are pretty much a box ticking exercise...we concluded we would have a much greater effect if we officially declined to take part on the grounds that history shows that any such responses appear to be ignored...We very strongly put forward our position that, if we took part in said consultations, we felt we would be legitimising an overall policy for coast management which is unfair, divisive and blatantly inadequate...I am convinced that our actions will have a far greater*

<sup>105</sup> Blunkell, C., (chris.blunkell@btinternet.com). 2012a. Re: Fwd: URGENT: NVCC funding. [Email] Message to B. Bass (briggs@briggsbass.com). Sent Thursday 19 January 2012, 12:37. [Accessed 2 May 2013].

<sup>106</sup> Bass, B., (briggs@briggsbass.com). 2012b. Re: NVCC in the short term future. [Email] Message to S. Fremantle (sfremantle@hotmail.com). Sent Monday 30 January 2012, 8:50. Accessed 2 April 2013.

<sup>107</sup> Kerby, M., malcolmkerby@btinternet.com. 2012. Fw: Flood Incident management Plan Consultation & FRMPS Consultation. [Email] Message to B. Bass (briggs@briggsbass.com). Sent 14 September 2012, 00:52. [Accessed 24 April 2013].

*effect on the machinery of government than just responding to consultations...if and when we manage to elicit a response from them I shall copy you in.*<sup>108</sup>

There is no record of any such response, and a subsequent invitation to attend a stakeholder event on the Triennial review of the EA and Natural England was not taken up by any representatives from NVCC.<sup>109</sup> Hostilities, it appears, had been resumed.

## **Discussion**

In settings where local interests are represented by proxy in the context of the setting of coastal policies, Fletcher (2007) notes that the channel of communication between representatives and citizens is weak, where it exists at all. Cast in Tilly's terms, we might ask simply whether 'low-cost' opportunity in this instance – predicated on unmediated interaction between government and coastal interests – was converted into influence over policy or, alternatively, whether the findings of O'Riordan *et al* (2009) are borne out: namely, that despite reported benefits to more participatory approaches to decision making (such as greater awareness of issues and improved understanding of other actors), ultimately 'community' actors feel they have wasted their time and effort.

We might also note that the creation and constitution of NVCC appears to have had potential in addressing issues around resources and capacities of various kinds as they apply to coastal groups and the question of adapting to change. Zsomboky *et al* (2011) observe that disadvantaged groups can lack capacity, with Foot stressing the need for people from deprived neighbourhoods to make alliance with those more affluent and socially influential. Again, the

<sup>108</sup> Bass, B., briggs@briggsbass.com, 2012c. *London Meeting/9.10.2012*. [Email] Message to undisclosed recipients. Sent Tuesday 16 October, 8:53. [Accessed 1 May 2013].

<sup>109</sup> Bass, B., briggs@briggsbass.com. 2013. *Defra – 24<sup>th</sup> January*. [Email] Message to C. Blunkell (chris.blunkell@btinternet.com). Sent Monday 14 January, 15:06. [Accessed 1 May 2013].

constitution of NVCC indicates potential for redress in the shape of support for member groups in responding to consultations and the provision of technical assistance. More specifically, a gap in the literature concerns the resource burdens for those from communities active in participatory deliberative processes, and NVCC's engagement with government offers an opportunity to explore this in greater depth.

Activist C (Happisburgh)'s belief that only by locales under threat coming together might things be changed assumes a commonality of interest amongst coastal groups that might be mobilized through NVCC. However, NVCC struggled to both recruit new groups, and to maintain the active involvement of some member organisations over time – broadly mirroring the trajectory of grassroots collective action in Selsey in terms both of eliciting broad and 'hands on' contributions.

The testimony of National NGO official is instructive to this end, indicating both conflicts of interest within coastal locales as an explanatory factor for non-recruitment, and that the mobilization of interests had been inhibited by concerns over any potentially negative effects of action on local house prices.

Within NVCC, identification of a consensus on member interests also proved difficult, with a tension emerging between the pursuit of local concerns and the imperative to develop a common position amongst members on which to engage government. Thus, NVCC might be said to have failed to some extent in this regard – both under its own terms, and those attending its 'contract' with government. Such evidence of disparity of interests appears to undermine government's confidence in the idea of a single community perspective, on the one hand, yet may help to explain officials' wariness of interest groups as they seek to balance the conflicting objectives of diverse stakeholders as identified by Milligan *et al* (2009) on the other. It also supports a concern that interest *per se*

may not translate easily to mobilization, as assumed by government and central to the consultation orthodoxy employed in the Sheppey case.

Turning to socio-economic factors as they relate to recruitment difficulties and the respective contributions to the NVCC effort of coastal group representatives, the Sheppey case raises the possibility of a cultural predisposition against coalition beyond geographical borders. This is compatible with Milligan *et al's* (2009) observation that some communities are 'hard to reach' – a finding that poses a particular challenge to Foot's (2009) prescription concerning people from deprived neighbourhoods needing to make alliance with those from more socially influential neighbourhoods. To conclude on this point, whilst there is evidence that NVCC members found the resulting access to senior officials useful, and of peer learning having had value, any broadening of opportunity through increased membership did not happen to the extent envisaged.

NVCC's mobilization strategy as it applies to government pursues a distinctive trajectory. Always fluid, it might be said to have emerged from CCAG's initially hostile and very public approach to seeking change, subsequently tempered by more conciliatory noises alongside evidence of more private engagement. Then, with the launch of NVCC, came a plea from Activist C (Happisburgh) for greater understanding, meaningful dialogue and cooperation between actors. Subsequent documentation around encounters between NVCC and government records efforts at accommodation in these regards, whilst noting NVCC concerns broadly in line with early representations. However, tensions prompted by the expiry of government funding and the need for reorganization, surfaced around the trade-offs implicit in adopting an organizational shape, purpose and strategy charged with satisfying both an urge to protest and the requirements of what might be seen to some extent as a government service delivery function. Ultimately, NVCC abandoned this approach for practical

purposes, effectively declaring that the opportunity it afforded had not translated to the desired influence.

For all that evidence supports to some extent the conclusions of O’Riordan *et al* (2006) and Milligan *et al* (2009) that involving local people in the setting of coastal policy results in improved relationships and greater understanding between the various actors, it also supports Foot’s (2009) conclusion over conflicting views as to how far communities and citizens can exercise substantial influence over decisions about public services and, more specific to this context, Milligan *et al*’s (2009) pronouncement that there is ‘no participatory panacea’. Calibration of NVCC’s influence on national policy using Arnstein’s Ladder (see Table 9) suggests that it fell short of ‘Citizen Power’ in that there is no evidence of the redistribution of power away from government, either generally or over a specific programme. Rather, any influence might be bracketed under ‘Tokenism’, with the sub-category of ‘consultation’ – characterised by authorities both seeking opinion from, and informing citizens. Notable, however, is that despite its potential as a step towards full participation, there are no guarantees in this regard.<sup>110</sup>

Perhaps tellingly, Arnstein sees effective partnership as dependent in part on whether the group concerned has the financial resources to pay its leaders, and the mobilization of resources for making the case of coastal groups effectively to government was a central preoccupation for NVCC and its members. Government funding made possible the retention of a secretariat; access to technical expertise; access to other actors through, for example the APPG; and the payment of travel expenses. Thus, its expiry, and NVCC’s inability to replace it, must be understood as a major factor, although not the only

<sup>110</sup> A more thorough account from government of its engagement from NVCC may tell a different picture to that of the dissatisfaction that emerges from the testimony offered by NVCC members and the relevant documentation.



one, in the group going into abeyance. Rather, organizational configuration in the shape of a historically significant reliance on the chairmanship of Activist C (Happisburgh) caused a related set of problems following his decision to step aside – in terms of the interest NVCC should serve, how it should be pursued, and the structure of the group and its relationship with government. Central to the latter consideration is the extent to which NVCC was reliant on the unpaid input of members representing coastal groups, with the sense that personal limits had been reached by the summer of 2011 irrespective of the provision of government funding, and confirmed emphatically during 2012.

## **Chapter 7: EXPERIENCES OF ACTIVISM**

There is very little to be found in the literature on coastal governance as to how local people organise themselves into groups, beyond simple references to ‘community stakeholders’ (O’Riordan *et al*, 2006; Milligan *et al*, 2009) and ‘representatives of the local community’ (Milligan *et al*, 2009). Consideration of

the mechanisms by which authorities sought to include the interests of people potentially at risk in the setting of policy, and the ways in which the latter responded, suggests that the business of coastal action groups is undertaken typically by very few people. In this chapter a 'micro' view is adopted in describing and comparing the reported experiences of action group representatives who have been active both within their respective local groups and NVCC – as well as those of others who, through working with them, offer salient perspectives.

One purpose of this chapter is to broaden consideration of the importance of the work of individuals to organizational configuration and mobilization, and the implications of this in terms of how local interests are understood by authorities in the context of consultation and community engagement, with implications for engagement practices and ascription of legitimacy.

Another key purpose concerns the mobilization of the resources necessary for collective action, and the implications for this in socio-economically distinctive cases of what appears to be the significant reliance of such efforts on individuals. A related question, and one with implications for considerations of the legitimacy of local representation, concerns the motivations of activists in taking on such responsibilities when others either cannot or will not.

Analysis draws on Tilly's Mobilization Model in structuring and comparing the accounts of individuals, with nuanced understandings of the individual mobilization of less tangible resources pursued through the application of Bourdieu's Theory of Capitals.

### **A solitary activity**

The bulk of the work associated with activism in this context typically falls to few people, and sometimes individuals often working alone. Speaking on his involvement as a member of Save Our Selsey (SOS), Town/parish councillor B (Selsey) explains that the vast majority of the work was done by just two people – a testimony that is notable in being ventured by one not so closely involved in the work of the group at that time.

Although it may not start this way, others having also made commitments may drift away – for example, once it is sensed that a crisis has passed or the issue become less obviously pressing. Whilst those activists remaining find the resulting burden onerous, the alternatives can appear to be less appealing still: their working habits, then, can be attributed at least in part to their own preferences, and they can be cautious about involving others in certain contexts.

Activist F (Blyth Estuary)<sup>111</sup> confirms this pattern in his own case, but explains that in his view the relevant effort did not need more than a few people – just him to look into the science, and writing to the Environment Agency (EA), and phoning and emails. As we will see, however, this was a significant undertaking made at some personal cost, although perhaps one significantly buffered by the time granted him by retirement and, at first glance, what appears to be some financial comfort.

There is also evidence that some have tended to work alone by preference, although we must be wary of isolating this as an explanation for such eventualities. A journal entry from Activist E (Faversham Road) confirms a concern that he tended not to be very inclusive in his work, but also that with notable exceptions people had been slow to offer help.

<sup>111</sup> Research notes confirm that Activist F (Blyth Estuary) was interviewed on his yacht at Ramsgate Marina, Kent, during a brief hiatus in his months-long trip around the coast of Great Britain. Well-spoken, articulate, courteous and dressed in casual clothing consistent with sailing, both he and his limited living space on his yacht were impressively tidy given the considerable amount of time he had been at sea.

Activists are alert to the organisational difficulties posed by such working arrangements. Another journal entry made by Activist E (Faversham Road) concerning his ongoing chairmanship of the local residents association confirms that he felt it necessary for the base of the organisation to expand in terms of its scope and its involvement of people, in response to a nagging concern that he was over-reliant on his own judgment to the possible detriment of the longer-term health of the group. Activist C (Happisburgh) neatly outlines the dilemma facing activists in this regard, explaining in the context of the Coastal Concern Action Group (CCAG) in Happisburgh that:

*After the first year or two of the shakedown I went back to the group and said: 'Look, things are moving and I'm having to make decisions on the run. I can't keep coming back to you because that automatically puts in a two week delay and I need to answer people'.*

As a consequence, he explains, he just 'ploughed on' in what he was convinced was the right direction. Activist D (Jury's Gap)<sup>112</sup> confirms the view that activists relinquishing responsibility for tasks can bring its own problems:

*It's very difficult to let some things go when you think you need to do them. You've got to get the right person along to a meeting 'cause otherwise it can do more damage than good. You can't have somebody go along to drop a spanner in the works.*

Thus, it appears that on top of the problems of others not wanting to either take on or maintain significant involvement in activism, there is a danger that organizational configurations that typically see just a few people, or even individuals, shouldering the load can become self-fulfilling. Having invested so much in mobilization efforts, it appears that activists may become concerned that any gains might be undone without their oversight, or that opportunities are not

<sup>112</sup> Interviewed in the garden of her house, which was dwarfed by the adjacent sea wall, Activist D (Jury's Gap) is nearing retirement age, petite, and has a heavy German accent. Research notes record her description of herself as 'private', which may have made the prospect of interview uncomfortable, and a home that had a feeling of happiness about it.

being exploited or developments missed. It seems that the demands presented by the need to respond appropriately and in timely fashion to developments can preclude activists developing group capacity by 'taking people with them'. This may help to explain the authorities' apparently cautious attitudes towards grassroots groups, as discussed briefly in previous chapters. As we have seen, Foot (2009) reports that a fundamental question for Maguire and Truscott (2006) lies in establishing the legitimacy of those seen to represent communities which, in turn, draws attention to organizational factors such as how local groups are constituted, the strength of mandate enjoyed by their representatives, and the ways in which group decisions are made.

Besides evidence of scepticism on the part of authorities with regard to the legitimacy of grassroots representation, there is also evidence of a similar lack of faith arising amongst the very people activists seek to represent. For some activists, a crisis can occur when they feel themselves to be squeezed between authorities they consider to be less than well disposed towards them, and local populations who fail to understand the approaches taken in dealing with the former.

With reference to the recalibration of his mobilization approach to a more consensual politics, Activist A (Selsey)<sup>113</sup> explains:

<sup>113</sup> Research notes record that Activist A (Selsey) is wiry, grey-haired, in his 50s, and dressed as if he has been doing something practical (or is about to). He is twinkly-eyed, keen to talk and quick to laugh, but looks tired. His office in the eaves of his house is piled high with box files, and the walls dominated by maps. Overlooking his desk is a framed picture of Don Quixote, the symbolism of which seems unlikely to be coincidental.

*You're stuck in the middle trying to explain 'Look, that's as much as we can get – I tried to get more, and I think on balance we should go for it', and they might see it more simplistically because they haven't been involved in the negotiation, so they're saying 'No, we want this, this and this.' So then you feel like you're in the middle between these two sides.*

A letter from Activist E (Faversham Road) to the EA at regional level in 2012 concerning the latter's decision not to pursue remedial beach defence work suggests a similar dilemma, observing that local people there had been, and remained, cynical of the value of time spent trying to influence EA policy locally, and that he had always tried to persuade those of this disposition to engage constructively. It goes on to articulate a fear that:

*...failure to deliver on this proposal, after such firm statements of intent, must undermine not only the Agency's credibility with local people, but mine also.<sup>114</sup>*

For some, then, mobilization strategy either has, or is likely to have, ramifications in terms of local support for action. In both of these cases, broadly 'constructive' approaches to political engagement risk alienating other interested but less involved parties.

For Activist D (Jury's Gap), however, 'going it alone' need not marginalise the group; rather, she sees group understanding and support as an essential condition for such organizational approaches to activism, not least as a guarantee of legitimacy. She explains that support in principle is important, even if the bulk of the work is left to the individual or individuals. The east Sussex group Defend Our Coast (DOC), she explains, had regular meetings where members would 'catch up and prioritise', and that whilst sometimes she had to make spot decisions when it was impractical to canvass widely, she is 'pretty confident' that in this way she was able to operate within her mandate. Activist C

<sup>114</sup> Blunkell, C. 2012b. *Faversham Road beach*. [Letter] (Personal Communication), 30 May 2012.

(Happisburgh) echoes this sentiment, stressing the significance of his being trusted to 'make the right call'.

Support from those around them, as well as from the groups they represent, can be essential for activists. Activist D (Jury's Gap) explains the importance of the contributions of her husband and family to her activism. Activist C (Happisburgh) echoes this, gesturing during interview towards his wife who was ironing nearby as the only reason he had been able to do what he had done; we will see as this chapter proceeds, that the corollary to families providing essential support for activists, where that is the case, means that they also get to share in any sacrifices that are made along the way.

## **Education and experience**

Review of the relevant literature pertaining to coastal governance suggests merit in consideration of populations' ability to locate what Bourdieu conceptualises as 'cultural capital' – specifically in this context the wherewithal to mount action on the back of a familiarity with, for example, relevant modes of professional conduct or even specialist knowledge. Given evidence that in 'participatory' settings local representatives can struggle to understand expert/technical perspectives, the education, backgrounds and professional lives of individuals bearing the brunt of collective action become particularly salient.

Testimonies from activists suggest that formal education and professional specialisms can inform their work in a very direct way, although in this context it appears, for most, to be less relevant than a broad experience which encompasses, for example, dealing with other professionals and speaking to large numbers of people and previous experience of contentious action.

In terms of formal education activists demonstrate significant diversity – from Activist C (Happisburgh) who explains that he left school at the age of 14

and had never taken an examination, to those with academic degrees and professional qualifications commensurate with the requirements of involvement in engineering (Activist F [Blyth Estuary]) bi-lingual translation (Activist D [Jury's Gap]), secondary school teaching (Town/parish councillor C [Selsey]), surveying (Activist A [Selsey]) and corporate communications (Activist E [Faversham Road]).

There appears to be significant variance in the extent to which such educational credentials and associated professional specialisms have helped with the tasks associated with activism in this context. Activist D (Jury's Gap) explains that she did not believe that her capacities in these regards had qualified her for the requirements of activism. At the time he became involved with SOS doing what he described as 'dogsbody work', Town/parish councillor (Selsey) B too felt he lacked specific skills – for example, in geography. Activist C (Happisburgh)'s professional experience is difficult to characterise: he had turned his hand to many things including driving buses and lorries, working as a parish clerk, and being Customer Services Manager and UK Sales Manager for a specialist car maker, none of which would appear to have obvious potential in terms of relevant specialist skills.

By contrast, Activist A (Selsey) believes that his professional specialism, enhanced by a qualification in ecological conservation provided him with a grounding in finance and environmental issues which helped in discussions with officials. Activist F (Blyth Estuary)'s example, arguably, provides an even more straightforward relationship between professional competency (and its educational underpinnings) and his activism in explaining how he conducted experiments that challenged the scientific evidence upon which policy was being made with regard to the Blyth Estuary. He was able to employ his professional expertise not only in questioning the judgment of the EA in declaring the walls of



the Blyth Estuary unsustainable, but also in running his own scientific experiment in support of this.<sup>115</sup>

Whilst activists bring to bear specialisms and academic backgrounds that vary in terms of their direct utility for collective action, the picture looks rather different in terms of how that experience furnished activists with contextual familiarity, or an understanding of the 'field' to use Bourdieu's language, with regard to the political terrain. By way of example, Activist C (Happisburgh) mentions having acquired some idea of how local authorities work, as a consequence of having had 'a few run-ins' with them. Activist E (Faversham Road) was able to draw on long experience of working with central government, and drew upon this in deciding whether or not he might be effective as an activist, and so in deciding whether to take on the role. Whilst not yielding any specialism he found to be obviously useful, Town/parish councillor B (Selsey)'s work as a teacher and as a manager in a large school proved useful:

*Walking into a meeting with 10, 12 people, professionals, was never intimidating. Likewise, if you stood up and spoke in front of a couple of hundred people who gathered at the meeting having done assemblies in front of 250 kids, a couple of hundred adults is no problem!*

Again, Activist F (Blyth Estuary) is able to provide a clear example of how understanding of the contextual terrain might be directly and usefully applied to his dealings with the EA. He explains:

*Because I'm an engineer, I've always had to have an answer for people who said 'Why have you designed it that way? Have you considered this? Have you considered that?' And I had to have an answer for everything – so I started phoning up their consultants.*

<sup>115</sup> Potentially of note is that other interviewees active on coastal issues in their respective locations but not involved with NVCC, such as Activist B (Sheerness/Sheppey), Town/parish councillor A (Sheppey) and Town/parish councillor C (Selsey/Pagham) cite practical experience in building and/or engineering, and their approach is notable for a focus on technical issues and practical innovation. We might also note their exasperation at the constraints placed by authorities doing what seems to be obvious in terms of defending from the sea.

Thus, a willingness to challenge professional specialists on details of their judgment appears to present no great challenge – either in terms of expertise or understanding of the cultural territory; rather, it is an unremarkable part of his day-to-day activity.

Whilst activists in this context have typically taken up causes in the past, such activity does not appear to stretch to formal, organized activism. Activist D (Jury's Gap) cites previous involvement in local campaigns around free bus travel for school children and local school closures, whilst Activist A (Selsey) was previously active with his local branch of environmental campaign group Friends of the Earth (although this had been neither demanding nor effective in his view). He explains:

*I don't obviously have any axe to grind apart from being an ordinary local person and finding that the proposals of the local authority are unacceptable.*

Activist E (Faversham Road) had been involved in supporting the miners during the UK government's programme of pit closures and associated industrial action in the 1980s, but had steered clear of the politically energetic groups that typified London student life at that time. Activist C (Happisburgh) appears to be no lover of organised collective action, although he demonstrates a rather individualist predilection for challenging authority. Commonly finding himself to be somebody that others will get behind in terms of contentious action, it may be of note that this is not necessarily a state of affairs he appreciates. He explains he had always had people 'falling in behind' him, and had always taken on the establishment in whatever shape it had taken, adding that:

*I don't like unions, I despise anybody that hasn't got the bottle to stand up and speak for themselves.*

Of course, this assertion sits in interesting juxtaposition with his belief of the need for coastal groups to work together, and the importance of giving

vulnerable people a voice, as covered in previous chapters. More generally, we would have to work hard to identify any radical fervour in the testimonies of activists in this context; rather, their sentiments might be located broadly in mainstream liberal political discourse – a point to which we will return.

To conclude on the subject of experience, whilst any obstacles encountered, as in the case of Activist C (Happisburgh) in terms of education and his own view of his academic facility, or Activist A (Selsey)'s embarrassment at the prospect of mobilizing support, may act as disincentives to involvement, these are overcome through various means in these cases. Intriguingly, Activist C (Happisburgh) offers the judgement as to effectiveness as an activist in influencing decision making that you've either 'got it' or you have not. Perhaps tellingly, National NGO official strongly echoes Activist C (Happisburgh) in venturing the view that what has made activists effective or otherwise in the NVCC context is:

*...individual characters really – people's approaches and past experiences, so very interpersonal things. Some people are good at it and some are not.*

## **The learning requirement**

The policy picture with regard to the coast is complex, and the actors various. Locating common ground between actors has been identified as a problem, not least as it concerns the limits to what people are able to understand (Milligan *et al*; 2009). Interviews with activists conducted for this study confirm that for some, if not all, activism and influencing policy requires significant learning – a challenge clearly differentiated by background and existing levels of education, and which can be daunting and require massive effort by way of response. Activist D (Jury's Gap) observes that: reading on the issue at hand represented 'a new subject'. Elaborating on this theme, Activist C (Happisburgh) explains:

*I had no idea of the extent to which I would have to learn – it was absolutely huge. The more I scraped the surface the deeper it became, and there was a point early on when I thought: ‘Oh, I can’t do this’. You ask one question, you get an answer that poses three more questions, and you’ve got to go away and research and find out. I didn’t want to be bothered – I was totally pissed off with that.*

This testimony comes from a man who left school at the age of 14 and, by his own admission no great reader. We will also see, however, that such an obstacle was not sufficient to prevent him from mixing with senior government officials, politicians and academics in some rarified settings, or indeed from presenting at an international academic conference. LA coastal engineer A (Selsey), confirms that Activist A (Selsey) also undertook what he describes as ‘a very steep learning curve’, whilst Activist E (Faversham Road)’s journal entry on the subject, made shortly after taking charge of the local consultation response effort for the local residents association, notes how much he feels he has to learn and wonders at the nature of the challenge facing others having to make the same rapid journey. A background including an advanced academic degree and long experience of working with central government, clearly, had not removed the sting of the learning requirement.

In contrast, Activist F (Blyth Estuary) gives no hint that the learning demands associated with his activism had been unduly challenging intellectually (although, as we will see, the time requirements had been significant), and we might note in this regard that his grounds for contest, as already discussed, are directly related to evidence gathered that draws specifically on his professional competences and understanding of associated orthodoxies concerning scientific processes and practices.

As we have already seen, both policy prescription and the testimony of local officials confirm the importance of informing the public in terms of the detail and implications of coastal change. We might also note the emphasis placed by

Local Authority coastal engineer A (Selsey) on the merits of targeting individuals who are potentially useful in correcting misconceptions amongst the local populace. He explains that at one public meeting:

*We targeted a guy who is mouthy and often gets things wrong, but who can also be great for correcting others when they get it wrong. We said 'come and have a chat', and he was very good.*

It may appear self-evident that encouraging learning in this way might overcome issues attending people being asked to navigate an alien field.

However, Activist D (Jury's Gap) explains that she got no help from officials in the context of Jury's Gap, although she also concedes that she didn't ask:

*...because I'm pretty stubborn, I sort of end up doing it myself, so I couldn't say that I asked anybody because they had so far until that point they taken a 'closed ranks' approach that didn't inspire you to go and ask.*

It would not be fair to ascribe indifference to the learning needs of local people to authorities on the basis of this evidence, although we might also note that in antagonistic situations there is perhaps something counter-intuitive about the idea of 'learning' from a party with which one has an issue, however indirectly.

To conclude on this point, we might usefully make a distinction between the learning required to express a meaningful opinion in response to a consultation exercise, and that required to challenge the very basis of the policy – and at national level. Such learning, it is reasonable to assume, might encompass issues and principles of governance beyond what is considered useful from technocratic perspectives for the purposes of a consultation exercise – a point to which we will return.

## **The costs and returns of activism**

Activism in this context, then, tends to be a relatively solitary and highly demanding undertaking and, returning to the literature on coastal governance, Milligan *et al* (2006) stress the need for consideration of potential costs to those active in participative decision-making. In representative settings, Fletcher (2007) suggests that negativity on the part of stakeholder representatives may be unsurprising given the reported significant additional workload implied. However, the resource burden for 'community-side' participants in decision making processes are given scant consideration.

For those who get heavily involved in activism, there is evidence of significant personal costs in terms of time, working lives and earnings, health and family relationships. Such effects are differently borne, as with other aspects of the experience of activism in this context, and can have clear ramifications in terms of the costs to collective action, given the reliance of collective efforts on the work and personal investment of the individuals concerned.

## **Time**

The testimonies of activists and officials alike confirm constraints upon time to be a key factor in people's decisions whether or not to participate in collective action. Activist D (Jury's Gap) observes that people having to earn a living are wary of committing more time. Activist A (Selsey) echoes this sentiment, observing that:

*Some people it's time to try and change anything, and I think in the end even once that dawns on some of the people who are more keen, they think 'Oh Christ, I'm whatever age I am, sod it – I'm not going to spend the next five years, or ten years, fighting this thing! So, for various reasons, you end up with just a very few people doing it.*

The time spent by activists on their work can be significant to the point of being overwhelming. Activist C (Happisburgh) estimates, conservatively, an overall time commitment of 13-14,000 hours, whilst Activist F (Blyth Estuary) suggests a figure of about 5,000 hours on relevant work between 2005 and 2011 and about 3,000 hours since on research, reading and related group activities. Without putting figures on their involvement in this way, Activist D (Jury's Gap) observes that, in terms of the time required, her activism has 'taken over' her life and, even the less involved Town/parish councillor B (Selsey) on his early work with SOS, that:

*There would be meetings, certainly, every two or three weeks. I've spent perhaps nine or ten hours delivering leaflets, and we would be organising exhibitions, and we were doing other things like manning stalls and talking to people.*

He explains that such activities could take up whole days – a point notable in drawing attention to the potential for competing demands on the time of activists, although being retired for much of his involvement appears to have eased this dilemma: likewise Activist C (Happisburgh) and Activist F (Blyth Estuary), although arguably to different degrees. Activist C (Happisburgh) explains that being retired he could find time; Activist F (Blyth Estuary) echoes this calculation, observing that his being retired meant that he was able to give 'more than most', adding that activism conflicted with other commitments 'only occasionally'.<sup>116</sup>

Working arrangements that facilitate a degree of flexibility are clearly considered important by those activists still working for living. Activist D (Jury's Gap) observes that it is hard to see how anybody who is not freelance or retired

<sup>116</sup> However, there is little in their respective testimonies to suggest a commonality of experience beyond this broad point; whilst the interview with Activist F (Blyth Estuary) took place on his twin-masted yacht, that with Activist C (Happisburgh) was conducted in a static caravan in his back garden.

could possibly find the time to do it, an observation given weight by the fact that Activist D (Jury's Gap), Activist A (Selsey) and Activist E (Faversham Road) all worked freelance at that time and so were able to juggle commitments to some extent. Activist D (Jury's Gap) explains:

*The people I work for, they've now got so used to ringing me up and saying: 'Is it alright to send you some work or are you going to a meeting today?'*

Activist A (Selsey) echoes this sentiment, explaining that as a self-employed gardener/agricultural labourer, he is generally able to juggle his various commitments. However, such flexibility does not ameliorate the demands of activism for him. Of his experience as one of two activists elected to Chichester District Council as members for the ward of Selsey South on the back of the SOS agenda, he explains:

*The problem is, people will say 'Oh you don't spend that long doing actual council meetings and things', and no you don't – but you never know when a meeting is going to turn up. Many of the people that you have to meet will only meet you in working hours, so that's really difficult, and particularly if you're mucky and all the rest of it. You might be shovelling manure or something – it's not easy suddenly to get changed into a suit and be somewhere for a meeting. It's not as if you can just flit out of your office and in half an hour be sitting in another office, you feel 'actually I need to make an impression on this person, so I can't afford to turn up there sweaty and all the rest of it. And I need my mind to be clear and objective, so I actually need to go home, get changed, have a shower and then go out' and that's probably half a day by the time you've done that and then gone off somewhere else.*

For all of the apparent promise of freelancing for the purposes of activism, then, such experiences are made distinctive by the nature of occupation (neither Activist D [Jury's Gap] or Activist E [Faversham Road] report such difficulties with integrating the worlds of activism and paid work), with pressures on time exacerbated by social expectations of decorum as well as logistical constraints. Nonetheless, all of those working report major setbacks in terms of earnings as a consequence of their activism. Activist A (Selsey) calculates that his income had dropped by something between a third and a



quarter, and that it had not been good in the first place. Activist E (Faversham Road)'s journal records that, during a period of particularly intense activity, his earnings had 'plummeted'. Activist D (Jury's Gap) observes:

*Financially it's crippling. It's cost the earth – tens of thousands of pounds. Obviously, because I freelance, if I don't work I don't get paid.*

## **Health and well-being**

There can also be costs to the health and well-being of activists as a consequence of their commitment. One of Activist E (Faversham Road)'s journal entries reports being denied badly needed rest, and that during a period when he was particularly active with efforts to influence coastal policy he took extensive time off work – unpaid. Whilst it would be wrong to attribute this solely to the demands of activism, it would not have helped. Activist A (Selsey) refers to the 'emotional stress' accompanying his efforts, and recounts a rather dramatic consequence:

*In the end I, actually blacked out, I had that much stress! At the end of the week, the worst week, I just collapsed. It's never happened before – I was speaking to my wife, and the next thing I know I was on the floor.*

Not all effects on the well-being of activists are so obviously tangible, however. There is evidence of feelings of guilt associated with this work – the feeling that they are somehow sacrificing their families to this pursuit; through their lack of earnings, or attention, or both. Activist D (Jury's Gap) observes that she had been fortunate in that two of her three children had already left home and so were not as affected by it as her third daughter before she left for university, thus underlining the obstacles to activism faced by those with younger families. Activist A (Selsey) explains with regard to his family's increased reliance on his wife's earnings:

*It actually feeds into your sort of self-esteem that you're not doing work, you're not earning money.*

It appears that a sense of self is confounded here, besides arguably more prosaic concerns around being unavailable for family purposes during evenings and weekends. Perhaps rather grimly, Activist C (Happisburgh) echoes this theme:

*It isn't until you get to the other end of it that you realise what it's done to you, and what it's done to those around you – and when you kind of look at it like that, you do question in your own mind, was the price too high? If I had understood 12 years ago exactly what that cost would be, and where I would be today both emotionally within myself and family etcetera, I would never have done it.*

There are hints that such concerns are justified. Activist D (Jury's Gap) explains her husband's irritation at the regularity of incoming phone calls whilst, perhaps more ominously, Activist C's wife explains:

*It has been difficult and there's time when I've not been supportive, because it's too much.*

### **The returns of activism**

If there are personal returns to be retrieved against the costs of activism as described here, they appear to be contingent on personal situation and are hard to quantify. Activist E (Faversham Road) had developed an academic interest in the subject predicated on his experience and accompanying knowledge in the context, as a consequence of which he had obtained employment and developed his research skills. As we have seen, Activist A (Selsey) had, perhaps less directly, seen a return on his efforts through the expenses paid him as a local authority councillor, although he reports no net financial benefit to this. Of note is that at a key point in the history of NVCC Activist A (Selsey) saw his further involvement as contingent on his being paid; thus, a return might be said to be a matter of some importance to him, as it was for Activist E (Faversham Road).

This is not universally the case, however. Those retired or approaching retirement see the prospect of enhanced employability as an irrelevance. Activist D (Jury's Gap) explains that she has no interest in making connections, although she concedes that her experience may help a younger person with their career. To suggestions that he exploit his knowledge and experience commercially, Activist C (Happisburgh) replied that at the age of 69 he had no wish to be 'charging all over the country'. His wife, who had been ironing nearby and occasionally contributing to the interview observes:

*You know, he could be making a lot of money on it. That isn't his angle on it, but by the same token it does go through your mind sometimes when you see people doing what they're doing and charging a fortune for it – hey, why aren't you doing this?*

However, and changing tack, Activist C (Happisburgh) explains:

*I'd feel I was stabbing my community in the back – like I was jumping ship, like I was crossing the floor of the house. It wouldn't sit right with me as a bloke.*

A consideration of the motivations of activists may help to shed light on such a position.

## **Motivations to activism**

Given the burden of responsibilities, stresses and privations associated with activism for some in this context, we might ask why some take up the challenge when, for the various reasons touched upon, others either do not or fail to maintain an involvement. This is a question important both for those seeking to make collective representation, and officials in the understanding and accommodation of such activity.

A key finding is that activists appear to share a sense of overbearing and insensitive authority, and of an injustice being perpetrated – of some tacit principle being violated. This appears to be more important than any formal

ideological conviction, or experience of organized activism, as already discussed. No less importantly, this research casts some doubt on the broad conviction of those in authority that the key to people's engagement with the subject is, to put it bluntly, solely self-interest.

Activist D (Jury's Gap), whose home was at risk from plans to abandon sea defences, describes herself as a person who will speak up when she thinks something is unfair. She explains with reference to Jury's Gap:

*I don't like old people who have worked all their lives being treated like a piece of garbage, and I think on the coast it just happens to be that predominantly there is an older generation that occupies coastal dwellings, who have worked all their lives to look forward to a nice retirement, to then be told 'Hard luck, you're going to lose your little bungalow because it doesn't warrant any more to defend it', that doesn't make it right, does it?*

If she is self-interested, her concern clearly does not end there. For Activist E (Faversham Road), a concern for the security of his family was further ignited by the anxiety, anger and feelings of helplessness expressed by his neighbours, and a sense of bullying authorities. Echoing such concerns, Activist C (Happisburgh) explains of his decision to become involved:

*The massive injustice of the situation – that was a great motivator. Little guys are getting walked on day in and day out – they count for nothing. What was abundantly clear in this situation that I found myself in '99 was, here is a community – a lovely community – which is just being crapped on from the greatest height by authority, and they feel there is nothing they can do about it.*

His own home was not at risk, and nor was that of Activist A (Selsey), who explains that he does not like authority telling the small people what to do. He adds:

*I was brought up in Selsey. I've lived here since I was two, so I've been off and on here for 48 years. This is the place I grew up in, I love. This is where my daughter's growing up – no-one's going to come down and tell me we're going to lose it!*

Locality appears central to Activist A (Selsey)'s own story, and policy proposals as threatening to sever a thread that connects generations – a sentiment that operates in tandem with his perception of autocratic and powerful outsiders: he talks about 'a bunch of suits' telling people they were going to lose their homes and how this:

*...gets my back up...So I decided fuck it! Fuck you, you're not going to get away with this!*

As with Activist A (Selsey) and Activist C (Happisburgh), the prospect of personal financial loss has no place in any explanation of the involvement of Activist F (Blyth Estuary). Rather, it might too be understood as a distaste for autocratic officialdom, with his anger spurred by EA consultants asking him why he was querying their data and, more broadly, a conviction that the government planned to abandon the coast of Britain based on flawed science. New evidence, commissioned by the EA and confirming his analysis, was ignored, he says, with the EA refusing to discuss it further.

A geographical rendering of interest, as government seems to favour in its prescriptions, might favour activism emerging from a long association with the area – as with Activist A (Selsey). Interestingly, however, such 'insider' experiences do not commonly inform activism in this context. Both Activist C (Happisburgh) and Activist E (Faversham Road) had only lived in their respective localities for a matter of months at the time they became active on these issues, whilst Activist F (Blyth Estuary) was a relative newcomer in Walberswick having retired there in 1998, just a few years prior to his becoming active. And whilst Activist D (Jury's Gap) was well established, she considered herself an outsider as a consequence of her German origin – not least as this had caused her problems, for example with local people suggesting she should 'go back to where she came from'. However, she also speculates that:

*Maybe it's because I'm a foreigner, and maybe I have a different mentality, and I just will say something when I think it's wrong.*

Foot's (2009) observation that when people from deprived neighbourhoods get involved in tackling deep-rooted social problems, they need to persuade those from more socially influential neighbourhoods to ally with them may be instructive on this point, although perhaps not in an entirely literal sense. Overall, we might observe a recurring theme in the testimonies of activists which invites us to entertain explanations beyond those that seek to root interest in the risk of personal loss and geographical notions of 'community' and, instead, accommodate concern for the well-being of others and the shortcoming of state actions. This accords with ideas of 'active citizenship', with Crick (2007) offering a conceptualisation of citizenship located firmly in liberal society, citing Adam Smith's endorsement of strong cultural restraints on the exercise of economic and political power. He goes on to argue that part of New Labour's citizenship drive rested on the conclusion that a general 'political literacy' in schools would empower pupils:

*...to participate in society effectively as active, informed, critical and responsible citizens' with the broader benefit of an active and politically-literate citizenry convinced that they can influence government and community affairs at all levels'. (2007: 245). Crucially, he concludes that it is only when we work together to defend the rights of others that we are acting as citizens (2007: 247).*

Allied to this, we might observe personal codes that, whilst they may not explain why people become involved as activists, may help with an understanding of why their commitment endures when that of others does not. For Activist D (Jury's Gap), this appears to be tied to notions of citizenship and, in particular, the exercise of constraint on political power. Referring to her continuing work as an activist subsequent to a welcome change of policy in her locale, she remarks:

*I remember one Shepway District Councillor saying to me years ago: 'What are you still doing? You got what you wanted'. I said: 'No I haven't – because it doesn't change the principle!'*

Activist C (Happisburgh)'s continued efforts, in contrast, are predicated on the personal mantra that if he says he will do something, then he will do it. Activist F (Blyth Estuary) offers a variant of this that hints at a decision in this regard that, at least in part, is rational in its calculation of the costs and benefits of continued action, whilst still reflecting concerns commensurate with an 'active citizen' sensibility. He explains:

*A lot of people ask me – 'Why do you bother?'. All I know is that having put six years effort into it, it is too important an effort to stop.*

## **Discussion**

The business of coastal action groups is typically undertaken by very few people. There can be various reasons for this: because it is understood that no more is required; because others are unwilling to commit themselves, or at least beyond a certain point; because the realities of activism preclude other approaches; and, tellingly, because those who do take up key positions find it easier to work in this way and may even prefer working alone and with relative autonomy. Whilst this arrangement can allow activists to accomplish things they consider unachievable through alternative organizational configurations, it may also present problems: in terms of a reliance on the resources of the few in important respects, difficulties with developing group understanding and skills, and relationships both within groups and between groups and other actors within the relevant polities.

There can be significant economic and related costs to seeking opportunity through collective action in this way – not just for activists themselves, but for those around them – which, if not cushioned by a relative financial affluence and the luxury of free (or at least flexible) time, points to a

socially differentiated experience of activism in this context. Calculations as to hours spent on this work can run into five figures, and mountains to climb are reported in terms of necessary learning. Activists speak of incomes slashed, and of issues with health and general well-being, and of note is that those who make and maintain heavy commitments are not necessarily those, in various senses, who can most afford to do so. Whilst there can be a return to the costs incurred by individual activists, for example in the shape of marketable knowledge or skills, this does not appear to apply to the retired or near retired, and for some the idea can offend the very basis of their activism.

Retired engineer Activist F was able to mobilize a highly compatible form of cultural capital in a field with which he was clearly familiar. However, activists in less affluent areas typically feel less competent in relevant professional or educational specialisms, or may demonstrate no pre-existing familiarity with what Bourdieu refers to as the relevant 'social space' – the political terrain of coastal planning, and the various actors who populate it. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given this finding, many activists report a heavy burden in terms of developing the cultural capital required, which is only partly leavened by the relevant authorities in this regard – despite evidence of the efforts in this direction. In short, people who take on the task of activism may do so despite feeling ill-equipped for it and, more subtly, can feel a disconnect between the demands of the field and their own guiding dispositions. That activists struggle past such calculations invites us to look beyond what might be considered residual and static capital assets and, accordingly, simple and linear understandings of 'capacity' in terms of 'communities' and their ability to involve themselves meaningfully in deliberative encounters.

Given such privations, the question as to why activists take on such responsibilities when others either can not or will not is of particular interest. The demands of making a living, concerns over lack of aptitude, or the prospect of



sacrifices and a long and unrewarding commitment may be sufficient to limit or halt the involvement of some (indeed most). Committed activists, however, seem prepared to confound ideas of habitus in pushing beyond what is familiar, comfortable, or even rational in terms of the calculation of costs and likely return, and to find accommodation with these new demands – however painful that may be.

Officials and local politicians alike consider the protection of people's own financial interests key to obtaining public attention in this context. However, this does not appear to be key in the cases of these activists. Rather, some ascribe a source of motivation to action as being a personal connection to the locale in question although, rather ambiguously, a proportion of activists considered themselves to be 'outsiders' in their own communities at the time their involvement commenced.

We have seen that self-interest is regarded with scepticism by some officials in the Selsey case. Whilst it can be seen as the key to the attention of the public, it can also be regarded with some suspicion when it is seen to be the basis of representation in deliberative settings. The organizational shape to which local action groups appear to default – that of a small number of very active people compelled by circumstance to rely significantly on their own judgement – is perhaps unlikely to allay any official concerns around the legitimacy of any such representation. Findings from the Selsey case suggest that not even the subjection of interests to the discipline of local democratic structures and processes may be adequate to alleviate such concerns. Given such realities, and alongside evidence of the plurality of local interests within locales, it becomes difficult to see how local interests might be acknowledged as legitimate voices in coastal planning exercises. This, in turn, begs the question as to precisely how government's stated aims of shifting decision making away from existing centres of power into the hands of communities and individual

citizens (DCLG, 2008) and, more specifically, encouraging communities to have direct involvement in decision-making (DEFRA/EA, 2011) might be realised.

## **Chapter 8: CONCLUSION**

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a critical understanding of the experiences of people living in coastal locations in England and Wales, and at risk as a consequence of coastal erosion, in trying to influence sea defence policy; and to discussions around government policy and practice. Drawing on evidence arising from a literature review and three case studies, it seeks an understanding of what Snape and Spencer (2003) consider to be subjectively meaningful experiences, and follows the prescription of Patten in venturing 'modest speculations' as to the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar conditions (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) – for example, the relevant Marine Management Organisation (MMO) categories as described in Chapter 4. It also makes judgements and recommendations as to the policy and practical implications of findings for policy makers, public institutions, and relevant practitioners.

This concluding chapter also considers the utility of the various renderings of social class considered for the purposes of this study – 'traditional' occupational class, Bourdieu's conception of social class, and the application of 'consumption cleavages' – in seeking to understand and calibrate evidence concerning the effects of socio-demographic factors in the planning and execution of deliberative exercises. Evidence is analysed to this end through the use, respectively, of Tilly's Framework for Collective Action (1978) and Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969).

Our focus from the outset was on exploring how larger, well-resourced and better-connected communities might be better able to pursue their interests as community action groups, form alliances and influence policy decisions; and how socio-economic circumstance informs individuals' willingness and ability to contribute to such efforts. This was pursued via three broad research questions:

- How successfully do authorities' community participation practices accommodate people's differing needs and concerns?

- To what extent do social, cultural, and economic factors inform the abilities and appetites of people in locations at risk to take action to influence decision-making processes?
- How do community action group representatives experience activism in this context, and what are the implications of this for their effectiveness?

The relevant literature identifies housing tenure and associated loss as key themes around which social action might coalesce on this issue, and encourages further consideration of the ways in which social class informs individuals' decisions as to whether and how to participate in collective action, the ways in which resource deficits manifest themselves and are addressed, and how affected populations organize themselves in defence of their interests and the implications of this for their effectiveness.

### **Deliberative democracy and community participation**

*"...America...is a world that teaches the primacy of the personal, of oneself, which ironically leaves people powerless. This country has always been saved by a new minority, who realize they've been robbed. In the process of righting their private wrongs, they have reanimated our public rights."*

Nicholas Von Hoffman (Terkel, 1980: 280)

Government policy prescription concerning coastal adaptation and, more generally, localism, favours a pluralist politics that values the participation through deliberation of those affected by the resulting decisions. However, such calls for more participation and deliberation must not be assumed to deliver the prize of further democratization, and instead invite critical scrutiny.

Rootes (1997) identifies a crucial dimension in this regard to be the openness or closedness of states to input from non-established actors, which

directs us towards considerations of deliberative models and their accommodation (or otherwise) of interested voices. Dryzek (2000) identifies two tendencies in deliberative democratic theory – one that is in step with liberal constitutional thinking, and a second, ‘discursive’ democracy, that is critical of it. Whilst there are features common to both, there are also important differences: at the core of liberal democracy lies the assumption that individuals are motivated by self-interest rather than any conception of the common good, and that diverse and incorrigible interests can be reconciled under a neutral set of rules. Deliberative democrats who traffic in ‘public reason’ want to restrict arguments to particular terms – for example, Rawls (1993) argues that citizens must conduct discussions based on values that others can reasonably be expected to endorse, so ruling out self-interest as a basis for participation.

Rootes observes that:

*The responses of established political elites to collective action vary according to their perception of the legitimacy of the aims and social characteristics of collective actors and forms of collective action. (1997: 99)*

In contrast, discursive democrats propose that democratic legitimacy rests on inclusiveness and unconstrained dialogue, and that individuals should accept decisions only if presented to them in convincing terms. Accordingly, Dryzek (2000) argues that self-interested and instrumental positions should *not* be omitted, but instead be subjected to a process that allows for the mitigation and modification of such positions; reflection sees participants distance themselves from such concerns through ‘preference transformation’, thus making the process amendable to democratic control.

Liberal democratic theorists argue that the reconciliation of liberal and democratic principles is in step with a culturally plural age, and that the institutions of liberal democracy are the proper home for deliberation. In contrast, Smith (2003) looks to environmental politics in identifying contradictory values

and discourses that are difficult to reconcile, whilst Dryzek (2000) argues that only 'thin' versions of deliberation can take place under liberal institutional arrangements.

For example, cost benefit analysis is a favoured appraisal technique within liberal economic institutions faced with the problem of responding to a plurality of values. However, Dryzek argues that such processes fail to recognise that interests and values are shaped and constrained by the participants' political, social and economic contexts. By such an analysis, the resources, experiences and expectations of participants become salient, as do processes themselves. More generally, he points to the preponderance of technocrats in such processes, and directs attention to constraints upon public officials imposed by the liberal political economy, making them less inclined to accommodate competing discourses.

Thus, mediators can be understood as playing a fundamental role in generating the conditions required for successful dispute resolution. Sunstein (Dryzek, 2000) argues that pluralism is undermined by social and economic imbalances, with Rootes (1997) confirming that participation in collective action is a minority activity. Accordingly, Dryzek argues that mediators must take an active stance, and assume a 'public-creating responsibility', and ensure that affected interests are suitably represented and able to engage with their constituencies. In contrast, he argues, a passive form of neutrality ensures the perpetuation of the status quo.

## **Deliberative democracy and policy discourse**

Policy discourse on coastal adaptation, in the wider context of political enthusiasm for localism, confirms tensions between competing deliberative democratic tendencies as well as omissions.

For example, in stating that adaptation to coastal change should be 'part of mainstream decision making' (DEFRA, 2009b), government appears to identify the institutional structure of liberal democracy as the proper home for deliberation which, according to Dryzek, invites us to be alert to problems implicit in such arrangements. However, in the context of localism, government's stated aim of passing more political power to people and away from existing centres of power (DCLG, 2008: 2) appears to support a discursive rendering of deliberative practice.

In declaring an intention to support communities in adapting to change (DEFRA, 2009b), government discourse appears to be in step with Dryzek's stipulation that authentic deliberation requires the effective participation of competent actors, although no explicit link is made between social and economic imbalances and the appetite and competence of people to make effective contentious representation on this issue.

Government's enthusiasm for people taking 'an active part in what happens locally' (DEFRA, 2009c: 7) appears to suggest direct citizen participation, although Dryzek warns that this is where stakeholder models are at their weakest. Government policy discourse is not explicit on what legitimate representation might look like; however, Community Adaptation Planning and Engagement (CAPE) guidance's conflation of engagement with those most at risk appears to legitimise self-interest as grounds for participation, consistent with Dryzek's prescription for discursive democracy but inadmissible under the liberal constitutional version as advocated by Rawls. Thus, how concerns around participants' self-interestedness are dealt with in the cases becomes especially salient.

Interestingly, the trigger for inclusion according to CAPE is the propensity for those in locations of coastal change to mount, or threaten, contentious action which, in turn, raises questions about whether discourses that challenge those of policy owners are accommodated and so, in turn, the nature of mediation. Government's stated enthusiasm for making use of communities' knowledge in finding 'new ways of solving complex problems' suggests an alignment with a discursive rendering of deliberative democracy, with the associated stress on the requirement for reflection and transformation on the part of all participants.

This is pivotal, given Dryzek's (2000) reading that authentically deliberative processes can be undermined by inappropriate institutional settings, expectations and practices.

### **Community participation practices**

Academic literature raises issues regarding the ability of local people to influence state-led efforts to make coastal policy – whether that should be as a consequence of a reluctance on the part of authority to submit its interests to negotiated outcomes, the effectiveness of elected representatives, the power that various actors are able to bring to bear on making decisions and setting policy, or irreconcilable expectations of local influence on decisions.

Overall, the literature appears to support the work of (Foot, 2009), which suggests conflicting views about how far communities and citizens can exercise substantial influence over decisions about public services – whilst community respondents expressed positive feelings about the potential benefits of engagement, there was also frustration about barriers limiting their involvement.

Evidence from case studies supports this broad finding. In the Selsey and Sheppey cases the public was made aware of draft proposals threatening



the loss of homes through comparable consultation exercises – consistent with those studied by Fletcher (2007) which saw communities find voice on decision-making bodies via local elected representatives. Despite a broad parity in terms of opportunity for local interests to exert influence, this resulted in a stark disparity between the nature and volume of responses between the two sites: concerted collective action in Selsey resulting in changes to the draft plan, with little heard from those affected in the Sheppey case, and no amendments made to the plan.

There is evidence of operating authority officials, local authority coastal engineers and elected representatives being attentive to the concerns of citizens. In the Selsey case, and acknowledged to be in part the result of local contentious action, the Operating Authority demonstrated the capacity and expertise to make decisions on a managed realignment scheme in a way that those involved found fair and satisfying. Such participation in structured engagement exercises suggests potential for developing trust and understanding between policy makers and citizens, supporting findings by O’Riordan (2006) *et al* and Milligan *et al* (2009). However, it was also observed by a key local activist that such an approach was applied only when local decisions had already been made that were truly important, over which concerns had been raised concerning decision-making practices.

More broadly, case study evidence draws into question a guiding assumption of UK governments, and guidance for coastal management specifically (EA, 2010) – that concern over interests will find voice through contentious action. Whereas such action occurred in Selsey, it did not on Sheppey, with the relevant consultation orthodoxy interpreting silence as an indication of acquiescence to policy proposals.

This is problematic. In the Sheppey case, it is difficult to see how Operating Authority advice *against* local authorities making early contact with

those who might be adversely affected by decisions during the early stages of the process can be justified. Such a course of action surely calls into question the seriousness of any intent to ensure that opportunity was fully extended to the interests of local people in the making of policy – especially given that the insular social nature, relative deprivation and lack of political sophistication of parts of the island are widely acknowledged. There is evidence, also, that homeowners can be wary of mounting collective action as a consequence of concern over threats to the value of their properties, consistent with Zsomboky *et al* (2011) reporting concern over negative effects of coastal change on property prices, with Few *et al* (2007) identifying homeowners as being in a group most vulnerable in this regard. This reflects, and even extends, Fletcher's (2007) evidence that those participants representing the public interest in relevant decision-making fora had no direct method of seeking the views of the public except for informal *ad hoc* routes.

A local authority actor in the Sheppey case expressed concern over the opportunities afforded local people and their elected representatives to influence decisions, whilst complaints about the deliberative process expressed through the formal consultation process appear to have been decided by appeal to the very same terms of reference that formed the basis of complaint. This reflects Fletcher's (2007) concerns with regard to the robustness of decision-making processes in representative settings, and the lack of any formal system to identify misrepresentation.

Turning to consideration of how local authority actors seek to raise awareness of issues of coastal change presented by preferred policies, there appears to be a commonly held view that appeals to people's self-interest – for example, through articulation of the threat to homes – can be key to people's attention. There is merit in this approach, although this judgement comes with caveats.

First, there is evidence that direct representation by local people is regarded with some suspicion, which directs attention to the question raised by Maguire and Truscott (2006) concerning the legitimacy of those seen to represent communities. More specifically, decision-makers can be wary of what they see as 'single issue' representations that may threaten the achievement of preferred outcomes. Importantly, such suspicions can also extend beyond grassroots action to formal local authority representation, which does not appear necessarily to fully legitimise local interests in the eyes of authority.<sup>117</sup> By contrast, in the Sheppey case the polity was populated significantly with actors likely to be in sympathy with the policies preferred by the project owners, few of whom enjoyed a meaningful democratic mandate. Much the same criticism was levelled at the deliberative process as it applied to Selsey.

Second, there is not necessarily any straight line between the identification of interest and its mobilization. Any threats to self-interest may be superseded by others such as those associated with poverty and unemployment, whilst the identification of interest appears significantly dependent on the clarity and urgency of the proposition. In both local cases, and reflecting the conclusions of Zsomboky *et al* (2011), a lack of clarity and/or immediacy can be linked to a lack of action.

Local authorities can be valuable coalition partners, but this is by no means guaranteed. For all that Selsey activists' pursuit of influence through membership of the local authority polity appeared to offer opportunities for 'partnership' (characterised by Arnstein as involving the sharing of planning and decision-making through an organized power base, with financial resources for leaders, in practice activists reported being at the mercy of party political

concerns, and easily marginalised in efforts to influence local authority priorities and actions.

Ultimately, central government ambitions of working in partnership with local people to find imaginative solutions to complex problems appear difficult to reconcile with official appeals to what is 'pragmatic' and 'sensible', as in the Selsey case, which appear to describe the limits to influence.

At national level, initial enthusiasm for engagement with central government quickly gave way to scepticism as policies were approved that activists felt failed to deal with the problems they had identified, with the language in which the relationship was couched hinting at an understanding on the part of government that its relationship with the National Voice of Coastal Communities (NVCC) was, to some extent, similar to that between client and service provider. Evidence from relevant government actors on the rationale and experience of engagement with NVCC would doubtlessly have provided useful additional insights in this regard.

Analysis of the various interactions explored for the purposes of this study, and calibrated using Arnstein's typology (see Table 8), suggest that, in practice, and despite ambitions that encompass 'partnership', operating authority and central government deliberative practices on key points of policy might best be described as 'tokenist' (inviting opinion but with no guarantee that people's opinions will be taken into account, and with information typically flowing from officials to citizens and little room for negotiation).

### **Social, cultural, and economic factors: abilities and appetites for action to influence decisions**

Although touching upon attitudes to coastal change, a review of the literature reveals little as to how local interests are mobilized, or their organizational configurations. There is little analysis to be found on how social class translates into action: however, what little there is suggests that this may be salient. Myatt *et al* (2003, 2003a) suggest a link between an occupational rendering of social class and awareness of and attitude towards change and its implications, and strength of orientation towards social action.

Levels of collective response to proposed policy varied considerably between the two key local sites. In so far as changes were made in the Selsey case that were attributed to local representation, with no equivalent in the Sheppey case, there is support in the evidence for Foot's (2009) conclusion that the benefits of engagement are distributed unequally: despite broadly similar approaches to engagement, responses were very different.

In stark contrast to Sheppey, where a lack of action coincided with weak political skills and an appetite for isolation associated with deprivation, the Selsey case identifies a group of activists prepared to mobilize wider collective action. Mobilization in Selsey also reached beyond geographical borders in encouraging coalition with other, similarly concerned groups, and both central government scrutiny of the relevant deliberative process and lobbying representation at national level. However, whilst Selsey was comparatively successful in mobilizing support for action, this dissipated quickly, and in terms of hands-on contributions, was largely characterised by participation in relatively undemanding tasks.

How might such issues around identification and mobilization be resolved? At local level, vehicles in the Selsey case such as Medmerry Stakeholder Advisory Group and the Manhood Peninsula Steering Group were considered successful to some degree in mitigating such inequalities. At national level, NVCC appeared to offer potential in addressing issues around difficulties

with the mobilization of resources in this context – for example, through support for member groups in responding to consultations and the provision of technical assistance. However, difficulties experienced by NVCC in recruiting coastal groups raises the possibility of cultural predispositions *against* such coalition in some locations, exacerbated by issues around funding, and suggest limits to such arrangements in mitigating socio-economic differences.

Town and parish councils appear to have potential in this regard at local level, however. Besides appearing to offer respite from the entanglements that can accompany party politics, imaginative and well-resourced town and parish councils can galvanise, represent and mobilize resource in support of local interests. However, they are clearly no panacea for concerns around weak local representation: the case of the failure to constitute a town council for Sheerness in the Sheppey case raises concerns that the existence of such institutions is at least partly contingent on preferences and resources rooted in the local socio-economic complexion.

### **Experiences of activism and the implications for collective action**

When at the 'Coastal Communities at Risk' conference in July 2009 the Minister responsible for flood and coastal erosion management explained that government was willing to engage with coastal communities, in exhorting those community activists present that 'It's up to you!', he was closer to the truth than he may have realised. Evidence from case studies suggests that the business of coastal action groups is typically undertaken by very few people. There are various reasons for this – the reluctance of others, because the day-to-day realities of activism preclude other approaches, or because activists feel more comfortable working in this way. To some extent this appears to justify suspicions with regards to legitimacy entertained by authorities. However, for

some communities this may be the difference between interest being identified and acted upon or not; that such suspicions can remain even when the same interests are picked up by formal democratic bodies suggests that the issue may not, at root, be one of democratic mandate.

Key activists and those around them – for example, their families – can shoulder significant costs. These people are not typically cushioned by affluence and all that can bring, and evidence of differentiated experience of activism suggests that, in this context at least, there is merit in revisiting the conclusion of Clarke *et al* (2002) that activism is a middle class, middle-aged activity.

Activists in less affluent areas typically feel less competent in relevant professional or educational specialisms, or may demonstrate no pre-existing familiarity with Bourdieusian ‘social space’. Rather, many report a heavy burden in terms of developing the cultural capital required: that they do so encourages us to look beyond residual and static capital assets, and linear understandings of ‘capacity’ in terms of communities and their abilities to involve themselves meaningfully in coastal planning. That committed activists push beyond what is familiar, comfortable or even rational in terms of likely costs and return – however painful that may be – invites consideration of motivation that extend beyond personal and immediate concerns, to more abstract notions.

### **Social class, coastal change and collective action**

Overall, findings tend to support Della Porta and Diani’s (2006) findings that it is difficult to identify any new primary basis for social conflict, and the circumspection of Saunders (1990) and Touraine (1981) in stressing the difficulties of unpicking occupational class relations from conflicts pertaining to post-industrial societies.

The literature coincides with the idea held by local authority coastal officers and elected representatives, that occupational class is an important determining factor in people's level of engagement with coastal issues as part of formal consultation exercises. Myatt *et al* (2003a, 2003b) identify retired and professional people as being more active on local issues, whilst Zsomboky *et al* (2011) find a link between disadvantage and both a low interest in, and capacity for, adaptation to coastal change. To an extent, occupational status is also useful to explain people's involvement in activism in that many people appear to make decisions based on competing time commitments and priorities, and the occupational skills they might bring to bear. Communities such as West Wittering, comprising affluent professionals with free time, appear to have little trouble either in mobilizing economic resources to contribute to the outcomes they would like to see in comparison to Selsey.

However, whilst the inability, or reluctance, of people to contribute to collective action beyond a certain level can be partly explained by an area's low occupational skills base, an experientially more compelling reading is offered by that of an emotional class response (Sayer, 2005) to the challenges presented by an unfamiliar political terrain and actors.

Bourdieu's rendering of social class extends beyond any notion of static and residual resources. Besides relative affluence, occupational skills and the free time associated with retirement, the community at West Wittering was seen as being highly familiar with the political terrain – a local collective habitus, then, that sits in some harmony with the relevant social field. By contrast, at Selsey a reading of awareness based on an occupational understanding of social class is enhanced by evidence that dissonance between habitus and field – or to use more straightforward language, what activism requires of people and what they feel comfortable doing – negatively influenced the extent to which people participated in collective action, assuming that they elected to do so at all. In the



Sheppey case, such a reading may help to explain an instinct for isolation that arguably militated against the kind of coalition building seen by Klandermans (1993) as essential in effective mobilization, and particularly so for those from deprived neighbourhoods (Foot, 2009). This supports the latter's point that people may exclude themselves from engagement with government on the grounds that they do not fit – a case of silence indicating not acquiescence to the policies proposed, but a class-based unease with the processes and terrain of deliberation, and what it appears to require of them.

However, whilst an analysis can help explain people's interest/involvement in collective action, it *doesn't* necessarily explain the trajectories of activists themselves, which is crucial given that collective action in this context appears typically to be concentrated in the hands of very few people. The majority of activists interviewed reported that such activity made significant demands on them in terms of the time required and income sacrificed – both of which can be tied to an occupational reading of social class. Significant obstacles were also reported that extended beyond such a reading, however – for example, in reading and learning habits, persuading others of a point of view, or making presentations to politicians and academics. Here, a Bourdieusian reading assists an understanding of a gap between habitus and field – of dissonance between individual disposition and the requirements of field. It does *not* explain why activists consider what is required of them; understand that it is uniquely demanding, unfamiliar and even frightening; and, unlike others, decide to proceed anyway.

Instead, there is evidence of a consumption cleavage as a motivation to action in that activists report concern at the risk to homes arising from government decisions not to protect them indefinitely (with it being implicit that other areas, and thus other people's homes, will continue to be protected significantly from the public purse and as a consequence of public management

decisions). Again, however, such a cleavage only explains the involvement of key activists up to a point, which is important given the difficulties that activists appear to have in persuading decision-makers of their legitimacy. Rather, activists are significantly motivated by a powerful shared distaste for what they see as an autocratic and external officialdom that, for example, refuses to discuss scientific evidence that contradicts the rationale for their judgements.

Whilst this is not the only motivation of activists, there is a palpable sense of activists reacting against what Touraine (1980) identifies as 'domination by the apparatus', and evidence that they identify with Crick's (2007) concept of a critical 'active citizenship' with its emphasis on influence on government and community affairs that is, by definition, considerably broader than the self-interest so warily conflated with collective action by operating authority actors.

### **Implications for policy and practice**

Overall, the setting of coastal policy appears to be significantly at odds with the stated aim of 21<sup>st</sup> century UK governments' to give power to citizens on issues of great importance to them. Rather, responsibility for sea defence has been removed from local authorities and given instead to central government. Ostensibly, local citizens have a voice on deliberative fora; however, for all of the appearances of pluralism, the evidence instead supports the conclusion of O'Riordan *et al* (2009: 2011) that agencies and authorities are not willing to give up power to negotiated results – at least when it matters the most.

Operating authorities have demonstrated a capacity for deliberative practices that are considered to be satisfactory and fair, and can help to mitigate the effects of resource inequalities. An approach satisfying the tenets of Localism must surely extend such engagement practices to considerations of overall strategy and, in so doing, make room for perspectives and ideas extending

beyond the 'pragmatic' and the 'sensible', and the 'usual suspects' in terms of genuinely influential stakeholders. Given government's stated enthusiasm for grassroots democracy, the absence from major coastal planning fora of town and parish councils as key stakeholders is curious to say the least. Whilst uneven in their constitution and effectiveness, town and parish councils appear to have vital potential in raising awareness of issues around coastal change, for sidestepping obstructive issues around party politics, and for both identifying and mobilizing local interest.

This might partially alleviate, although not necessarily dispense with, concerns over the rigour and legitimacy of local representations. As typically configured in this study, community representation can be dependent on the work of few activists, with concerns over legitimacy appearing to risk self-fulfilment: in short, where the relevant resource is in short supply, and formal representation weak, it is hard to see what more acceptable representation might look like. Alternatively, if the legitimacy of local interests *must* be subjected to the kind of scrutiny observed, and such anxiety exercised over their threat to the safe passage of preferred policies, then it is reasonable to suggest that other key interests be treated in similar fashion, with particular attention paid to the spread and relative weight of interests.

However, it is unlikely that any incremental reform – up to and including the adoption of more participatory deliberative practices – will deal successfully with the fundamental issue, that under the prevailing arrangements some people stand to lose their homes uncompensated whilst others are protected substantially by the public purse. Such concerns, tied to those around the ways in which decisions are made, underpin sustained local representation, and only the adoption of an adaptation model that sees risk shared is likely to solve the issue. As Milligan *et al* (2009) stress, there is no panacea to be found in participation alone.

Overall, it is difficult not to conclude that the hand of the centre is not so much hovering over the tiller, as Corry and Stoker would have it (Blaug *et al*, 2006), as hanging onto it for dear life – at least on deciding the essential design of policy. Operating authorities are both mediators of deliberative process, and proxies of a dominant interest minded to seek coastal change. More generally, we might observe that local authority actors – both elected representatives and officers – appear to have to juggle support for policy making processes with support for citizens who may have issues both the with what is being proposed, and the processes employed in making such decisions, and with no obvious mechanisms for redress. This is clearly unsatisfactory, given that the extreme implications of decisions for those involved.

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## **APPENDICES**