

Where We Live Next

Research Report for the British Academy

‘Youth, Sustainability and Democracy: How Young People can Shape Environmental Policy in Urban Spaces’



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARYAims

The United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP26) in Glasgow closed in November 2021 with an agreement on efforts to reduce Carbon emissions and address a potential catastrophic warming of the planet. Without commenting on the nature of the agreement, two points are clear in terms of ‘Where we Live Next’. First, younger generations are the most concerned about, and politically active on the issue of climate change (Barford et al. 2021; Henn et al. 2021). Second, the implementation of environmental policy agreed at COP26 will largely need to take place at a sub-national level with the support of emerging adults (Kythreotis 2021; Sloam 2021).

The aim of this report is to investigate how, by harnessing the former: youth support for action on climate change, we can achieve the latter: sustainable public policy in the places where we live.

During COP26, there were many wonderful stories about how young people have led grass-roots initiatives across the world. These stories of youth activism and leadership have previously been analysed for the British Academy (23 March 2020) in its ongoing *Youth Futures* programme across countries as diverse as Fiji, Uganda and Algeria. However, there is hardly any research on how young people are engaging (and can effectively engage) with local and civic authorities on these issues, or how the voices of under-represented and marginalised groups of young people can be amplified to ensure a *just transition* to a Green economy.

This report helps to fill this gap in the research. It examines *youth engagement in environmental issues*, shedding new light upon how – in which spaces and under what conditions – it can lead to public policy that is sustainable *at city and local level* in general (Section 1) and in our case study cities of London and Nottingham (Sections 2 and 3). In doing so, it addresses two central themes in the ongoing work of the British Academy (2020): ‘the social, cultural, and educational factors affecting just transition’; and, ‘the voices, spaces, and scales of environmental governance’.

The practical benefits of youth engagement in public policy are beginning to be recognised on every plane of governance: from the United Nations (2018), to the OECD (2020a), to local councils and city authorities across the UK (Local Government Association 2012). In the context of the Covid recovery and the Green Transition, it has become more generally accepted that the voices of young people (including those from traditionally marginalised communities) are integral to the development of future-oriented, sustainable public policy. But how can civic authorities move beyond mere *tokenism* and effectively engage with younger generations? A key feature of this report is that it addresses this question from both sides of the equation through interviews and focus groups with young people, officials in civic authorities, and civil society actors in London and in Nottingham.

Why focus this study of environmental politics on young people? It has been argued that most political change takes place through generational replacement (Franklin 2004). So, observing trends in youth politics can offer us a ‘glimpse of the future’ of our democracies (Hooghe 2004: 331). Second, there is an increasing distance between younger citizens and policy-makers in many established democracies, which requires urgent attention. However, it is important to remain sensitive to intragenerational inequalities in life experiences and civic and political engagement especially as the voices of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are amongst the most neglected in the political world.

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Rationale

Younger generations have faced successive waves of crisis (Sloam and O’Loughlin 2021) – the 2008 banking crash and subsequent austerity in public spending, the Covid-19 pandemic, and climate change – which have made their lives more precarious (Hanna and Oliva 2016; Bessant et al. 2017; Cowie and Myers 2021). And, it is widely accepted that the economic and environmental burdens of these crises have fell most heavily on the young (OECD 2020b; Intergenerational Foundation 2021).

The gathering climate crisis represents the greater of these challenges. In the run-up to COP26, world leaders drew attention to the fact that countries were living ‘at the expense of younger and future generations’ (Angela Merkel 2021) and that protestors had ‘every right to be angry with those who aren’t doing enough’ (Boris Johnson 2021). But the UN Conference failed to address young people’s lack of agency. As the mass youth protests outside the conference venue and in cities across the world illustrated, young people do not feel they have a seat at the policy-making table.

The failure to integrate youth voice into generating policy solutions is a common thread across all these crises. As organisations ranging from the OECD (2020a) to the Prince’s Trust now recognise, youth participation is an essential ingredient for achieving sustainable public policy. Moreover, emerging research shows that *a place-based approach to youth participation* can offer huge benefits for young people, civic authorities and the environment (British Academy 2017; London Sustainable Development Commission 2019; Sloam 2020).

However, a youth-based approach to ‘sustainability’ entails recognising a broader understanding of the concept. Nissen et al. (2020), for example, show that in cities across the world, issues of poverty, a lack of public services and environmental degradation are all intimately connected. So, we need to think about how we implement environmental policy *locally*, and also about how this policy feeds into a whole range of related challenges, as articulated by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

FIGURE 1: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



Why study young people in cities? Cities are young and diverse places. Over half of the world live in urban environments, which produce more than 60 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions (United Nations 2022). They are, therefore, both the problem and also the solution to the climate crisis. In this report, we provide an analysis of existing research on youth, sustainability and civic participation in the UK and internationally – focussing on place-based analyses of young people and environmental policy in cities. The state-of-the-art section examines existing literature on youth engagement in environmental politics and the promise of urban democracy for mainstreaming youth activism, to generate sustainable public policy. The case studies of Nottingham and London, investigate the environment views and activism of young adults (aged 18 to 24 in the two cities) and efforts by civic authorities to engage them in public policy.

Findings and Recommendations

The findings and recommendations of this report are both a call to arms for more research on citizen participation in environmental policy at the local level, and for civic authorities to better engage with (young) people and groups from traditionally marginalised backgrounds. Regarding young people, there is particular opportunity to utilize their enthusiasm for action to tackle environmental problems – and their local knowledge – to address problems in their cities and neighbourhoods. This would go some way to creating a more sustainable and future-oriented public policy in the places where they live. By providing better quality opportunities for engagement with young people, civic authorities would play their part in turning fatalism and pessimism amongst young people into hope and action – mainstreaming youth engagement in environmental issues and helping to restore some faith in democracy. In doing so, civic authorities also have the potential ensure the inclusion of marginalised groups in the green transition.

Our investigations found that, whilst there were reasons for optimism in the increased quantity of engagement opportunities for young people at the local level, the quality of this engagement and interactions with policy-makers is often lacking. For example, the tokenistic inclusion of young people in events once the big decisions have already been made is a major stumbling block to effective engagement. Young people are not included early enough in environmental policy making or design, and are not provided with the educational tools or platforms for deliberation to engage more fully in the policy process.

In light of the research, we make four key recommendations to improve the quality of civic authorities' engagement with young people over environmental policy:

1. Better communication of local policies and strategies to young people, to make them aware of the development environmental policies at an early stage.
2. Regular spaces for sustained engagement with young people - school age and young adults - to be developed by councils for meaningful design of policy.
3. More environmental education in schools including opportunities for civic engagement and community projects.
4. Prioritization of community engagement and community engagement officers in environment teams.

STATE OF THE ART*Introduction*

Young people's lives and politics have been transformed by successive waves of crisis over the past two decades: The Great Recession and austerity in public spending; a climate emergency that will most affect younger generations; and the ongoing economic, social and health impacts of the COVID pandemic (Sloam and O'Loughlin 2020). These consequences are particularly acute for young people living in urban environments: from the rising costs of housing, to the lack of support for mental health, to the physical effects of pollution (Wise 2019; Cowie and Myers 2021; Watt 2021). Despite their often precarious lives (Bessant et al. 2017), young people are supportive of action against climate change (Henn et al. 2021), and are at the vanguard of climate action movements. However, there is a lack of youth engagement in public policy. As the United Nations COP26 Climate Conference showed, there is relatively little scope for youth involvement in policy-making at the international level.

Cities must be at the heart of any action against climate change. Over half of the world's population live in cities, which account for more than three-quarters of global energy consumption and sixty percent of greenhouse gas emissions (United Nations 2022). And, there is much potential for youth participation in environmental policy-making at the local and city levels (British Academy 2017). By drawing connections between the challenges young people face in their day-to-day lives and environmental policy in their urban environments, such as the relationship between mental health and green spaces, we can empower younger generations. Thus conceived, civic empowerment can generate a greater sense of efficacy amongst our young people, and simultaneously generate a more productive and sustainable public policy.

Climate Crisis, Environmental Policy and The Role of Place

Young people have been at the forefront of protests in cities across the world, in calling for more government action to combat climate change. Youth-led climate strikes dominated the political landscape in 2019, as the #Fridaysforfuture Movement spread like wildfire across the world (Pickard 2019; Boulianne and Ohme 2021; Grasso and Giugni 2022), led by figures such as Greta Thunberg, condemning politicians and leaders for letting down their generation and demanding positive action (Sloam et al. 2022). And, the Movement gained real traction as national governments responded to these protests with ambitious commitments to reducing Carbon emissions. In the UK, for example, it led directly to a new law to 'slash emissions by 78% by 2035' (UK Government, 20 April 2021).

In the wake of the November 2021 COP26 United Nations climate conference in Glasgow, young people took to the streets again to demonstrate against perceived inaction by national governments (Pickard et al. 2022). In some ways, these protests did act as a spur for political action. British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, argued at the Youth4climate pre-COP26 event: 'young people around the world are already paying the price for the reckless actions of their elders... Your future is being stolen before your eyes, and I saw the protestors earlier on, and frankly you have every right to be angry with those who aren't doing enough to stop it.' (UK Government, 30 September 2021).

In their research for the British Academy, Kythreotis and colleagues (2021: 69) identified the need to 'take greater heed of the significance of... urban climate activism' and to 'give citizens and civil society more credence with global climate policy decision-making processes'. But this need remained unfulfilled. At COP26 itself, the stories of young people from around the world were used as inspiration

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for governments to act, but policy-making was left to politicians and officials in discussion with industry and prominent non-governmental organisations. So, the lack of direct youth input into the UN negotiations on climate change provided a reality check. According to Thunberg, as she protested outside the Conference venue on 1 November: ‘Change is not going to come from inside there. That is not leadership - this is leadership’ (BBC News 2021). Young people were excluded to such an extent that it poses the question as to whether youth participation in decision-making at the international level is achievable in any meaningful way.

In an era of global crises, it might well be that these global problems require global solutions. And, clearly the focus on global United Nations climate conferences is warranted. However, the British Academy’s ‘where we live’ programme has led the way in demonstrating that local (in this case, urban) solutions remain as relevant today as they have ever been (British Academy 2017). If climate deals are agreed internationally, they must be adopted and adapted at the local level. In this report, we propose that achieving these goals at the local level provides a more promising avenue for youth participation in environmental policy-making.

Both academic and policy communities have increasingly recognised the need and desirability for youth engagement in public policy. Since the landmark United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 enshrined (in Article 12) the *right to participate* in community planning, we have witnessed an explosion of initiatives across the world aimed at strengthening youth voice. Although many of these initiatives have often failed to deliver real input into policy-making (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008; Brady et al. 2020), there is a far greater recognition of the democratic and economic benefits of youth participation in public policy (OECD 2020a) – particularly in terms of its utility for a future-oriented and sustainable public policy (see discussion of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, below). This is echoed in a 2021 briefing for the British Academy, claiming that ‘Young people’s knowledge and perspectives should be prioritised in climate action and adaptation’ (Barford et al. 2021).

There is a significant body of literature on youth civic and political engagement, and a recent explosion of studies on youth participation in environmental protests that are nationally and internationally focused (Grasso and Giugni 2022). However, there is very little research that considers youth environmental activism at grass-roots level in urban environments - and still less on the ways in which young people and civic authorities can forge coalitions to achieve these goals (Sloam 2020). The literature that does exist springs largely out of community research in the United States (Hart and Youniss 2018; Henn et al. 2021). Part of the reason for the lack of literature in the UK, is that such youth/local authority interactions have been scarce on the ground in previous decades. This report investigates the views of young people in urban areas on environmental issues, their interactions with policy-makers, and the potential for ‘civic empowerment’ regarding climate issues.

The remainder of this section will explore the follow themes:

- Youth activism and environmentalism: the increasing importance of environmental issues for younger generations, and their efforts to promote these issues on the political stage.
- Urban democracy and the environment: how civic engagement and democracy in cities provides opportunities for, and barriers to, meaningful youth participation.
- Sustainable public policy: the need to reimagine a public policy that is future-oriented, connects environmental issues to other key challenges, and allows space for the co-production of policy between civic authorities and urban youth.

Youth, Sustainability and Democracy: How Young People Can Shape Environmental Policy in Urban Spaces (James Sloam, Matt Henn and Christine Huebner)*Young People, Political Participation and Environmentalism Activism*

Young people have become disillusioned with mainstream electoral politics over several decades (Sloam 2014; Henn et al. 2018). In most established democracies, youth voter turnout and membership of political parties has declined significantly, and younger generations have turned to alternative forms of political participation: from the ballot box, to the streets, to the Internet (Norris 2002; Castells 2015; Bennett and Segerberg 2013). Opinion is divided on the extent to which we should be concerned about these developments. Some authors point to the negative cycle of low youth turnout elections and party membership (Patterson 2009; Van Biezen et al. 2012) – parties and politicians are more likely to neglect groups that do not vote, feeding further disillusionment amongst young people, and so on. However, others emphasize the positive influence of *engaged citizens* and issue-based forms of participation (Dalton 2015; Sloam and Henn 2019). Regarding issue-based participation, the role of place is central. Several scholars have highlighted the growing role of ‘everyday politics’ in shaping youth civic and political engagement in the cities, towns and neighbourhoods in which they reside (Bang 2005; Boyte 2010; Li and Marsh 2008). This is also confirmed by the large uptick in local volunteering in many countries (Dalton 2015).

Yet, on closer inspection, the picture is not so promising. First, there are large inequalities of participation between those young people with high levels of educational attainment and those from well-off backgrounds when compared with their contemporaries from less advantaged backgrounds (Sander and Putnam 2010; Dalton 2015, Sloam and Henn 2019). Second, youth interactions with politicians and officials are very low compared to that of older generations (Sloam 2013), so that local politics (as well as public consultations in local areas) tend to be dominated by older, more affluent, male and white citizens (Tonkens & Verhoeven 2019; Intergenerational Foundation 2020).

The waves of crisis referred to above led to corresponding waves of political protest by younger generations. These were an expression of outrage at financial inequalities and corruption after the 2008 financial crisis (Occupy Wall Street, the Spanish Indignados and many more), of racial discrimination in all its forms (Black Lives Matter), and of the need to press for urgent action on climate change (#FridaysforFuture) (Sloam 2014; Castells 2015; Della Volpe 2022). Regarding electoral politics, young people tend to be supportive of socially liberal and left-leaning candidates and causes, such as Bernie Sanders (in the Democratic Party) in the past two US Presidential elections and the UK Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn in 2017 and 2019 (Sloam and Henn 2019).

Underpinning these political protests, today’s young people have been found to hold more ‘postmaterial’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ values (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Sloam and Henn 2019). So, they are much more likely to view immigration positively, to be supportive of women’s and minority rights, and to be comfortable with the idea of diversity in society. And, Henn and colleagues (2021) have shown that postmaterialist values are closely associated with interest in environmental issues and environmental activism. However, young people with lower levels of educational attainment are less likely to share these values, and so are less likely to become engaged in environmental issues. Henn and colleagues (2021: 1), thus, emphasize: ‘the role of education and the need to re-think the climate emergency locally, to close the “education gap” [by] connecting threats to the climate to challenges young people face in their everyday lives’ (see also della Porta and Portos 2021).

A significant body of literature has emerged to explain the climate strikes and youth environmental activism that has taken place since 2019 (Pickard 2019; Fisher and Nasrin 2020; Grasso and Giugni 2022). Grasso and Giugni’s *Handbook of Environmental Movements* (2022), for example, provides an invaluable investigation of common trends and individual case studies that shed light on why and how so many young people became involved over such a short space of time. That volume and other recent

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work, including a collection in the *Journal of Youth Studies* (Sloam et al. 2022), investigate environmental activism for a wide range of perspectives, study the role of social class (Wennerhag and Helmo 2022), gender (Togami and Staggenborg 2022), emotions (Pickard et al. 2020), political communication and social networks (Boulianne and Ohme 2021) and education (Flanagan et al. 2021).

Of course, not all young people are environmental activists. Some young people are not engaged or simply have other political priorities. But there is also a large group of young people who feel overwhelmed by the scale of the climate crisis. Research has shown that this can lead to a sense of fatalism, anxiety (with implications for mental health) and inaction (Ojala 2012; Hayward 2020; Hickman et al. 2021). Engaging in environmental issues at the local level, on the other hand, can feel less overwhelming. It has the potential to generate a greater sense of efficacy amongst young participants, as they are more likely to achieve tangible change within their communities.

Despite the wealth of literature that now exists on youth environmental activism through protest movements, there are few studies that look at the impact of this activism – either directly or indirectly – on electoral politics. In addition to influencing countries to adopt more ambitious targets for the reduction of Carbon emissions (see above), youth support for environmental issues has impacted upon electoral politics. In comparison to older generations, young people in most established democracies are much more likely to support Green candidates and parties: from support for Green New Deal candidates, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez within the Democratic Party in the US (a platform that was later adopted by President Biden), to voting Green at the 2021 German federal election (the Greens were the most popular party amongst 18-30-year-olds and became a coalition partner in the national government).¹

Yet, the experience of COP26 was a negative one for many young people. Climate protestors continued to scorn the efforts of national governments for not going far or fast enough – in Thunberg’s words, young people are tired of ‘blah, blah, blah’. At a rally outside the Conference venue in Glasgow, she told fellow protestors: ‘Change is not going to come from inside there. That is not leadership - this is leadership’ (BBC News 2021). The inclusion of the voices of young people (other than to provide emotional pleas for action) in complex negotiations between national governments, international organisations, large companies, and even large environmental campaign groups, was always a high bar to clear. This is another reason why it is important to pay more attention to environmental activism in the places we live from both an academic and policy perspective.

Young people remain grounded in their environments. According to Harris and Wyn (2009: 327): ‘in spite of the modern interpellation of youth as mobile and globally oriented... [young people] are bounded by micro-territories of the local’. Given that cosmopolitan and pro-environment values are most prominent amongst young people with high levels of educational attainment, it makes sense that these micro-territories are also likely to be a more appealing form of environmental activism for those who are less privileged. In this report, the focus on urban environmental activism provides a more level playing field for young people diverse backgrounds.

Education and educational institutions have a key role in promoting environmental issues amongst diverse groups of young people, by providing knowledge about issues such as climate change and opportunities for deliberation on the impact of these changes and what young people might want to

¹ On the other hand, youth-led environmental activism has faced a ‘cultural backlash’ from older generations over the past decade (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Leaders such as former US President, Donald Trump as well as President Bolsonaro of Brazil have actively opposed measures to act against climate change, and taken aim at Thunberg and other young activists labelling them as ‘brats’ or questioning their competence.

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do about it (Hayward 2020; Sloam et al. 2021). Drawing on Ostrom's (1990) concept of the 'environmental commons', Flanagan and her colleagues (2021) provide powerful evidence as to the potential engagement of young people from lower income areas and of predominately ethnic minority backgrounds through an initiative that delivered citizen science-style education and access to local policy-makers in Wisconsin. Policy-makers are also beginning to recognise the values of climate change education, as illustrated by the announcement of UK Government plans to introduce climate education into the national curriculum in England and institute a Duke of Edinburgh-style achievement award on action to protect the environment during COP26.

Urban Democracy and The Promise of Youth Participation

We have discussed, above, how policy-makers and academics have increasingly recognised the justice and utility of strengthening youth voice. Ostrom (1990) famously wrote that: "There is no reason to believe that bureaucrats and politicians, no matter how well meaning, are better at solving problems than the people on the spot, who have the strongest incentive to get the solution right". In general, it is young people have the strongest incentives to solve environmental problems in the places where they live. But to what extent do cities offer opportunities for youth participation in policy-making?

Almost a decade ago, Skelton and Gough (2013: 455) edited a special issue of *Urban Studies*, in which they addressed the lack of attention devoted to young people in the Urban Studies literature, and more generally to their 'ignored presence in the city'. This is particularly the case for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Nissen et al. 2020). In the context of the existential crisis of climate change it is more important than ever to recognize young people as 'valid social agents and competent urban actors... [through] retheorization, reconceptualization and alternative methodologies' (Skelton and Gough 2013: 455). Unfortunately, city authorities are as culpable as national governments in keeping citizens and young people out of the conversation. Today, the promise of youth participation in urban democracy is more widely recognised, but remains largely unfulfilled. As attention turns to the green transition in the wake of COP26, and as sustainability departments in local councils and civic authorities are rapidly expanding, it seems that citizen engagement is often sacrificed in the race for economic development.

There is a large body of work - heavily concentrated in the United States - on the promise of urban democracy amongst all age groups of city dwellers. Archon Fung (2009) in his seminal work on civic participation in Chicago, highlighted the ways in which civic groups can influence public policy in their neighbourhoods. However, in the UK, most studies have focused on the work of local action groups or broader social movements to improve public services – for example, to save local green spaces or skate parks from closure (Sloam 2019) – rather than policy interactions with local or civic authorities.² Moreover, the few existing studies of youth engagement with local authorities tend to concentrate on the liminal existence of children in an adult world (Weller 2006; Wood 2012). Regarding engagement in urban democracy, unequal participation is a problem in all countries. According to Tonkens and Verhoeven (2019: 1596), 'Research on civic engagement consistently shows that citizens active in urban neighbourhoods are not representative... Middle-aged, higher educated,

² It should be noted here that the relative lack of UK literature on youth participation in this field reflects the lack of policy-making powers in most areas of the UK i.e., the centralized nature of the British state in England (HM Government 2011).

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white men are often over-represented.’ Conversely, the voices of young people – especially those from poorer communities and ethnic minority backgrounds – are often ignored (O’Toole et. al. 2013).³ Academic studies have long pointed to the positive role that children can play in designing policy, ‘empowering young people in the creation of their world’ (Corkery et al. 2007: 8 – see Loebach 2020). Traditionally, adult policy-makers have doubted the ability of young people to contribute due to supposed immaturity or lack of knowledge and experience (Wilks and Rudner 2013). Nevertheless, local authorities have become increasingly aware of the need to embed citizen participation – and even youth participation (Cortés-Cediel et al. 2019). Brady et al. (2020) provide one of the few comparative studies of civic authorities’ attempts to engage young people – in their case, ‘marginalized urban youth’ in London, Belfast and Dublin – in decision-making at the city level. Although they point to some successes in youth engagement through a wide variety of initiatives – including deliberative forums, volunteering, and expression through the arts – they also identify some real areas of concern, such as youth ‘alienation’ from institutions, ‘capacity and resource limitations’, ‘challenges of inclusion’ and ‘ritual rather than real engagement’ (Brady et al. 2020: 1). With regard to the latter point, it is evident that *tokenistic* inclusion of young people is common and that genuine two-way interactions with tangible policy outcomes are rare (Wilks and Rudner 2013; Loebach 2020; Sloam 2020). In this sense, a change of mindset is required amongst policy-makers – from ‘civic participation’ to ‘civic empowerment’ (Wray-Lake and Abrams 2020).

Sustainable Cities and Young People as the Solution

The lived experiences of citizens in democratic societies have undergone dramatic transformations over recent decades. These include long-term changes influenced by trends such as economic globalisation and ageing populations, and the recent waves of crisis discussed above. The negative impacts of these crises are concentrated in urban areas, and amongst marginalised groups, and are particularly challenging for young people in their transitions to adulthood (Furlong 2016; Green 2017; OECD 2020b). Recognising the importance of ‘lived citizenship’ is a starting point to understanding and empowering these groups (Kallio et al. 2020). In policy terms, this means recognising that the complex and intersecting challenges that young people face – economic, social and environment – are all intimately connected.

The evidence clearly shows the importance of interconnected policy areas for the everyday lives and politics of young people. This is highlighted in Carmen Sirianni’s (2021) seminal study, ‘Sustainable Cities in American Democracy’, which investigates environmental policy in American cities over several decades and across many policy areas. In this work, the author reveals the value of linking issues ranging from water and air pollution, to public transportation, to green buildings, to urban agriculture and beyond, as well as the value of citizen participation for the purposes of building ‘a more robust civic Green New Deal’ (Sirianni 2021: 306). Helpfully, these interconnections have also been recognised by the United Nations through their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which link poverty and hunger, health and well-being and decent work, to more traditional environmental issues such as clean water, clean energy and pollution. Reflecting on sustainability allows us to identify vicious circles (for example, poverty leading to poorly insulated housing and environmental waste)

³ In London, for example, the *urban renaissance* after the 1990s (often deliberately) excluded young people from poorer communities, as illustrated by the *gentrification of large parts of Newham* in the run-up to the 2012 Olympic Games (Kennelly and Watt 2012).

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and potential virtuous circles (for example, the insulating of houses, leading to lower heating costs and less use of fossil fuels in heating homes).

The UN SDGs have also served as an inspiration for youth participation in policy-making. The UN 2018 World Youth Report provided a clear statement on this in ‘Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’:

The active engagement of youth in sustainable development efforts is central to achieving sustainable, inclusive and stable societies by the target date, and to averting the worst threats and challenges to sustainable development, including the impacts of climate change, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict, and migration (United Nations 2018: 1).

Furthermore, the academic evidence supports the quest for greater youth participation, as ‘both a maker and a marker of the progress of city or country to meet the challenge of sustainable development’ (Malone 2015: 18).

Yet, there has been an apparent failure in cities to measure and evaluate initiatives to meet these objectives of youth participation. Cities have made great strides in measuring some environmental targets such as pollution (Holden et al. 2017), but ‘in most cities and countries, we have little idea of the priority issues for young people’ that relate to these wide-ranging goals (London Sustainable Development Commission 2019). Only recently has the academic literature began to examine what youth participation in cities’ sustainability policies might look like in practice. Nissen et al. (2020), for example, explore common lessons from initiatives in seven cities in the global North and South. Moreover, work is also emerging on mechanisms through which youth participation might be more effective for both sides – such as through deliberative exercises with young people and policy-makers (Ataol et al. 2019; Brady et al. 2020; Sloam 2020).

So, the challenge facing us in terms of research into youth, sustainability and public policy in cities include especially a) identifying the priority issues for young people, and b) engaging with them to find solutions. In the following sections we present new research, from the perspectives of young people and policy-makers in London and Nottingham, to shed further light on the opportunities and challenges of engaging young people in the green transition. We focus, in particular, on young adults, who are the most economically vulnerable age-group in British society and are more absent than children from the existing urban studies literature.

CASE STUDY 1: LONDON

To study the complex relationship between youth, sustainability and democracy, the first case study focusses on the views of young Londoners and policy-makers in the Capital. It investigates young Londoners' views on sustainability and their engagement in environmental issues with civic authorities. The case study begins by providing context to the *lived citizenship* of young Londoners and the multiple layers of environmental policy-making in London. After describing the original fieldwork, led by Professor Sloam, it presents interviews, focus group and survey findings, which seek to understand how young people (16–24-year-olds) think about climate change, and the changes they want to see. It will also reflect upon efforts by policy-makers to engage with young people, and the perspectives of policy-makers on youth engagement.

The first point is to recognise the scale of the challenge in understanding the views of young Londoners in a global city of eight million people across a large geographical space and taking into account the vast economic inequalities that exist in the city (Partnership for Young London 2021).⁴ London is a diverse and young place. Just under a third of the population of London is under the age of 24, and 15- to 24-year-olds make up 12% of the city (Trust for London 2022). And, a significant majority of young people come from non-white backgrounds. London is also estimated to have approximately 400,000 students (mostly young) in higher education. Despite the economic and social challenges that many young Londoners face in their day-to-day lives, they have also been found to be strongly supportive of socially liberal, cosmopolitan values and pro-environmental values (Sloam and Henn 2019).

The second point is to recognise the unique governance issues in London. This case study adopts a pan-London approach, but the distribution of powers between the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the 33 boroughs is relevant to the policy solutions. In broad terms, the Mayor and GLA are responsible for setting the agenda, a few major city-wide policies e.g. the London Low Emissions Zone, and promoting certain discretionary initiatives (such as the work with young people described below), whilst the borough councils have general responsibility for implementation in accordance with their local priorities. However, central government in Westminster sets many of the parameters for action in the Capital – including decisions over Council funding, mandatory provisions for environmental policy, and Transport For London financial settlements.

How young people in London feel about the environment

The research conducted for this case study took place between 2019 and 2022 and involved close collaboration with the Greater London Authority – in particular, with the young people working part-time in the Authority's peer outreach team. The research was founded on participatory research with these young peer outreach workers, aged 16 to 24, who were mostly female, overwhelmingly from ethnic minority backgrounds, and largely from low-income backgrounds. 30 interviews were conducted with these young people on the issues that were most important to them with a focus on questions of sustainability and the environment. These interviews generated the themes that were discussed with 90 participants in a world-café style-event. The event involved nine focus groups, which

⁴ Although London has the highest GDP of any region in the UK, it also had the highest rate of child poverty (37%) (Child Poverty Action Group 2022).

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were facilitated by the peer outreach workers, and incorporated creative methods (such as Lego building), to stimulate conversation.⁵

The qualitative analysis of young Londoners' views at this event fed into a set of questions for an N=2,002 representative survey of 16- to 24-year-olds in the Capital, which was fielded by the polling company Survation in Spring 2019. In 2021, Professor Sloam conducted focus groups with a new cohort of GLA peer outreach workers. These groups were designed to address young Londoners' views on the environment and action on climate change in the context of the upcoming COP26 Summit. Finally, in early 2022, the research turned to policy-makers, to explore their attitudes towards engaging young people in environmental policy-making.

One of the main themes to come out of the 2019 interviews and focus groups was that – whilst young Londoners cared about the environment – it was not their most pressing concern. According to one female focus group participant (aged 19), 'it is a very ignored issue, because in London now there are more serious issues that we focus on that are life dependent... like housing, or poverty, or crimes.' The one exception, confirmed in our later survey, was air pollution, which was ranked fourth – just below *housing, crime* and *mental health* as a priority for government (see below). So, the focus groups themselves provided a platform for the young participants to think more deeply about environmental issues with their peers. A female participant (aged 18) had built a Lego model, which depicted: 'a person and their little boat and they're trying to get away from all the trash and pollution that we have created... to a greener space where everything's clean and the environment is looked after'. Indeed, the narratives of the young Londoners we spoke to were often constructed in a deeply personal way – for example, being upset with the impact of pollution on a family member's asthma.

Young Londoners expressed different attitudes to the environment depending on their social class and where they lived in the city, and also connected the environment to broader issues associated with 'poor and ignored' neighbourhoods. For example, participants talked about a lack of recycling and rubbish on the streets in what they described as 'shit neighbourhoods'. Poverty and underfunded public services were seen as the driving forces behind the challenges they faced – and that poorer places in London were being frozen out and left behind. Regarding environmental issues, one young man (aged 18) commented: 'you've got the Boris bikes, which are great, but they're only for a certain area... They need to bring it to South London... where people do actually need this transportation'.

Environmental issues were often quite explicitly linked to the other key priorities. With respect to crime and personal safety, one young woman (aged 21) complained that 'bus stops are closing, buses are passing by in neighbourhoods that are deemed as unsafe or deprived in a way'. And, mental health was often mentioned (even prior to the pandemic, which has made the situation worse – NHS Digital 2021): 'the environment is a big part, because it is constantly adding and decreasing to either our emotional state or our health and the way we function as a society' (female, aged 19). Young Londoners placed a high value on parks and nature – 'a space with your community that really de-stresses you' (female participant, aged 18).

Yet, most of the participants felt a sense of powerlessness with regard to environmental issues – either they did not know how to engage or did not believe it would make a difference. Moreover, the few who were already engaged in community activities felt frustrated by the lack of support from civic authorities. Interestingly, young people's sense of efficacy was closely related to the issue of scale.

⁵ The participants for the focus groups were recruited by the GLA Young Londoners Participation Network and contained a disproportionately large number of young Londoners from traditionally marginalised groups: over half from low-income areas and approximately two thirds from non-white ethnic minority backgrounds.

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When thinking about action and solutions, young Londoners emphasized the need to participate in projects and initiatives in their communities to: ‘make a change’ through social work and participation in community projects through, for instance, youth work and mentoring. For example, they presented various ideas for solving what they saw as a London-wide housing crisis: including, ‘community-led self-build projects’ for affordable homes using recycled materials, such as those led by the Rural Urban Synthesis Society in Lewisham (female, aged 24).

The world café event provided a valuable forum for the discussion of environmental issues – and potential solutions. Many of the young Londoners told us that they had never had an opportunity to think and discuss these issues before. The results offered a wide array of suggestions for individual action, civic engagement and intervention from local authorities and the GLA. The ideas for tackling environmental issues ranged from boycotting companies with low environmental standards and pressurizing London authorities not to invest in those companies, to introducing new schemes for growing your own produce within the community, to becoming involved in maintaining local parks and communal gardens, to building more dedicated cycle routes in the city. This strongly suggests that events such as these can build efficacy and generate solutions that might prove beneficial for civic authorities to adopt.

The purpose of the survey was to use the qualitative results to drill down more deeply into the environmental priorities for young Londoners, aged 16 to 24, alongside other social and economic issues. In 2019, the issues young Londoners ranked as one of their top three priorities for the GLA to act, were *knife crime* (47%), *housing affordability* (37%), *homelessness* (33%) and one environmental issue – *air pollution* (30%). Mental health was also a key priority for young people (LSDC 2019), but was not tested in this survey as it is not a GLA competence. The three most important environmental issues were *recycling and waste reduction* (19%), *air quality* (18%), and *carbon emissions* (18%). The survey findings demonstrate that the environment was not the top priority for young Londoners at the time, but – as suggested in the focus group results – environmental issues are often folded into what are seen as more pressing issues, such as having (adequate) accommodation, being free from the fear of crime, and maintaining one’s mental health. To conceptualise the overlapping nature of policy priorities more easily, the survey was used to generate clusters of priority issues through further discussions with the young peer outreach workers and statistical analysis (see Figure 2, below). Each of the clusters related to specific UN Sustainable Development Goals – that were important to young Londoners. Interestingly, two the clusters that emerged related to young Londoners wanting to know more about the issues and engage in their communities (Clusters 3 and 5), which we address in the conclusion to the report.

Figure 2: Key Clusters of Issues for Young Londoners Mapped onto the UN SDGs



By 2021 environmental issues were much higher up the agenda. In the wake of the climate strike movement and in the run-up to the 2021 COP26 Summit in Glasgow, the environment had become the top issue for young adults in the UK (YouGov 2021). In this context, we ran several focus groups with a new wave of GLA peer outreach workers. It was immediately apparent that news regarding the climate strikes and COP26 had stimulated more thought and momentum regarding youth engagement. It was also apparent that the young Londoners we spoke to had more nuanced views about the scale of any response to climate change, being much more aware of global issues, yet still tied to local solutions.

We wanted to re-examine young Londoners' sense of efficacy on environmental issues and whether they felt they were being included at any level in the run-up to the UN Conference. Typical answers to a question about whether young people felt they had a say were: 'Not really, but I think we can still play our part' (female, aged 22) and, 'we have a say through our actions' (female, aged 24). Interestingly, one young person (from an ethnic minority background) mentioned that it made them feel like their community was not wanted in the conversation. In relation to COP26 and the climate strikes, it was mentioned that climate change has a 'very white face'. So, even the youth-led climate strikes were seen to be somewhat less inclusive for those young people from traditionally marginalised groups. When thinking about climate change and who was responsible, young Londoners also spoke about Western countries seeming to 'blame countries in the global South for pollution as they try to develop' (male, aged 23). So, just as poorer Londoners (many from immigrant backgrounds)

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feel they are being ignored and dictated to on climate change, they felt the same was true at an international level. This suggests that the exclusion of young (minority) voices from climate change discussions is a real problem both in the UK and at an international level.

Regarding public policy in London, the conversation then shifted to congestion charges for driving cars in London. The participants recognised that something had to be done to address the problem of pollution in general and around schools and how this affects children's and young people's health. One young person highlighted how they understand how congestion charges are good for the climate crisis, but worried about the impact upon the elderly or those who suffer from disabilities where mobility becomes more difficult. So, public policy to protect the environment might be well intentioned, but the peer outreach workers wondered whether it discriminated against those that were less well-off especially in the context of the pandemic. For example, one young Londoner was pleased that the T-Tax [the expansion of London's Ultra Low Emissions Zone] introduced around the South Circular had helped cut pollution massively, but was concerned whether ordinary people could afford these extra costs. Another concern was that, whilst getting people off the roads was generally seen as a good thing, public transport costs remained very high. Indeed, free travel for under 18s on London public transport was suspended in 2020 as part of the central government's pandemic deal with Transport For London.

The young people we spoke to in 2021 presented a number of general ideas – relevant to the big picture climate debate going on at the time – as well as more specific ideas for implementation at a local level. On a more general level they advocated: making sustainable solutions affordable, a greater regulation of large companies such as on pollution, the promotion of schemes to support saving and sharing of energy in housing, and more public conversations about climate change. At a local level, their suggestions included: providing free shared plots to low-income households, implementing car restrictions to deal with pollution, investing more in public transport to lower the costs for young people, developing more community-based projects e.g. to save electricity while the city is sleeping, and planting trees and getting school children involved in these projects. Were civic authorities to engage with young people more intensively, there are clearly a lot of practice ideas that might be integrated into public policy.

How the local policy community engages with young Londoners on environmental issues

Finally, we wanted to look at the issue of youth participation in environmental policy-making from local policy-makers' perspectives. This was approached through an analysis of the initiatives at GLA level and in certain London boroughs, and discussions with policy-makers – 8 interviews with civic leaders, and those engaged in environmental policy and youth engagement within the Capital.

Civic authorities have seen a large increase in mandatory duties to promote action on climate change in addition to the increased expectations of citizens and voters for action. At the GLA level, this was illustrated by the decision by the Mayor of London to take the political risk decision to expand the low-emissions zone, which entails significant additional costs for motorists within the Capital. Yet, despite the relative enthusiasm of younger generations for action to protect the environment, the London policy-makers we spoke to were unanimous in their view that civic authorities in London had been slow to engage. However, they also believed that the willingness (the quantity) of engagement had taken-off in recent years, even if the interactive nature of this engagement (the quality) was often not quite right.

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At the GLA level, a whole raft of initiatives had been put together as a response to the climate strikes and in the run-up to COP26. In response to the question ‘Can you talk about any initiatives you have developed to engage young people in the work of the Council (with particular reference to environmental policy)?’, the two interviewees from the GLA environment team [Henry and Pete] highlighted the work the Authority had done on pollution for children, including a network of air pollution sensors installed at hospitals, schools and in local communities to measure pollution locally. They pointed to several initiatives to promote environmental issues in schools to coincide with the UN Conference. The centrepiece was Climate Kickstart, which engaged 66,000 London children in a variety of activities during the first week of COP26 (1-5 November 2021). Whilst these new initiatives for school children are certainly to be welcomed, and some of the programmes encouraged children to start their own projects (e.g. the Earthshot Prize to recognise outstanding youth-led ventures), there was no sense of engaging young people in environmental policy-making at the GLA level. On the one hand, this is understandable given the Authority’s primary role in setting the broad lines of policy. On the other hand, members of the GLA’s own peer outreach team reported on ‘how hard it is to engage with or influence the Environment team as a young person’ (even from within the Authority). They complained that youth engagement was ‘tokenistic at best’ when it came to policy design. Finally, these London-wide initiatives focussed almost entirely on school-age children, missing out on the opportunity to engage with the large population of pro-environment young adults.

At the borough level, the picture is sporadic. Whilst a few councils have developed schemes to engage with young people, serious effort to connect beyond the promotion of education about climate change in schools were few and far between. Almost all the London policy-makers we spoke to recognised this deficit, but found it hard reaching out to young people. A councillor in Hounslow responsible for environmental policy, for example, ‘found it hard to fill the places for the Youth Community Reference Group’ set up to discuss environmental issues’. And, they conceded that many of the engagement opportunities for young people were as ‘as with youth councils, eventually filled by young people who are not altogether representative of young people in the borough’ [Katherine]. So, the question of which young people participate in environmental discussions is also an important issue.

Council policy-makers struggled to achieve what co-ordinators in the peer-outreach team referred to as ‘genuine engagement’ for a couple of reasons, according to one of team with particular experiences of working with Lambeth Council: first, ‘they do not commit to youth engagement over a sustained period of time’; and, second, they are reluctant to cede control over policy-making to young people, so that ‘the big decisions have already been made before the consultation have begun’. An interviewee, leader of civil society group working with young people and the Council in Harrow, summed it up quite bluntly: ‘Councils are not set up for genuine citizen engagement. They like decision-making processes to be neat. They do not like messy decision-making, and – when young people are involved – it becomes messy, if they allow them a proper voice’.

However, many of the problems surrounding youth engagement were attributed to contextual issues beyond GLA or individual council control. In particular, the issues of inequality and poverty and a lack of public services referred to of the young Londoners was viewed as an impediment to a more effective youth engagement in environmental policy. Referring to the congestion charge expansion discussed above, one interviewee from the Government’s Levelling Up Department (focussed on London) believed that ‘The Mayor rightly introduced greater congestion charges, because he had to protect children’s lungs, but he does not have the means of mitigating the effects on poorer groups. The GLA and the boroughs do not have the resources to deal with the structural issue of poverty, which would

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be needed if we really want to take youth engagement on environmental matters seriously. Greening policies can actually lead to the embedding of these inequalities, as poorer young people are pushed out of their neighbourhoods.'

In the wake of COP26 and legislative commitments by the UK Government to reduce carbon emissions, many London boroughs are in the process of updating their sustainability strategies – although with widely varying levels of breadth and depth. And, as noted by the Hounslow councillor referred to above, that these 'strategies have tended to focus on economic development – for example, through Green jobs and upskilling – and achieving economic gains for young people. And, the community engagement dimension sometimes gets left behind, because it takes times and is often run by different departments.' The focus on economic development in areas of high poverty given the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, is understandable, and even commendable. But this also hampers youth engagement and, in our view, is likely to reduce the quality of public policy.

The institutional dislocation of environmental policy from community engagement and youth outreach was observed in all the Councils we looked at as well as the GLA. For example, in the GLA, a peer outreach co-ordinator noted that the Environment team are 'somewhat cut off from the Community Engagement teams and the peer outreach teams, who have the expertise of engaging with young people – especially those young people who do not come from privileged backgrounds'. This expertise is also crucial for understanding the connections between the environmental policy and other economic and social problems facing young people – for example, the link between mental health and green spaces, and the cost of public transport and green travel, raised by the young Londoners in the focus groups – and providing a more holistic and inclusive approach to environmental policy-making. As our civil society interviewee, working in Harrow, emphasized: 'You have to engage with young people with experiences of the problems you dealing with and the knowledge of how different policies may work – or not work – in their neighbourhoods'.

With these conversations, we conclude that the promise of urban democracy for environmental policy is very much unfulfilled in London. However, the next few years offer an opportunity – recognised by all of our interviewees – to get young people on board, if civic authorities can find inclusive ways of engaging over a sustained period of time. Schools are an essential venue for engagement. But schools have many other learning priorities, and so should not be relied upon so heavily (almost exclusively in some cases). Furthermore, environmental policy-makers can learn lessons from other policy areas, such as violence and crime reduction, where there are many positive examples of youth engagement. However, this would require a change in mind-set from those in charge of environmental policy – that, as with crime reduction, young people's views are not just an add-on, but are essential to the policy-making process.

CASE STUDY 2: NOTTINGHAM

This second case study focuses on young people's engagement with local democracy concerning environmental issues in the UK city of Nottingham, and was based on empirical research led by Professor Matt Henn and Dr Christine Huebner. Nottingham is an important local case study for investigation for two key interconnected reasons. Firstly, as a response to the developing climate and environmental emergency, Nottingham City Council (NCC) has publicly declared in its "[Carbon Neutral 2028 Action Plan](#)" (CN28), the ambition to become the country's first carbon neutral city. Secondly, in order to help realise this commitment, NCC has noted its intention to work closely with Nottingham citizens. For instance, its [2019-2023 strategic plan](#) states that it aims to 'put our citizens at the heart of everything we do' - later re-framed in its [Recovery and Improvement Plan Refresh 2022](#) as '[p]utting the customer at the heart of our thinking'. Taken together, these two objectives leave Nottingham uniquely placed in seeking to engage directly with local residents – including young residents - to spearhead research on the UK's *local* response to the climate crisis.

Nottingham is a mid-size UK city of 337,100 residents. Like London - our first case study - Nottingham is a diverse city, with for instance, [35% of its population from minority ethnic backgrounds](#). It also has a relatively young age structure, with [21% of its citizens aged under 18 and 30% aged between 18 and 29](#). As a two-university city, this age profile is not surprising, as more than 1 in 8 Nottingham residents are full-time students enrolled at Nottingham Trent University and at the University of Nottingham, which are themselves the [second and seventh largest UK-based universities](#), respectively

The city is also marked by [high levels of socio-economic deprivation](#). Nottingham has a 7.8% unemployment rate compared to the England average of 6.4%, while average earnings in the city are significantly lower than elsewhere across England (£30,400: £39,500). It ranks 11th most deprived area in the country, with 30% of its neighbourhoods amongst the 10% poorest in England. Nottingham also has a *Healthy Life Expectancy* that is 5 years less for men and 10 years less for women compared to the average across England. There are also significant within-Nottingham inequalities, with for instance people residing in some of the city's poorest areas dying 12 years earlier than those in the most affluent areas.

Nottingham is also a particularly 'green' city. In 2017, it was confirmed as second only to Birmingham in terms of its accessible green areas, which accounted for [25% of the city space](#) (in addition to residential gardens). Furthermore, in 2021, it was reported that [Nottingham had gained a total of 68 Green Flag Awards](#) – more than any local authority area in the country – as recognition for reaching the highest possible environmental standards for its parks and other public spaces.

As a unitary authority, Nottingham City Council has [sole responsibility for providing a full range of services to its citizens](#) - from social housing, education and schools, child services, libraries, local bus and tram services, through to rubbish collection and others. Importantly for this report on the relationship between young people and local environmental policy-making, NCC also has a significant role to play in addressing issues such as environmental protection and carbon reduction.

With respect to the latter, NCC worked closely with the Nottingham Green Partnership, the city's two universities, the NHS and various other key local partners to publish the [Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028 action plan](#) in June 2020, noting that, '[a]s a city, we will need to reduce our emissions by just over one million tonnes of carbon dioxide (tCO₂) by 2028, greater than a 22% decrease each year between now and then' (Nottingham City Council 2021: 4). The onset of the COVID pandemic and a deterioration of the general financial landscape - including significant real-terms funding reductions

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from central government - combined to present considerable challenges to the city in terms of the prospects for delivering on the CN28 action plan. For instance, the ambitious [Nottingham Strategic Council Plan 2019-23](#) was updated in 2021 to the [Nottingham Strategic Council Plan 2021-23](#), which noted: 'However, the context in which we are operating has changed dramatically since that [2019-23] Plan was formally adopted in 2019, and if we are to achieve our aims and live up to our aspirations for Nottingham in the future, we must rethink what we do and how we do it.' In 2022, the 2021-23 strategic plan was then replaced by the [Recovery and Improvement Plan Refresh 2022](#) which reiterated 'the seriousness of the financial, governance and operational challenges we face', and that '[w]e are under no illusions about the size and scale of the challenge ahead of us, but [...] we are confident we can take the necessary actions, at the required pace, and to the desired quality, to deliver the fundamental changes needed'. These objectives include Nottingham's CN28 action plan which remains a priority policy-ambition for the city. Given that is the case, we intend in this case study to examine what initiatives have been devised to involve and empower young people in the ongoing design of Nottingham CN28 and in other linked local environmental-sustainability policies.

This case study is based on evidence from research with 35 young people who live in Nottingham and interviews with local policy-makers. It will explore how young people aged 15 to 25-years in Nottingham think about climate change, and the changes and solutions they want to see at different levels of governance. It will also evaluate initiatives to engage young people in the city, such as the local Youth Climate Assembly. The research for this case study was conducted between summer 2020 and spring 2022. Based on participatory research, 35 young people participated in eleven youth-led focus group discussions moderated by trained young members of the Nottingham Youth Cabinet aged 16 to 25 years in summer 2020. In groups of three to seven, the participants and their young moderators discussed which environmental issues they deemed important, which changes and policies they would like to see, and who they saw responsible for solutions to environmental issues. Nine semi-structured interviews with policy-makers - each lasting approximately 30 to 50 minutes - were conducted during March 2022 and revolved around strategies to involve young people in local policy-making on environmental issues. Participants included service leads based within relevant NCC departments, representatives from the two local universities with responsibility for environmental/carbon-reduction issues, and also members of prominent local environmentally-focused social action and civil society groups. Data from both the focus group discussions and interviews were pseudonymised with young people choosing their own pseudonyms, and then analysed thematically with a focus to identifying differences as well as shared concerns and spaces for joint solutions.

How young people in Nottingham feel about the environment

In Nottingham, the group discussions among young people revolved around a range of environmental issues and concerns. Most of the young people who participated in the research in Nottingham showed concern for the environment and for mounting environmental issues. Some participants reported feeling sad, frustrated and a few even felt a severe sense of hopelessness when thinking about the wide-ranging and irreversible environmental damage. Others reported having more 'mixed feelings' when thinking of the environment: while on one hand, they shared concerns and feelings of sadness, they also described the environment and wildlife as incredible. Some young people also spoke of experiencing a sense of guilt over not doing enough as individuals to affect environmental

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change. Few mentioned that the environment was not their primary concern. For those, other issues, such as racism, inequality, and other social issues took precedence.

Many of the participating young people were concerned about global and - what they perceived to be - interconnected environmental issues. The majority mentioned worries broadly attributed to climate change, such as about global warming, melting glaciers and polar icecaps, rising sea levels, extreme weather and forest fires around the world. The young people spoke of issues connected with climate change from around the world in Australia (forest fires, coral bleaching), Brazil (rain forest), Bangladesh and the Maldives (flooding), Asia (plastic pollution), the United States (coal mines, frequent tornadoes and hurricanes), and China (air pollution), with few also speaking of issues more local to the UK, for example in Norfolk and Cornwall (beach littering), Blackpool (sea water pollution), Liverpool and Leeds (air pollution), and Nottingham (loss of green spaces, pollution of local canals). Some participants spoke of global environmental issues in very general ways (*'the ozone layer', 'global warming'*), whilst others explicitly explained how they saw climate change as a global issue that connected and associated with many environmental problems, locally and around the world.

"I think climate change for me, it's just like such a big thing, it's like kind of an amalgamation of everything we've been doing to the planet for so long that it feels like it's hard not to say climate change at this point especially with everything going on." Nymph, 18, female

A number of young people also spoke of concerns regarding deforestation, declining biodiversity and the impact of wildlife, pollution and overproduction. Most of them were concerned about plastic pollution and waste, the pollution of rivers and oceans as well as air pollution. Some young people also discussed their concerns about the impact of overproduction and pollution in the particular context of fast fashion - the mass production of cheap, poor quality, disposable clothing. While for some young people pollution was first and foremost a local issue – they worried about littering, a lack of recycling opportunities, air and water pollution, and the loss of wildlife in their local communities – others instead spoke about pollution in a general and global sense, for example about the impact of plastic pollution on the oceans, deforestation in the rain forests, and air pollution in big cities around the world, from the UK to Asia.

While most environmental issues mentioned were seen as either of concern on a global scale or as having a mix of global and local impacts, one issue that was mentioned as concretely local and specific to Nottingham was the loss of green spaces due to advancing building work in the city. The young people who mentioned these issues were also concerned about the balance between building work and preserving green spaces, including on brownfield sites, within the city centre as well as on the outskirts of the city.

When asked explicitly to reflect on local environmental issues, many of the participants thought that Nottingham as a city was doing well in general when it came to environmental issues. In contrast to other cities that the young people thought of in comparison – Birmingham, Manchester, and first and foremost London – Nottingham was perceived to be doing particularly well in terms of public transport, with many young people mentioning the good tram connections as well as the introduction of electric buses. A number of participants also said they appreciated Nottingham's efforts to preserve green spaces and increase biodiversity.

"I feel like compared to a lot of other places, Nottingham is pretty good uh, a lot of things like the public transport system is brilliant and uh, there's definitely more green spaces than some other cities I have been to." Nardus, 18, male

*Youth, Sustainability and Democracy: How Young People Can Shape Environmental Policy in Urban Spaces (James Sloam, Matt Henn and Christine Huebner)**How young people think about solutions*

Thinking of solutions to environmental issues was challenging for the young people who participated in the research in Nottingham. Most discussions among these participants revolved around tensions between individual and communal action, with many young people claiming that what was being done to address environmental issues on the whole – regardless of whether they saw individuals, corporations, or governments as primarily responsible – was “not enough”.

Many of the young people who participated in the discussions in Nottingham saw responsibility for environmental issues primarily with governments and individuals – “everyone” –, some also with businesses and large organisations, such as universities. Most young people reported having taken individual action to address environmental concerns, such as recycling, reducing waste, cycling and walking instead of relying on cars, and cutting meat from their diets. While for some young people these individual actions and ‘everyone’ feeling responsible were key to addressing environmental issues, many were concerned that individual actions were not going to make big differences. These young people felt conflicted about the potential impact of individual responsibility when compared to the scale of environmental issues globally and the impact of businesses and large corporations.

Table 1. Responses from young people in Nottingham focus groups according to how the respondents viewed individual responsibility on environmental issues

Individual responsibility most important	Individual responsibility not most important
<p><i>“I think that everyone's got their little bit to do. Like, you know, I'll carry my own shopping. I don't need a plastic bag or I'll have this meal or I'll drive this car. But I think like finding solutions stuff, you know, like it's been said people are finding a solution themselves.”</i> Boris Johnson, 16, male</p> <p><i>“I feel like environmental issues is something that we collectively need to be able to respond to. Sometimes you can't always rely on the government to take the measures that you feel need to be in place, and I feel like as a collective, that's something that we should be able to do to help for the betterment of ourselves.”</i> Samantha, 17, female</p> <p><i>“But it's just I don't really know what else they can do, to be fair, because I think a lot of the responsibility lies with us as well. Like, I think the council can only do so much too.”</i> Charita, 19, female</p>	<p><i>“Also moving the responsibility from individuals and putting focus on companies, and stuff that we can't control because we can always manage ourselves and our own habits but we can't really...we don't really have the physical manpower to go to electricity companies or their factories or again on a global scale, so making that and tackling them a priority as well.”</i> Flamingo, 18, female</p> <p><i>“I feel like it's up to politicians and it's up to bigger corporations uh, and groups to be able to find solutions and make that impact, because that- in the UK where we pay our taxes to the government to be able to do what we can't do, and that then puts all the responsibility and liability onto the government to be able to sort everything out and to make those moves and changes.”</i> Adam, 16, male</p>

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In these discussions about individual and broader ‘structural’ actions in which there is an imperative for the government to regulate and for big corporations to make changes, those participants who showed concern that individual action would not have sufficient impact to address environmental issues, also revealed feeling hopeless, powerless and ultimately, a deep sense of lack of efficacy. For some young people, their sense of efficacy was related to the perceived scale of environmental issues, with particularly those young people struggling with fatalism who perceived environmental issues as global and interconnected. For others, however, this was an issue that was inherently connected with age, with older people seen to have more power to make larger-scale changes compared to younger generations.

“I think I’ve given up mostly on kind of the generation that’s in power now. I just don’t think we’re going to get much out of them because they don’t care, unless something amazing happens, I just- and something already amazing happened with the climate strike but it’s not done anywhere near as much as it could’ve done, so I just think we really need to get the next few generations into this to keep the momentum up or it’s just not- it’s not going to work because they’ve not done anything for us and they don’t- literally what they would do now.”
Nymph, 18, female

Almost all participants spoke about wanting ‘the government’ to take more action on environmental issues. Many saw this as necessary to address dilemmas surrounding individual action, powerlessness, and a perceived lack of efficacy in light of the scale of environmental problems. One of the most important points in discussions about solutions was that participants demanded action, rather than plans and talks of changes to protect landscapes and the environment. While businesses, schools, universities were seen as important in enacting changes, a number of participants explained that for them ‘the government’ was ultimately responsible to lead on and incentivise these changes, for example through regulation and taxation. Notably, some participants argued for more government action on environmental issues after comparing the situation to the Coronavirus pandemic, where young people said they experienced that governments were able to take immediate and strong action if leaders deemed it necessary.

In these discussions, it was not explicitly mentioned which level of government young people referred to. However, when asked, most young people gave examples of national government solutions – government white papers, taxation, national funding schemes for renewable energy. Local governments, such as Nottingham City Council, were rarely mentioned in discussions as needing to take a leading responsibility in the development of solutions, with some young people explicitly demanding more national, rather than local action on environmental issues. One young person even acknowledged that local councils had “*their funding starved*” (Marx, 20, male), leaving it not in a position to make substantive changes. Others observed:

“I think that particularly in like regard to sweeping policy changes, there’s not particularly much that like local governments can do, it’s a lot more on national government, but again, housing, land use, urban sprawl is also a big problem.” Tom, 19, male

Some young people saw local authorities as potential frontrunners and role models in addressing environmental issues, rather than as primary regulators and strategic planners. For example, even though many participants had not heard of Nottingham’s efforts to become the first UK council to be carbon-neutral by 2028, most appreciated this as a good example of how individual local governments can demonstrate action and act as role models for change:

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"I think it's good that they're at least they're trying- they put themselves a target so yeah, like even if they don't quite make it but at least something is being done, and then that might- other cities as well might start it, it might trigger something like that that other cities might start realising that they can make changes and have an impact as well."

Amanda, 15, female

When asked about solutions to environmental issues at the local level and the responsibility of local governments, discussions among the participating young people often turned to a perceived lack of awareness and information. The majority of participants felt they did not know enough about environmental issues in general, and about ways to address environmental problems locally, in particular. Just like many participants had not previously heard much about Nottingham's efforts to become carbon-neutral by 2028, a number of them said they wanted the council to communicate these measures more. Notably, this was regardless of whether the participants had moved to Nottingham to study or had been born and raised in the city, or whether they were or were not involved in local action groups themselves.

Consequently, a number of participants also assigned considerable importance to the role of awareness-raising measures and education at the local level. Indeed, among the measures young people wanted local councils to take (such as the oft-cited high priority issue of recycling), among the most frequent answers concerned measures of awareness raising and education, both in schools but also more widely with the population in general. Some also wanted greater levels of civic engagement, such as general listening exercises and more interaction between council leaders and the public.

"I would say in terms of a local thing (...) maybe teaching like, encouraging more like, young people, even older people to like, reconsider the environment more I would say is like the council can do." Tom, 19, male

"I think there should be some more environmental education within schools." Elin, 17, female

How the local policy community engages with young Nottingham residents on environmental issues

The second aspect of this case study involved us seeking the views and perspectives of key local agents involved in contributing to the policy landscape with respect to civic engagement in local environmental initiatives, especially Nottingham's flagship *Carbon Neutral 2028 Action Plan (CN28)*.

Participants were asked what they considered to be the main environmental policy issues facing the city. Not surprisingly, most emphasised the need to develop local policies and initiatives designed to mitigate the worst effects of the climate crisis and to help to achieve net carbon zero in Nottingham by 2028. Within that broad objective, the different agents emphasised an array of different goals. For instance, respondents based at NCC tended to focus on civic engagement with residents and with local businesses and organisations, to encourage all sectors across the city to *"own' the [CN28] policy and for it not to be a city council led initiative"*. Alongside that engagement priority, other key NCC priorities included transport, the built environment as well as energy sources and energy consumption patterns. The two universities between them tended to work closely with staff and students on areas such as carbon reduction, waste reduction, enhancing biodiversity, safer cycling infrastructure, promoting sustainable procurement and also more sustainable catering. Other civil society and social action groups prioritised specific issues germane to their own campaigning gaze. For instance, the *Nottingham Good Food Partnership* have been campaigning to raise awareness about food poverty across the city and also developing an environmentally focused *"10 Year Low Carbon Local Food Plan*

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for Nottingham.” The Nottingham Climate Assembly have been coordinating with a number of community-based environmental groups, with three key purposes in mind: (i) to engage with a wide and diverse range of voices to develop a programme of educational awareness about the climate crisis; (ii) to extend and deepen a grass-roots conversation on “*big development projects [such as] the development of the Broadmarsh [shopping centre] and also [...] the transition away from the power station at Ratcliffe-on-Soar [...] into an incinerator*”; and (iii) to establish a Youth Climate Assembly that “*is representative enough and broad enough and not just the kind of [young] people who [are] already really engaged in these issues*”, so that they can become more directly involved in such conversations.

In general, these key local agents were eager to stress the importance of engaging with young people and students in developing Nottingham-based environmental/sustainability and carbon reduction initiatives. This position was particularly well-articulated by the Chair of the Nottingham Green Partnership:

Interviewer:

“[D]o you think that there are any particular environmental issues where the Green Nottingham Partnership might think it would be really good if you could get young people involved?”

Respondent:

“I can think of plenty. The first one I think that I would like to emphasize is that the work that we [Nottingham Green Partnership] are doing is intended to promote the reality that we are no more than leaseholders of this planet. And those who have the longer leases on it are those who are younger than us. And so, first and foremost, [...] everything that we do has to have in mind the impact upon the legacy that we leave for our successors [...] and young people have a longer tenure in principle than older ones.”

Indeed, this ambition was shared by each of the policy-makers that we interviewed. For instance, reflecting their commitment to putting local residents at the centre of their decision-making on key issues such as the environment, the manager of the NCC’s *Research, Engagement and Consultation* team emphasised the long tradition of partnership and engagement between the local authority and its citizens, including young citizens:

“[I]t’s a city and a children partnership vision [...] there are lots of practitioners and strategy leads and managers, directors who subscribe to a very open and co-productive driven idea of what engagement and participation with children and young people is, should be, want it to be. There are lots of initiatives there which embody the principles we’ve talked about”.

Similarly, Nottingham Trent University (NTU) emphasized the centrality of ‘sustainability’ as one of the six core themes of its overarching ‘*University, reimagined*’ strategy, which includes a programme of dedicated student-engagement sustainability related activities, initiatives and events: “*So each year we have a whole week called Green Week. We have another one called Sustainability Action Week. We have Fairtrade Fortnight. We also have Enterprise Week and we do an annual Sustainability Conference for students*”.

However, the general message emerging from the interviews is that where children and young people were engaged in such initiatives, they were typically involved as ‘recipients’ rather more directly in two-way processes as active ‘co-producers’ of such environmental and carbon-reduction projects. Most of the policy-makers interviewed expressed a general desire to more deeply engage with young people in shaping CN28 and similar environmental/sustainability initiatives, and to empower youth in

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such decision-making processes. For the NCC, this was now moving to the top of the agenda for CN28. As one officer stated it:

"[CN28 partnership conversations are] a huge area that we've just not engaged with and we could get so much out of it by just convening those partners and bringing them together and just having a bit of influence. So I think within the next year we could definitely start to mobilize some of that."

This was reflected in the views of a different NCC officer, who claimed:

"I think we're getting better at it. but at the moment I feel as though it's just fairly generalized interactions and engagement rather than us trying to sit down in inverted commas specifically with, you know, 16- to 25-year-olds or whatever."

Nevertheless, such direct engagement with the city's young people in CN28-related policy-crafting was not always considered to be feasible. For instance, as one respondent concluded, "[T]o be honest, it's probably not something that we've considered enough", while another stated, "I would say it's an area that we're not that good at". Furthermore, the recent financial contractions faced by the NCC also posed particular resourcing challenges with respect to developing a youth civic engagement approach to CN2028. One NCC officer observed that, "I think always our ambition is tempered by the massive constraints of capacity internally within the local authority, its ability to do the work [...] after two years of budget cuts." This illustrates how it is possible that few of the young research participants knew or had ever heard about CN28. Given the interest and support young people showed in the policy in general when it was discussed in the focus group, there is considerable room for policy-makers to engage with young people on this aim and involve them in the policy-crafting on the carbon-neutral strategy.

While the interviews revealed that the Nottingham City Council and the other key players had been involved in running a number of different projects designed to encourage local young people to adopt environmentally-sustainable and carbon-reducing behaviours, these were typically aimed at younger-aged school children (particular those at primary schools) or at the two universities. There were relatively few projects that were targeted at secondary school and further education college students or at those older 'harder to reach' youth aged 18-plus who had left formal education and had not enrolled at university. As one respondent remarked: "I think there's been great collaboration with universities, good collaboration with primary schools, but I think there's a bit in the middle missing". Indeed, a particular challenge for the city council was acknowledged in terms of being able to reach out to, and involve, a full range of diverse communities and voices across the city in Nottingham's carbon neutral ambitions. Despite democratic legitimacy and inclusion being at the heart of the Council's plans, achieving this in practice was considered to be a major challenge:

"it's something which is I think potentially worrying for politicians and officers alike and partners that unless it's carbon neutrality is something that everybody feels is their business and is important, it's not going to be something which is achievable because not everybody is going on the journey."

Summary

As in London, in Nottingham, too, the ambition to put citizens, including young citizen, at the heart of the city's environmental policy has fallen short of the mark so far. Our research – eleven focus groups with 35 young people aged 15 to 25 years and interviews with nine senior representatives involved in

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carbon-reduction policy-related activities based at Nottingham City Council, the two city universities as well as local social action and civil social groups – shows that there is at this point relatively little evidence of genuine and successful initiatives to engage young people directly and actively in a two-way process of urban democracy with respect to environmental policy matters.

However, the evidence collected for this case study illustrates the potential for Nottingham to engage young citizens in environmental policy-making. It shows that there is shared concern for environmental issues among young people and local policy-makers: global issues such as the consequences of climate change as well as issues closer to home such as local efforts to increase biodiversity and to manage the consequences of inner-city redevelopment projects. Similarly, both our young research participants as well as the local policy-makers interviewed for this case study showed a desire for and gave priority to citizen engagement in environmental policy-setting activities. There is thus much scope for the involvement of young people aged 15 to 25 in local policy processes in Nottingham and based on our research we can reasonably expect young people and local policy-makers to quickly find common ground in discussing the most pressing environmental issues for the city to tackle.

Yet, despite this appetite for citizen engagement, there was little evidence of successful involvement of young people aged 15 to 25 years in Nottingham's environmental policy planning and strategy. Few of our young research participants were aware of what policy-makers considered Nottingham's flagship environmental policy, its "Carbon Neutral 2028 Action Plan" (CN28), and policy-makers acknowledged that whilst considered critically important, there had not yet been much work done to access the views and perspectives of a wide and diverse range of young people to create relevant and high-quality climate-related policy.

The case study allows us to identify starting points for Nottingham and barriers to realise its potential for meaningful youth civic engagement in local environmental policy planning. Both young people and policy-makers raised the need for listening exercises and further awareness raising campaigns – in particular for its flagship policy CN28, but young people also mentioned this for recycling schemes, and positively, for local public transport – as a first step. Both also considered opportunities to engage young people through education, in particular through schemes that focus on pupils at secondary schools rather than on younger, primary-school aged children, who had previously often been a focus of policy-makers.

The biggest challenges for Nottingham are to realise the potential for meaningful youth civic engagement in its full scope lie in the city council's financial constraints – something that even some of the young people acknowledged – the policy scope of the local council vis-à-vis the national government, in particular in terms of education and curriculum involvement, and the difficulties inherent in reaching out to, and involving, a full range of diverse communities and voices across the city.

CONCLUSION

In this report on youth, sustainability and democracy, our starting point has been that although young people have been prominent in leading successful national and global protests that have both influenced governments and contributed to the shaping of United Nations COP26 climate negotiations, we know very little about the extent and impact of youth interventions at sub-national level. Our main aim has therefore been to consider the ways that local and civic authorities already - and *could*, in the immediate future - harness the energy and imagination of young people into the crafting of sustainable local policies and initiatives to mitigate the worst effects of the climate crisis. Our findings from focus groups with young people and from interviews with local policy communities based in London and in Nottingham make for relatively sobering reading; young people lack confidence that their voices count for much in conversations about how best to address the climate emergency, while policy-makers seem unsure regarding how best to engage young people in such matters. However, the data also offer some – albeit, tentative - basis for measured optimism. Not only are young people keen to engage in dialogue with local policy communities about environmental and climate-related issues in the first place, civic authorities and wider policy communities are also becoming increasingly cognisant of the need to develop structures and processes for strengthening youth voice in policy-making.

Focus groups (London and Nottingham) findings

The research with young people detailed in the case studies on London and Nottingham illustrates how concerned they are about environmental issues. In 2020 in Nottingham, and by 2021 in the London case study, our young research participants aged 15 to 25 years showed grave concern for a wide range of environmental issues, globally as well as in their local communities: from the impact of climate change, melting ice caps, deforestation, carbon emissions, plastic pollution, waste excess to air pollution and the loss of biodiversity and green spaces. Many young people saw environmental issues as locally and globally interconnected, and particularly young Londoners often also linked environmental issues explicitly to other key priorities, such as mental health and personal safety. The young people who participated in our research also demonstrated a wealth of ideas on what could be done to address environmental concerns nationally as well as in their local communities - and many were keen to be listened to and become involved in agenda-setting and strategizing for local policy-making.

However, despite this appetite for involvement, our research also illustrates that engagement with young people on local policy-making concerning environmental-sustainability issues needs to be done right. Our research participants expressed a deep sense of powerlessness in the face of what they saw as overwhelming and interconnected issues, and the vast majority of them believed that – as young people – their voices and actions to preserve the environment would not be heard and not make a difference. To instil a sense of efficacy in young people, policy-makers thus must ensure that they establish genuine two-way engagement with communities of young people that is followed by

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concrete and visible action. There is nothing that the young people who participated in our research wanted more from politicians in addressing environmental concerns than to ‘*just do it*’.⁶

When involving young citizens – and similarly older ones – in sustainable environmental policymaking, education and awareness raising on environmental concerns and policies were seen as a necessary requirement. In both London and Nottingham, young people identified a lack of education, information, and awareness as common problems when it comes to environmental issues, with a number of our participants saying they themselves felt relatively uninformed about environmental issues in general and particularly about ways to affect change at the level of local government. Additionally, our London case study highlighted how environmental concern is not uniformly distributed among young people. In particular, social class backgrounds - but to some extent also where young people live - matter for how they prioritise and contextualise concern for the environment. Local policy-makers must carefully consider this matter, and must make concerted efforts to involve young people in environmental policy-making regardless of their backgrounds, for example through education and also via widely spread as well as specifically targeted opportunities for civic engagement.

Local policy community (London and Nottingham) findings

Policy communities are increasingly recognising this as a matter of importance when developing strategies and specific initiatives to address the climate crisis at the sub-national level. Indeed, for some of the London and Nottingham policy-makers interviewed in this research, there was acknowledgement that the crafting of sustainable local policies on environmental issues would benefit from more direct and two-way engagement with young citizens – in which local policy solutions would (and in a small number of discrete projects, *were*) in part be shaped by the views and perspectives of a wide and diverse range of young voices. The findings from these interviews suggest that to date, most such engagement initiatives with young people were often not especially ‘interactive’ – and neither have they contributed to the building of a strong sense of efficacy. It is therefore not surprising that most young people tend to lack confidence that they can make a difference through their efforts and interventions in the face of the mounting climate emergency.

Policy-makers recognise this deficit in their engagement with young people, although they are finding this a particularly challenging issue to address – not least because of deepening resource constraint issues that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there is evidence of a will within the local policy communities in Nottingham and in London to try and find more effective ways of engaging with young people.

One key area for attention locally is education - and specifically to address young people’s lack of knowledge concerning how best to intervene to help mitigate the worst effects of the climate crisis. As Hayward has observed, “young citizens need democratic language, tools and ways of understanding their situation to recreate a common and more sustainable world” (pp.4–5). This was raised in our research with the young people and with the local policy community, with both groups emphasising the lack of spaces for discussion of environmental/sustainability issues. However, what was also clear from the ‘policy-maker’ interviews was that although there were some creative engagement projects, these tended to be relatively one-off exercises; there was little evidence from the interviews that the local authorities had yet developed systematic strategies for engaging young people in the co-

⁶ We asked our Nottingham participants what would be their #1 message to, or slogan for, policy-makers - and remarkably many of them came up with this well-known sports company slogan.

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production of long-term environmental programmes. Furthermore, most environmental initiatives and projects were developed with primary schools and with/at universities - there were relatively few such programmes targeted at secondary school students or at young adults who had left formal education. As a consequence, the reach of such engagement initiatives seems relatively short, and key voices across the two cities remain relatively under-heard. Related to this, evidence from the London interviews indicates that more consideration needs to be given to how local community and outreach teams might be incorporated into climate-focused youth civic engagement programmes. At present, London-based community engagement teams who deal with young people are often decoupled from the work of environment teams – consequently, environmental strategies often focus on the economic aspects of the green transition, rather than the civic participation/democratic dimension.

Recommendations

Through our research with young people and with ‘policy-makers’ based in London and in Nottingham, we have identified a number of creative engagement initiatives that have contributed to thinking about how best to address the ongoing climate crisis at the local level. However, we have also found that there remains considerable scope to develop strengthened relationships between young citizens and local authorities that would enable the emergence of strategic and genuine co-production structures and processes that would articulate the experiences and imagination of young people for the purposes of effective and sustainable policy-making. In the light of this research, we would make the following recommendations:

1. Local authorities should work closely with young people in the co-design of regular spaces and opportunities for sustained engagement with young people from diverse backgrounds – both school age and young adults - design of local environmental policies.
2. Authorities should prioritise better communication of local policies and strategies to young people, to make them aware of the development environmental policies at an early stage.
3. More environmental education should be offered in primary schools, in secondary schools and in colleges of further education, and this should include making available opportunities for civic engagement and community projects.
4. There should be a prioritization of community engagement, and also the participation of local authority officers who have responsibility for community engagement, in the development of local authority environment teams.

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Appendix I: INTERVIEWS WITH POLICY-MAKERS (30-45 minutes – semi-structured interview guide)

What is your role within the Council/ Authority?

What do you think are the most pressing environmental (policy) issues in the city? Which areas of environmental policy are you keen to engage with young people on?

Can you talk about any initiatives you have developed to engage young people in the work of the Council (with particular reference to environmental policy)?

At what point in the process did you get young people engaged? [to help define the problem/ Council or authority objectives? To help design the solutions? To help implement Council or authority policy?]

Did they take place online/ by mail/ by email or social media in person? How did you recruit these young people?

How did they rate their experiences? [How did you feed back to the young people you worked with? Would you say they were happy/ frustrated with the engagement?]

What would you say were the main successes/ drawbacks of these initiatives? [can you give some examples of where this has worked well to change or strengthen policy?]

How have these experiences affected the way you intend to engage with young people in the future? Do you have any initiatives in the planning stage that you can talk about?