Hope and local food activism in a North Wales town: a conceptual and ethnographic study

Rosemary Heather West

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Keele University

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Edited to include: My son arrived shortly after my thesis was submitted, and has, like his sisters, spent time napping in my arms while I prepared for my viva and while I worked on amendments. This is for him as much as for my daughters.

They are all too young yet to understand how enormously grateful I am that they allowed me to work and that they put up with my focus being elsewhere, at least some of the time! I hope that what they take from this is that anything is possible if you put your mind to it, particularly with

the support of those who love us. I hope that I am setting an example for my two girls especially, and showing all three that Mummy is not only good at making cakes, but she can be a Doctor of Philosophy too.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine the relationship between hope and local food growing projects within a sustainability context. Hope has often been overlooked or dismissed as naïve in sociological and political discourse, while interstitial political practices, of which local food growing projects are one example, which focus on everyday concerns have tended to be under-researched. It is to these fields that this thesis contributes. I ask how local food growing projects nurture and develop hope as part of a wider response to sustainability issues, and how these projects might inspire and maintain hopeful action, both in terms of the projects themselves and within a wider context. I do so to illuminate the value of hope within a sustainability context, and to show how paying attention to what "small facts say about big issues" (Gibson-Graham, 2014) can give insight into the significant impact that small-scale collective actions can have. Ethnographic research into this type of interstitial activism is also typically uncommon, and so this thesis contributes to this gap in knowledge by using an in-depth qualitative case study of local food growing group, Incredible Edible Abermor. Through this I show that interstitial practices, and food growing especially, have important, if modest, transformative potential within a sustainability context. They inspire hope through a sense of community, empowerment, and even nostalgia, which encouraging participants to maintain hopeful action within the project, as well as to develop wider interests and sensibilities oriented towards sustainability and environmental issues. Importantly, hopeful action and attitudes are not examples of naïve optimism to be overlooked but are instead powerful and necessary responses to contemporary environmental issues.

Contents

1 Introduction

I don't want your hope. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I do. Every day. And

want you to act. I want you to behave like our house is on fire. Because it is.

Greta Thunberg, 2019[1]

The narrative on climate change and sustainability is increasingly terrifying, and perhaps rightly so. Since I began writing this thesis in 2016, we have seen the five warmest Julys on record. Australia has been on fire, so has the Arctic. Arctic sea ice was at a record low in 2022, 2020 and 2019 (NOAA, 2022). Climate change, or rather, the climate emergency, is no longer something in the background news, and surely can no longer be ignored. But there is a danger that, in the face of all this fear, we find ourselves paralysed, unable to act. Indeed, if the outlook is so definitely dire, there is arguably little point in doing anything at all (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh, 2007; Lueck, 2007; Ojala, 2012). The flip side of this gloomy assessment tends to come largely from businesses and technology companies, promising that there are solutions to climate change which we can implement without changing the way we live or damaging our economy. But these are often expensive, regularly unrealistic, and ultimately based on a blind and false hope which does not help the situation and leads to scepticism of any positive assessment.

Yet there are alternatives, and, as I will argue through this thesis, they are hopeful. There are grassroots initiatives around the world, with people pursuing solutions to sustainability issues and the climate crisis for themselves (Pickerill, 2021), without involving big business or government.

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[1] https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/our-house-is-on-fire-16-year-old-greta-thunberg-speaks-truth-to-power/, date accessed 28/09/2022

They are addressing environmental issues as well as financial struggles, by coming together to meet the material needs of their communities in innovative ways (Schlosberg and Coles, 2016; Deflorian, 2021). They do so in the face of gloomy outlooks and frightening statistics, and they remain hopeful. Do-it-yourself movements are everywhere, with repair cafes, swap shops, and energy cooperatives popping up across the UK. One notable example is in food and agriculture, as people around the UK (and the rest of the world) are working to change their food systems. They are starting enterprises which improve local, sustainable, access to food, creating surplus sharing networks to respond to the global waste crisis, and setting up buying groups to make access to food both more affordable and dignified (Sustain, 2022), they are also increasingly growing produce themselves, for themselves and for others.

The grow your own movement is growing. Not just in terms of produce, but in terms of numbers. Sales of vegetable plants and seeds are rocketing and growing your own has been embraced not only as trendy but also as healing and supporting during the Covid lockdowns of 2020 (Wyevale, 2019). Gardeners are increasingly moving away from the traditional vegetable patch and looking for new and innovative ways to plant edibles, in hanging baskets, on balconies and windowsills, and on patios (Wyevale, 2019), and there are still 100,000 people on waiting lists for UK allotments, some of whom will have to wait 17 years for a plot (Cottrell, 2021). Outside of home gardens edibles are also on the rise, with a growth in community supported agriculture and guerrilla gardening across the UK. Incredible Edible, founded on the idea of planting edibles for the community on otherwise unused land, has seen its numbers grow to 82 groups in the UK (at the end of 2018) (Incredible Edible, 2018), and since its beginnings in Todmorden, Yorkshire, now has groups all around the world.

It is against this backdrop, and amidst such 'buzz', that I began this thesis. Having always had an interest in the environment as well as in sociology, the growth of grassroots local food activism, particularly 'growing your own' caught my attention. Previous studies had given me the opportunity to work with local food producers in an area of North Yorkshire, and I was struck by

the amount of energy and hopefulness which they brought to their work, despite a turbulent political environment (as Brexit began), and a frightening narrative around climate change which ultimately questioned the point of such small-scale activities. Through this thesis I intend to explore the notion of hope, and how it inspires and maintains action in grassroots local food activism.

As with popular narratives, hope is not a prevalent concept in sociology, (Lueck, 2007). A fear of encouraging complacency in the face of social issues, an emphasis on critique, and an effort to ensure that the magnitude of problems is not somehow missed (Best, 2001; Lueck, 2007; Back, 2015), leaves a tone which is often despairing or hopeless (Back, 2015). As in sustainability narratives, where hopefulness is often dismissed as, at best, naïve, so a belief in progress is often cast as naïve in sociology (Back, 2015). The result is the holding up of a perfect societal goal, which is inevitably and continually missed, thus breeding pessimism (Best, 2001; Anderson and Fenton, 2008).

This negativity seems to be reflected in the literature on the food system, and indeed on food activism and sustainability, as the pervasive feeling in the majority the literature is pessimistic. The current food system is broken, and the structure of it is difficult to dismantle or throw off because massive amounts of power are concentrated into it (Patel, 2009; Carolan, 2012). The environment has been irreparably damaged and remains under further threat (for one example, White, 2004). Hunger is a very real issue for the disempowered around the world (WFP, 2022). Food security policy has as its very reason for being the threat of international disaster (Kirwan and Maye, 2013). Even local food movements, grounded in food sovereignty , are at risk of getting stuck in the 'local trap', and becoming as damaging as the existing hegemonic system (Born and Purcell, 2006; Carolan, 2012). All of which coalesce into a very bleak and hopeless picture of the existing food system.

If we accept that this existing system is not working, at least not as well as it should for everyone involved (including the planet), and if we are to change it, then this pessimism ought to be overcome. To paraphrase Marx, the point is not to analyse the broken system, it is to enable and initiate new beginnings (Stock, Carolan and Rosin, 2015). Acknowledging the scale of the issue necessitates a collective response, and to inspire that we must first inspire and empower individual actions so that they are seen as a worthwhile part of collective action (Braithwaite, 2004a, 2004b; Lueck, 2007), in short, we must inspire hope. This thesis will conceptualise hope as a belief in individual actions and the difference they can make (agency), the knowledge that individual actions are limited by societal factors (structure), and the motivational force which inspires individual actions in the face of these obstacles (McGeer, 2004; Lueck, 2007). Like agency more broadly, hope may also be both individual or collective and based on shared goals and visions (Lueck, 2007), and oriented towards collective (in this case, food) futures.

There are always alternatives to the status quo of the food system which are available, and which can be explored individually and collectively to realise alternative and adventurous food futures (Carolan, 2016). This is not to say that they are easily taken up or that they do not require effort to engage with, but they are there, and they enable manoeuvrability and freedom for individual and collective actors (Anderson and Fenton, 2008; Carolan, 2016). One way in which these alternatives can be imagined, explored and implemented, is through prefigurative projects of sustainable materialism or diverse economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Schlosberg and Coles, 2016; Schlosberg and Craven, 2019). These prefigurative projects allow individuals and collectives to act and live in alternative ways, effectively bringing imagined futures, or utopias, into being in the present. To do so, individuals need to go forward hopefully, acknowledging the barriers to alternatives but also believing them not to be insurmountable. In demonstrating alternatives and creating new ways of living, working, and relating outside of problematic systems, these projects create a sense of possibility, and of hope. These projects, as well as other

activity outside of the hegemonic system (which is not, of course, limited to food activity), are therefore inherently hopeful.

Importantly, sustainable materialism and diverse economy projects take place in the everyday. Although this area of life is often overlooked when considering activism (see Chapter 5 for a full discussion), there is nevertheless value in these grassroots, perhaps small in scale, activisms. These projects seem to have the effect of inspiring action outside of the original project, ultimately encouraging individuals to live in more sustainable ways in a wider context. Karl Weick (1984) suggests that focusing on 'small wins', which involve smaller and more achievable goals, helps us to reach larger ones. The size of social problems can be a stumbling block to action, and this is especially so when considering climate change (Weick, 1984). The sheer scale and urgency of the climate emergency can make it seem insurmountable (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh, 2007), and so stop action before it begins. One way to overcome this paralysing effect is to break the problem down into smaller and more manageable issues. These can be more easily tackled, leading to small wins which can be celebrated and in turn attract more people to the cause, thus driving social change (Weick, 1984). Immediate and visible results are important (Navne and Skovdal, 2021) for sustaining action and for extending it to other individuals and geographical areas, even if those results are perhaps modest in scale. This thesis aims to explore such projects, examining the relationship between them and hope, within a context of sustainability.

1.1   Arriving at my research

I have been involved in food and sustainability in some way for most of my life. Raised in a farming family, and the daughter of a chef and a gardener, food and the environment have always been a central part of my world. I am a keen cook and an enthusiastic, if not always successful, gardener, as well as an advocate for local and sustainably sourced produce. As a researcher, I

have had long term interests in the sociology of food and agriculture, food activism, and environmental politics. As such, this growth in grow-your-own caught my attention and is the basis of this thesis. Questions about how people engage with food and growing to effect change necessarily influenced the research that I undertook here, as well as the ways in which I analysed my findings.

As I explored the literature, several things became apparent. First, the vast majority of literature on the local food movement as a whole comes from North America and describes a movement quite different from the one I know in the UK. Second, although there is attention to community gardening as a phenomenon, there is little which considers other types of growing projects, and attention to other consumption projects has tended to focus on ethical consumption practices within which initiatives encouraging the growing and sharing of produce do not sit comfortably. Third, where there is attention to hope, it is largely confined to psychology and education, though there are notable exceptions.

It also became clear that political practices which focus on the everyday are relatively under-researched (MacGregor, 2021a), and that researching these types of activism in an ethnographic way is perhaps less common again (Arribas Lozano, 2018). My goal with this thesis is to contribute to these gaps, explaining hope and why it should be explored as politics, and exploring everyday activism, specifically within the local food movement, in an ethnographic way. I will argue that the local food movement, particularly grow-your-own initiatives, are a useful and important space in which to observe and understand hope, as well as the value of these movements and initiatives in terms of sustainability.

1.2 Research Questions

My research questions evolved over time, with the final versions addressing gaps in existing research on local food activism and hope, as highlighted in Chapters 2-5, which explore hope and

food activism as concepts. They draw on issues which emerged from my case study, although it would be impossible to address all these comprehensively in the space available.

The overarching aim of this research is:

To examine the relationship between hope and local food growing projects within a sustainability context.

Following the recent turn towards grassroots activism which seeks to meet the material needs of local communities in ways which work outside of existing systems, and which may go further to influence and change those existing systems (referred to as sustainable materialism (Schlosberg and Craven, 2019) or examples of diverse economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, 2008)), this thesis explores the ways in which individuals are inspired to engage in such activities and encouraged to maintain their participation. The ways in which hope is inspired and manifested, particularly in the face of daunting environmental goals, is considered throughout.

How best can we explore and understand hope in the context of local food growing projects?

How hope can be understood as politics is a core question throughout this thesis. My approach is to use in-depth qualitative methods (see discussion below) to uncover the meanings and motivations behind individuals' actions. Attention to context and the influences, relationships and interactions which produce and maintain hope is key to understanding what hope is, and how it is generated and sustained.

How do local food growing projects inspire, nurture, and develop hopeful action?

What is it specifically about local food growing projects that inspires hope in participants, and maintains it, ensuring ongoing participation? I will suggest that, amongst other factors, these projects' ability to create community, to empower participants, and to draw on feelings of nostalgia enable them to inspire and maintain hope in significant ways.

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How does the hope which is inspired and maintained by local food growing projects relate to a wider sustainability context?

Local food growing projects appear to not only sustain participation for themselves, but also to inspire action in other areas of life related to sustainability. How, then, might participating in local food growing projects encourage engagement with wider sustainability issues and the taking up of other behaviours which are aimed at addressing issues of sustainability? Can seemingly niche and small-scale action have an impact on broader issues of sustainability?

1.3   My approach

Sherilyn Macgregor (2021a) argues that interstitial political practices, like local food growing projects, which focus on everyday concerns are under-researched in environmental politics and social movement studies. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, research on such types of activism which is ethnographic is even less common (Arribas Lozano, 2018; MacGregor, 2021a). This has resulted in a situation where the power of seemingly niche, or even everyday practice may be dismissed or overlooked. Ethnographic study allows for significant meanings to emerge from specific contexts, rather than being selected from the outset in the application of strong theory (Gibson-Graham, 2014). In beginning this project then, I was keen to take an ethnographic approach which would enable a holistic and exploratory approach, focused on interpretation and discovery (Merriam, 2014), allowing contexts and participants to speak for themselves. This enables a focus on the smaller scale actions which may be understood as necessary steps towards broader political change (Wright, 2009), rather being lost amidst bigger theories. Focusing on hope necessitates an exploration of individuals' motivations and the meanings that they attach to their action, pointing again to the use of in-depth, qualitative methods which draw not only on speech, but on activity and interaction as well. The most obvious route, therefore, was to produce

an ethnographic case study of local food activism, allowing me to focus on "interpretation in context" (Cronbach, 1975, p.123).

Ethnography focuses on seeking to understand from the inside. It emphasises discovery, rather than suggesting or assuming what answers will be found (Schensul, S and LeCompte, 1999). In this sense, it is both exploratory and emergent, as the researcher uses the method to discover the significant questions, rather than having them all at the outset (Spradley, 1980; Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Schensul and LeCompte, 1999). Research is almost always an iterative process, (Crang and Cook, 2007) and this should perhaps be especially so in ethnographic work and has been a guiding concept in this thesis, with reading, fieldwork and analysis all influencing each other as well as developing my thesis structure and questions. With this in mind, I conducted much (though not all, for practical reasons) of my reading and theoretical work alongside my fieldwork, allowing the two to influence each other and to help me to understand which questions might be usefully included. Analysis also took place alongside fieldwork, meaning the boundaries between the various phases of this project (planning, research, fieldwork, analysis, writing up…) have been typically fluid and blurred.

Arguably, it is never possible to fully know events (Law, 2004) and there is no method which can fully capture the complexity of life (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Ethnography's strength in the face of this is its emphasis on understanding events from the *inside* (Grills, 1998). Participant observation, as part of ethnography, allows the researcher to try to experience the participant's world, and to therefore gain some understanding of it. The goal, as Sarah Pink (2015) describes, is "to seek to know places in other people's worlds that are similar to the places and ways of knowing of those others" in order to "come closer to understanding how those other people experience, remember and imagine" (p.25). This means attempting to experience the participant's world, or aspects of it, as the participant would by fully immersing oneself in their world. On a practical level, it was unfortunately not possible for me to become a volunteer at the

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projects I studied. I did, however, participate on the days I was present, and avoided wherever possible being a passive observer.

Although I arrived at the project with ideas of which techniques I would use, and which might be most effective, some methods proved more fruitful than others, and so my fieldwork involved an element of experimentation. Indeed, this is true of my thesis overall, as each element informed the others and its structure developed over time. It involved several different qualitative methods, discussed in more depth in Chapter 6. At its heart though, my fieldwork involved 'being' at the sites, participating, witnessing, and the 'deep hanging out' which is central to all ethnographies. Being at the sites allowed for the serendipitous learning (Pink, 2015) and the surprises (Willis and Trondman, 2000) which are key to this type of understanding.

1.4   Thesis Structure

This thesis will begin with an examination of the concept of hope. Drawing on philosophy and social psychology as well as politics and sociology, I will set out what is meant by the term hope (Chapter 2), how it relates to agency (Chapter 3), and how it might manifest through utopian projects especially (Chapter 4).

In Chapter 5, I will then turn to the local food movement and argue that local food growing projects in particular offer a fruitful way in which to explore hope as politics. I establish a focus on everyday activism, reading local food growing projects as prefigurative and utopian rather than as projects of consumption alone. I draw particularly on work from David Schlosberg (Schlosberg and Coles, 2016; Schlosberg, 2019; Schlosberg and Craven, 2019) and J.K Gibson-Graham (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, 2006b; Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020) to use sustainable materialist and diverse economy frameworks as ways of observing, analysing, and understanding hope and hopeful action.

My methodology will explain in Chapter 6 how I went about examining hope in these contexts, using in-depth qualitative methods and a broadly ethnographic approach as explained earlier. I will also introduce the group which I worked with, their local area, and my key participants within the group, in a selection of short pen-portraits.

In the second half of the thesis, I have identified three major themes from my data analysis: nostalgia (Chapter 7), community (Chapter 8) and empowerment (Chapter 9). I will consider each in turn, exploring how each theme offers ways in which to understand how hope manifests and has effects within the group. In this section I will offer new insight into how we understand hope, in that it may draw from the past while still being oriented towards the future, and that it can fundamentally affect the way in which individuals understand themselves and their relationship to the world around them through its relationship with agency. I will also argue that, particularly through these three themes, the hope found in local food growing projects is relevant in a wider sustainability context.

Finally, I close in Chapter 10 by evaluating the relevance of my findings in a wider context and considering possibilities for future research. I situate my findings against the wider context in which the existence of an ongoing climate emergency is no longer in question. The increasingly pessimistic reality is that global temperature is rising, along with sea temperatures, and that ice sheets, glaciers and sea ice are declining at an accelerating rate contributing to rising sea levels (NASA, no date). Since the 1980s, each decade has been warmer than the previous one and the world's warmest seven years have all been since 2015, with 2022 set to join them in the top ten (United Nations, 2022a). The summer of 2022 in the UK saw drought, failing crops, water shortages and unprecedented temperatures (Scott, 2022), while Europe had some of its worst wildfires in history, along with the inevitable accompanying carbon emissions from them (Kirk, Blood and Gutierezz, 2022).

Situating my data against this backdrop shows that there are examples of grassroots environmental activism, of which my participant group are one. Although the situation is quite obviously dire, people are still making the lifestyle changes that they can and encouraging others to do the same. As I will show through my fieldwork data in my final chapters, people are imagining better futures and working to build and develop them in the present. Somehow, they are not paralysed by fear and do not despair in the face of the sheer enormity of the problem we face. These people have hope, and their hope is important because it enables and sustains action, even at a small-scale, and action is what is so badly needed (Pickerill, 2021). It is, therefore, important to highlight and explore this hopefulness, and to examine the relationship between hope and local grassroots projects within a sustainability context.

My conclusion therefore draws out themes emerging from the empirical content of this thesis and suggests some broader implications for understanding relationships between hope, local food activism, and sustainability. It suggests practical lessons for policy makers and practitioners interested in this type of everyday activism and identifies issues for further consideration, including the importance of not overlooking or dismissing hope.

2 Hope – a conceptual exploration

Hope, as an object of study if not always as a sentiment, is often conspicuous in sociology by its absence. The same can be said of its presence in the social sciences more generally. This is not to say that there has never been any mention of, or attention to, hope in the social sciences, but it remains somewhat novel, if not entirely obscure. Where there has been attention to hope, it has often been to dismiss it (Wright, 2008). The prevalent view has been that hope leads to stasis and inaction because it is primarily seen as tied up in (capitalist) materialist consumption or in a religious search for eternal life. There is a prevalent and largely negative view of hope typified by Marx's notion of religion as the 'opium of the people'. Ghassan Hage (in Zournazi, 2002) argues that the type of hope we have in capitalist societies means that "we live an ethic of hope, and that becomes an ethic of deferring joy which fits in very much with the idea of saving and deferring gratification… [whereas] enjoyment being subjected to the logic of capitalism, you suffer now in the hope you might enjoy later without this enjoyment ever really arriving" (p.151). In other words, our hope is placed in 'tomorrow' and is largely reduced to material pursuit. Arguably, because these types of hope are placed in the beyond (such as religious afterlife), or are reduced to a capitalist pursuit of social mobility, change in the present and every day is never sought, and so hope is, therefore, crippling (Fromm, 1968; Zournazi, 2002; Hage, 2003) and inextricably linked to the status quo, deferred happiness and inaction.

Yet the problem with dismissing hope, I argue here, is that it continues to endure; social movements remain active and steadfast, and hope is found even amid despair. More than this, hope appears to be a necessity. It is something which motivates and maintains action in the face of obstacles, and indeed which sustains us through our daily lives and the bad times which are an inevitable part of them (Zigon, 2009), and is therefore important for individuals, but it is also a force which can be exploited, for good of bad reasons. Even if we take a positive view of hope,

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we still might accept the ideas from writers such as Marx and Nietzsche that hope can be used to exploit people and to maintain societal control. Hope clearly cannot be entirely pushed aside, and therefore warrants further scholarly attention.

In what follows, I explore the existing literature on hope in the social sciences considering the ways in which we define and understand hope, and the ways in which we understand the role of hope in individual and collective action. I will argue that the definition of hope has generally been over-complicated thus far, and that a key point of contention in the literature seems to be whether hope is conceptually tied to agency or not, or in what relation hope otherwise stands with agency. I will review this overarching conceptual debate across the different literatures that touch upon it. A key distinction that emerges from this is that between hope and optimism and leads to the question of how we should define (but not over-define) hope.

2.1   What is 'Hope'?

Before trying to define hope, it is useful to draw a distinction between everyday usages of the word, and the hope which is being offered as an object of study here. The word 'hope' is used in everyday language in several ways; I hope it does not rain today; I hope that a rumour I heard about a friend is not true; I hope that the local rugby team wins; I hope to have a bigger house one day; I hope that all is right in the world; I hope you have a nice day. Some of these are very trivial, while some are more important, and in some I am the object of hope, whereas in others the hope is impersonal. Philip Pettit (2004) defines this type of 'everyday' hope as 'Superficial Hope'. This hope is not a certainty, nor is it impossible, and it is also for something desired. 'Superficial Hope' can be reduced, essentially, to a belief that something could happen, and a desire for it to be so. This conception of hope is unhelpfully broad, and fails to note the differences between hopes, wishes and fantasies (2008). That said, I do not want to suggest that our conception of hope should be entirely divorced from the natural language usage of 'hope'. From

the outset then, we have two types of hope; that which is found in everyday usage, 'superficial hope', and that which is something other than this.

According to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2004), 'hope' means "a feeling of expectation and desire" (p.686). When we hope, then, it is because we have some expectation that something we desire will, or at least *could*, occur. People do not hope for things which they do not desire, nor do they hope for things which they could not expect to ever happen; a person may daydream of being able to fly, but this is not the same as hoping it will happen. Hope is somehow more realistic than dreaming, or wishful thinking, and in being so, it is more achievable. If hope is realistic, and achievable, it implies that hope is also goal oriented.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1996) follows this notion that hope is goal oriented. He argued that hope is something within *everyone*, and is the belief that something which an actor, or the social group to which they belong, is concerned with, or has undertaken, will be achieved and will be beneficial for both the actor and the community. Hope, for Sartre, is "in the very fact of positing an end as having to be realised" (p.53). In his three-volume exploration of hope and philosophy, Ernst Bloch (1995) also characterises hope as action and future oriented. Like Sartre's notion of hope as a goal which has been set, Bloch describes hope as the active movement towards that goal. For Bloch, hope is an emotion that requires people to "throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong" (p.3). Hope, then, can be understood as either 'everyday' or 'superficial' (I will use 'everyday' as it is a more neutral label), or 'active' and goal oriented.

Psychologists have, understandably been particularly interested in how hope should be understood. Charles R Snyder (1994, 2000) in particular developed a psychological theory of hope, which helps to draw out its active nature. His theory has two components: agency and pathways. A pathway, in this theory, is a route towards a person's aspirations, and their perceived ability to follow such a route. Pathways need not be immediately realisable; it is the "perception that

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effective pathways could be charted if needed and so desired" (Feldman and Snyder, 2005, p. 406) that is the important component of hope. The second component, agency, is "the thoughts that people have regarding their ability to begin and continue on selected pathways towards those goals" (Snyder, Michael and Cheavens, 1999, p. 407). This sense of *potential* agency is what motivates actors to instigate movement along a pathway and to maintain such movement (Wright, 2008).

For some psychologists, Snyder's theory does not go far enough. Hope is not simply a by-product of one's perception of the likelihood of success, it is also an emotion which keeps a person motivated and engaged in the pursuit of their goal (Bruininks and Malle, 2005). Hope clearly has cognitive components which are important for understanding its motivational capacity, but it also has emotional components which are equally important for understanding it (Smith and Lazarus, 1990; Lazarus, 1999). There are several reasons why hope may be characterized as an emotion. Basic emotions are concerned with our survival, and it is difficult to imagine the survival of a society which has no hope, which would lead us to characterize hope as an emotion. Psychologists James Averill et al (1990) establish hope as an emotion by comparing it to others such as anger and love. They found that it conforms to many of the same parameters of these other emotions, in that it is difficult to control, may be nonrational, and in that it motivates behaviour, playing a primary role in keeping people engaged with future outcomes. Richard Lazarus and Craig Smith (1990) also suggest that hope may be viewed as an emotion for its ability to help cope with negative states through hoping for a solution (Smith and Lazarus, 1990; Ojala, 2015). Here, hope, as a positive emotion, helps one to bear the negative state and accompanying emotions, which may, as a by-product, perhaps promote efforts to resolve the negative state (Ojala, 2015). The view that hope consists of both emotional and cognitive components is preferred in this thesis, as both the practical motivational aspects (the cognitive pathways) and the capacity to make us feel good and therefore help us to cope (emotional aspects) are important.

The implication then is that hope is not a passive emotion. When an individual simply sits and wishes for something to happen, even with the optimistic conviction that it *will* happen, the lack of action means that it *won't* happen. Or at least, it won't happen because the person has hoped it will. And the longer the thing does not happen, the more hope disappears (Swedberg, 2007). One may wish to win the lottery, but while they remain content with the fantasy of winning and never buy a ticket, they can never hope to win (Bruininks and Malle, 2005). The difference between passively waiting for the hoped-for-thing, and actively hoping for it, is action. Jarret Zigon (2009) stresses there are times when directly pursuing our hoped for goals is impossible. For him, this means that action itself is impossible, and hoping is the best that we can do. For example, there will be times when individuals hope for something which is out of their control, or for which they are dependent on *someone else's* action. I argue that, even here, hope is active. In these times when the best we can do is hope, hope motivates us to continue with our *action* of not giving up. The action which is brought about is simply not stopping, and hope is, therefore, still an active emotion. That said, this is a different type of hope, one in which we might hope for another to be able to achieve an outcome rather than being able to achieve it ourselves.

Hope is often conflated with optimism, though there is an important distinction to make between the two. Hope is ultimately more practical than optimism, and more useful. Optimism is the belief that something good will happen, regardless of one's own or other's efforts, while hope is the belief that a particular outcome is possible and that there are steps which can be taken towards that outcome. To draw again on the example of the lottery, a person may hope to win the lottery, if they buy a ticket, but cannot be optimistic about their chances because they have little control over the outcome and the odds are stacked against them (Bruininks and Malle, 2005). David Orr (2007) eloquently captures the difference between hope and optimism when he says, "Optimism is the recognition that the odds are in your favour, hope is the faith that things will work out whatever the odds. Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up. Hopeful people are actively engaged with defying or changing the odds. Optimism leans back, puts its feet up and wears a confident

smile knowing that the deck is stacked" (p.1392). Although, we should be careful to note that hope is not wishful thinking. It does not mean that we believe something *will* happen in spite of the odds, only that we know that it *could* if we work towards it (Roser, 2020). Optimism is more general than hope, is more closely associated with greater chances of success and is often concerned with more trivial matters than hope. An individual will hope for something which is important to them. When they find themselves in situations where their chances of success are low, the importance of the hoped-for-goal will keep the individual motivated and push them to remain engaged and take whatever action they can to achieve their goal (Bruininks and Malle, 2005).

Hope can usefully be understood as having three main parts (see Roser, 2020):

1- The desire for X

2- The belief that X is possible but not certain

3- A mental emphasis on X, as well as on the desire for it and on the belief that it is possible

The first two parts are part of a theory of hope which goes back to Hobbes (1668) and others, but it suffers from several challenges, not least of which is that hope may be collapsed into despair (Milona, 2019) as one may desire something, and believe it to be possible but not certain, and still despair rather than hope. The third part of the understanding of hope here addresses this challenge as it requires the hoper to be *involved* with their hope. They need to have emotions, thoughts, plans and actions which revolve around both the desire and around the possibility of it coming about. Emphasising the desire *and* the possibility in this way focuses the hoper in a way which prevents despair (Roser, 2020) and provides the active element of hope which is mentioned above. It should also be added that X must be in some way considered to be good. If we do not believe it to be good then we are simply in a state of desire (Nolt, 2010).

However, even a clear theory of hope, as described above, is only a starting point as we also need to assess how hope can be divided into different types and levels, and it is to this discussion that I will now turn.

2.2   Multiple definitions?

A distinction between superficial and substantial hope has already been outlined above, but throughout the literature available on hope, there are numerous other definitions and distinctions of different types of hope to be found. This raft of differing definitions causes confusion and adds to the perception that hope is not a sensible object of study for the social sciences. So, before a single definition can be settled on, and operationalised for study, either these must each be addressed and included in an overarching idea of hope, or they must each be addressed and deemed to indeed be different types of hope, meaning that the single definition is, in fact, another subtype of hope instead. In the following section, definitions of hope used by various authors will be explored and unpacked, to identify similarities and disparities and by doing so, move towards a more unified definition.

The previous discussion largely addresses hope at an individual level, so we will start there. First, this is described not as individual, but as Private Hope (Drahos, 2004; Lueck, 2007). Private hope simply means the hopes held by an individual, and at its centre is individual agency, and therefore individual action. Andrew Knight (2013) distinguishes different types of private or individual hopes. First, he identifies Empowered Hope, which is the belief that our goals can be achieved through our own agency (as described earlier), and then Fortuitous Hope, which is the belief that chance, luck or something 'bigger than ourselves' will steer us towards the hoped-for-object. These, I think, can easily be put back together, as the difference between them lies in how the hoper perceives external factors and their own agency. The hope itself is the same, but how it is

put into practice, which is determined by what the hoper deems to be within their control or not, is different.

Peter Drahos (2004) describes something like fortuitous hope when he identifies Public Hope. Public Hope is the hope of an actor who is politically motivated. This may be articulated publicly, which is essentially about claiming to be able to deliver a hoped-for-goal for the general population, or it may be hidden from the general population. Outside of a political context, this would simply be the individual hope of an actor, but because this actor is a politician acting within a political context, and the result of their actions have far-reaching consequences, this is Public Hope. Perhaps most central to the idea of public hope, is that it is another actor's agency at the centre of the definition, not the individual's. This is like fortuitous hope in that trust is placed in an outside entity to deliver the hoped-for-goal, although it lacks the element of chance which is important in Knight's approach. Fortuitous Hope then could be a more appropriate name for Public Hope, except that it misses the political aspect of some instances of it. Again, I think this is an example of hope within a particular context, rather than a different kind of hope altogether. Indeed, the emphasis on X being delivered by someone or something else suggests that this may even be optimism in a specific context, rather than hope at all.

Moreover, the name 'Public Hope' seems somehow inadequate. Partly because it does not necessarily mean that the hope is held by the public, for the public, or even *in* public. It also seems more akin to trust, and less to hope. As Drahos (2004) describes it, public hope does not appear to be hope at all; if hope is a goal and action oriented emotion, then it follows that hoping for a goal without involving any agency at all, because all agency in achieving it is transferred to another (usually a politician) is not hope. Public hope necessarily involves blind conformity to what powerful others say (Braithwaite, 2004a). The phenomenon Drahos addresses could be better described as optimism perhaps, or trust, and is like Zigon's (2009) notion that there are circumstances where the best we can do is hope and where we might perhaps place our hope in another's agency rather than our own. This is not limited to the political, whenever a person

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wishes for something, and then remains passive where they might otherwise act (therefore, not hoping), trusting that another person will deliver that wished-for-thing, the emotion becomes more like a combination of desire and trust. Perhaps it is a phenomenon that starts in hope, by appealing to Private Hope, but the transfer of agency prevents it from actually *being* hope.

The hopes of one person may not necessarily be the same as that of another, but hopes may of course be shared, and so there is also Collective Hope (Drahos, 2004). Collective hope, as described by Drahos again, is simply a social version of Private Hope. When individuals discover that they share a hope, and can work together to achieve it, the hoped-for-goal becomes more attainable, and so their shared levels of hope increase. Although still rooted in individuals each acting, Collective Hope differs from Private Hope because it is externally reinforced, and therefore more likely to result in positive action and more likely to survive disappointments. Collective Hope is more resilient than Private Hope. Here is an important point of difference. Not in the hope experienced by the individuals, but in the way that hope is expressed and experienced as a collective. Although essentially the hope remains the same as X is desired and believed to be possible but not certain and is focussed on by the hopers, it is expressed differently once it is shared.

Darren Webb (2008b) moves beyond defining different *types* of hope, and instead describes five different *modes* of experiencing hope. In doing so, he avoids some of the difficulties of trying to identify different types of hope, and instead focuses on the ways in which hope may be expressed in different contexts and alongside different emotions. The first two modes of hope are both centred on individual hopes; Estimative Hope, in which an individual believes a goal is within their reach and takes action to attain it; and Resolute Hope, where the hoper sets aside knowledge of limitations, and believes themselves capable of reaching their goal regardless. Neither of these types of hope is likely to be socially transformative, largely because they lack any collective element, though also because Estimative Hope is hampered by a measure of risk aversion.

The third mode is Patient Hope and is more akin to the Public Hope as discussed earlier. Here, the hopeful actor takes no action, and simply trusts in an 'other' to deliver the hoped-for goal. As with public hope, this seems more like wishful thinking, or optimism, than hope. It simply is not active enough and is much closer to the Superficial Hope introduced earlier (Pettit, 2004).

The final two categories left to discuss here are both social and collective in nature; Critical Hope and Transformative Hope (Webb, 2008b). Both types of hope focus on societal goals rather than individual goals, and so are more like the Collective Hope mentioned above. The difference between the two is that Critical Hope is specifically critical of aspects of society (hunger, poverty, social injustice etc.) and seeks to negate these miseries, while Transformative Hope goes one step further. Unlike Critical hope, it aims not to end the miseries existing in society, but to totally transform society, secure in the belief that people can construct and organise better ways of life. For Webb, transformative hope is a specific type, though I would argue that the desire for transformation, on an individual or societal level, is an intrinsic part of all hoping. Indeed, the very act of hoping could be argued to be transformative; in envisioning a goal or situation we want to reach, and identifying the ways of reaching it, we understand the current situation as only one of many possibilities which is no more or less inevitable than any other, thus making those alternatives more possible simply by understanding them (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, 2006b).

When Critical and Transformative hope are considered in more detail, there appears to be very little difference between the two, except to say that the goal for each is different. And so, it is the desires which differ, not the hopes. Nor is there any real difference between Resolute Hope and Estimative Hope, other than that the hopeful actor has a more or less cautious disposition. Moreover, there is little difference between Resolute and Estimative hopes, and Critical and Transformative hopes, other than that one pair is articulated and shared publicly, while the other is still individual. The 'odd one out', so to speak, is Patient Hope.

That there is little difference between these different categories of hope, except for Patient Hope, matters. By over complicating matters, and labelling hope in different contexts as qualitatively different types of hope, we miss the 'bigger picture' (Milona, 2019; Roser, 2020). Hope, as it can be understood here, is an overarching emotion, present in many different situations and indeed affected by them, and so by splitting it up into different categories according to context, we focus more on the context than on the hope. By over-defining, hope becomes obscured.

Sarah Amsler (2006) describes a structure of discourses of hope, which helps to identify the elements that must be present for an emotion (or capacity) to be defined as hope at all. The first is the 'what-exists-but-is-undesirable', which is the condition the actor wishes to change, the second is the 'what-is-desired-but-not-yet-existing', which is the hoped-for goal, and the final element is the *means* for realising the transition between the two, which is *agency*.

Separating the two concepts of agency and hope at all requires caution, as it is perhaps not difficult to make the terms *too* distinct, and to fall into, again, defining and over-defining different types of hope. Julia Cook and Hernán Cuervo (2019), for example, suggest that hope can *accompany* a sense of agency if it is supported by the present conditions of the individual and is viewed as possible. For them, when an individual feels that their hope is unviable, or that it is something which is out of their control, there is little sense of agency. They suggest that there are, broadly speaking, two types of hope, introducing another set of types of hope to be considered – representational and non-representational. The difference, they argue, is that representational hopes engender a sense of agency in the hoper, while non-representational hopes do not. Representational forms of hope are oriented towards a specific or concrete, and therefore accessible, image of a hoped-for future. Non-representational hopes, on the other hand, are characterised solely by feelings and sensations of hopefulness as opposed to having a specific referent (Cook and Cuervo, 2019). Representational hopes inspire a sense of agency when the individual feels that their specific view is supported by their current conditions and is therefore possible. On the other hand, representational hopes which do not appear viable to the

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individual lead to a loss of a sense of agency. Non-representational hopes may also lead to little sense of agency, when the actor feels they have little control over their lives. However, they may also be accompanied by a sense of agency if the actor actively cultivates their hopes for the future despite little material support. Agency, for Cook and Cuervo, is therefore not causally related to hope. As I will argue later in this thesis, hope and agency exist in relationship with each other, and, in fact, hope can be understood as a *type* of agency in itself, though not all agency is hope.

The inclusion of agency in a theory of hope is not uncontroversial and will be discussed later in this section, although it has of course appeared in many of the definitions so far. For now, it is useful to note that Amsler's theory echoes the traditional theory of hope with its desire for X and the belief that it is possible but not certain. It adds a requirement for the hoper to be aware of and understand their current undesirable situation. The 'means' element is akin to the cognitive emphasis discussed earlier, in that the hoper is required to focus on X and their hope must influence their thoughts and actions as they strive for their goal. All the different types of hope described above have these elements, except for Public and Patient hope. I argue that these are not hope at all but are optimism[2]. Even between the categories of individual and collective hope, hope is largely the same, except that more demanding goals may be faced and that there is a willingness to focus on collective rather than individual goals. The distinction between these two types is perhaps the most useful then.

Based on this analysis we can define hope as:

> **Hope:** The desire for an achievable yet demanding goal, and the determination to take action to reach it in the face of obstacles.

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[2] Perhaps, if they are more than optimism- as they generally have a specific goal, they are more aptly named as Passive hope.

Individual Hope: The desire of an individual for an achievable yet demanding goal, and the determination to take individual action to reach it in the face of obstacles.

Collective Hope: The shared desire of a group of individuals for an achievable yet demanding goal, the willingness to prioritise the collective hope over individual hopes, and the determination to act as a group to reach it in the face of obstacles.

Hope for transformation: Hope for goals which are genuinely transformative, involving change rather than accumulation for example, for the individual or for society, such as those for social change. Importantly, this is not a separate *type* of hope, but hope with a different type of desire (a collective and transformative one).

2.3   What is the value of Hope?

Having defined hope as active, and goal oriented, the next question is what is the point of hope, particularly in situations where action is not a possibility? Moreover, what is the point of studying hope at all? If we start from the position that it is hope which sustains us through our daily lives, and hope which motivates us to overcome the breakdowns and bad times which are inevitable parts of our everyday lives (Zigon, 2009), then it is difficult to overstate the value of hope as a disposition. Therefore, there is value in understanding hope as a phenomenon, and in understanding how hope may be inspired and maintained.

For Luc Bovens (1999) there are multiple layers of value in the act of hoping. Perhaps most importantly in the context of social science, is the *instrumental* value of hope. By this he means that when we have goals which can be achieved through exerting our own agency, hope provides the motivation to do exactly that. Hope, therefore, enables individual actors by arousing zeal, and giving the determination to seek alternative methods when one path to our goal is closed off (Bovens, 1999). "[To hope] is to experience ourselves as agents of potential as well as agents in

fact" (McGeer, 2004, p. 105), meaning that the very presence of hope increases the likelihood of achieving our goals (Lueck, 2007).

Part of the value of hope is the way in which it sustains us and our actions. This is particularly so when we talk of collective, transformative, and indeed idealistic hopes. The trouble with ideals, is that they often speak to a deep desire, but are also often unlikely to be achieved. And so, if we are to talk of idealistic hopes we must also ask if hopes in ideals are justified? If they are so likely to be frustrated, and so may ultimately be detrimental at least to the hoper, there is surely an argument to say that we should not concern ourselves with idealism and hope. Or, on the other hand, we might consider that the ideal is so desirable that there is not just value in hoping for it, but also some imperative to spread or inspire those hopes in others.

For example, the ideal of a racially just society is, obviously, a deeply held desire by many, but the reality frequently frustrates that hope. Martin Luther King Jr. addresses this question in his sermon 'Shattered Dreams'. He describes how racial justice is both incredibly desirable but also incredibly improbable:

> What does one do under such circumstances? This is a central question, for we must determine how to live in a world where our highest hopes are not fulfilled (2007, p. 518)

He answers:

> On the one hand we must accept the finite disappointment, but in spite of this we must maintain the infinite hope. This is the only way that we will be able to live without the fatigue of bitterness and the drain of resentment (2007, p. 522)

Maintaining hope in the face of such improbability is instrumentally important. Because hope requires mental emphasis on the part of the hoper, it influences their actions (Roser, 2020), therefore moving towards the improbable ideal (Milona, 2019). In this sermon, King goes on to say, that "our ability to deal creatively with…blasted hopes will be determined by the extent of our faith in God" (2007, p. 526), and for some that is of course true. However, we do not

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necessarily need to turn to the divine to find that idealistic hopes may be rational, even if they only have a small likelihood of being realised. The notion that by imagining an alternative and pursuing it we help to make it more realisable in the long run (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, 2006b) gives idealistic hopes an instrumental value, and reinforcement of those hopes may well come from a collective (Braithwaite, 2004a) rather than the divine.

If we are to take a different ideal, that of limiting global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees say, then we can still find value in maintaining hope for something so desirable yet improbable. If the hoper must attend to their hopes by taking actions, then there is an argument to say that the hope in the ideal will lead to other related ethical hopes, for green energy or political attention to green issues for example. So, the hope in the ideal makes other, perhaps more realistic, hopes possible, where despair would make these other things which ought to be pursued as impossible as the overarching ideal. Michael Milona (2019) argues that idealistic hopes can be patient. This is not in the sense of patient hope as discussed earlier, where the hoper will wait for an other to fulfil their hope for them. Rather, idealistic hope is patient in that it endures over time and can wait for its ultimate goal to be achieved while smaller 'steppingstones' are taken in the meantime. "Deeply rooted idealistic hopes can [also] foster admirable patterns of more realistic socio-political hopes" (p.14), meaning that they feed action and pursuit of hopes in the present as well as maintaining their ultimate goal.

If the individual, and their agency, is central to hope, then hope is by its very nature empowering. The value of hope, and of understanding how to maintain and inspire hope, is therefore also in the potential for empowerment, particularly in those individuals and groups who have previously been disempowered. There is also value in simply understanding that hope is a powerful thing. It motivates individuals, and groups, to action, and can be transformative in doing so, as we see in King's sermon above, or in the example of hoping to limit global temperature rises. Sasha Courville and Nicola Piper (2004) point out that it is important to be clear about whose hope we are talking about, because hope is not exempted from the power relations present in wider

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society. One group, or individual, may be more powerful than another, and therefore have at their disposal the means with which to attain their hopes at the expense of others. They may also be better able to articulate their hopes, and to inspire others to help them achieve their hopes. The individuals who are hoping are both subordinate to the structures and power relations within society, as well as being agents of their own lives, and capable of exercising power. Therefore, the context in which people are hoping, and indeed, the things that they are hoping for, should be taken into account when considering hope as a whole[3].

The key here is still agency, those with the most ability and opportunity to exercise agency will be most likely to achieve their hopes. Perhaps then the question is not, 'what is hope?', but 'how can individual hopes become collective hopes, and how can they then gather momentum to move towards realisation?' In considering power, it is also necessary to realise that hope is not a benign force for good but can be exploitative or destructive as well as positive.

2.4   Negatives as well as positives

Hope can be an overwhelmingly positive force, motivating and empowering individuals toward their goals, at times even in the face of seemingly impossible obstacles and adversity (Drahos, 2004). But with intense hope comes the risk of intense disappointment, which can be catastrophic for the individual (Bovens, 1999; Drahos, 2004). There is also the risk that hope outweighs the realities of the world around us, leading to irrational action, and ultimately to failure (Drahos, 2004). It can also limit risk aversion, when we are not crippled by a focus on the possible losses, action, and indeed success, is more likely (Bovens, 1999), which is obviously a positive. However, an imbalance of hope and fear like this means that in less-than-fair gambles we fail to consider

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[3] Though not, I hasten to add, used to define new 'types' of hope.

the possible losses, and over-hopeful action can result in disaster. Therefore, we must realise that hope is not inherently good but has its hazards too (Bovens, 1999; Drahos, 2004; Amsler, 2006).

A lack of balance seems to be the danger with hope, either that it is not sensibly balanced with fear, which allows a sensible assessment of risk (Bovens, 1999), or that it is not balanced with the individual's understanding of their capabilities properly. When an individual feels incapable of reaching a goal or does not believe in the importance of individual action for reaching a goal, it can lead to inaction, rather than action (Courville and Piper, 2004; Lueck, 2007). For example, a study of young adults in Sweden which explored the relationship between hope, concern for the environment and environmentally friendly behaviours (such as recycling), found that hope could actually have a negative effect on people (Ojala, 2012). When participants had a high level of worry for the environment, a high level of hope correlated to a high level of environmentally friendly behaviour, but only when that hope was based on a belief in the importance of individual action (Ojala, 2012). When hope for the environment was based on a denial (of climate change for example), or an inflated belief that other people will take action (such as governments), environmentally friendly behaviour occurred less frequently (Ojala, 2012). Hope which does not empower *the hoper* can be essentially disempowering and lead to no action at all.

As discussed earlier, there are different contexts in which hope occurs, and different types of actors who can use hopes in various ways, some of which can be more dangerous than others. Private hopes can be hazardous, but only really to individuals. Collective hope is like private hope, except that there are common hopes and goals shared among a group. Hope which does not encourage the individual to action, only to accept a set of policies or conditions which are suggested as a way of achieving a hopeful goal, which may or may not be otherwise acceptable to individuals (Courville and Piper, 2004; Drahos, 2004) is what Drahos (2004) terms public hope. As discussed earlier, in practice public hope is more like optimism or trust, but it may begin as an individual or collective hope for a societal goal.

The danger of Public Hope is that "it becomes a tool of manipulation, an emotional opiate that political actors use to dull critical treatments of decisions and policies that serve private rather than social interests" (Drahos, 2004, p. 33). Some political actors can use hope in ways which leave the public unwilling to share the hopes which they have for themselves, and also unable to look elsewhere for sources of hope (Hage, 2003). This creates a societal hope based on fear and maintained through a sense of movement generated through the oppression of others (Wright, 2008).

Hope, then, can be dangerous in that when misplaced it leaves us open to bitter disappointment as individuals. It can also be abused by those in power who might wish us to hope for something different, or who simply do not wish to act on our hopes. And it can leave us vulnerable to a "reactionary politics of fear"(Amsler, 2010, p. 130) where we could instead be pursuing a "progressive politics of hope"(Amsler, 2010, p. 130).

2.5 A moral obligation to hope?

Given the potential risks of hope, can it still be argued that it is essential, and even a moral obligation? It is perhaps bold to suggest that there is a moral obligation to hope, and to cultivate and inspire hope in others. I would like to suggest that, particularly in the context of environmental concerns, there is, and that this is my reason for exploring hope as part of this thesis. Here I will consider the benefits of hope and hoping as an individual, as well as a society. I would like to ask whether we have a *responsibility* as social scientists to be hopeful. Can a reorientation of philosophy towards the future, and so to social change, help to bring more hopeful futures into being?

My first point is a simple one: hoping is positive. It is a lovely thing to hope and to feel hopeful. It can lift the spirits and soothe us when we are struggling, and so we would surely want to maintain it in ourselves, and it is a good thing to inspire hope in others (Roser, 2020). While individual

benefits of hope may seem to be solipsistic, this does not mean that they are not still good and should not be valued.

Dominic Roser (2020) also suggests that there is a moral imperative to inspire and to spread hope for the benefits as individuals, but also for the societal benefits even of focussing on idealistic hopes (see earlier discussion). That said, it must be remembered that hopes should be for something *good*, and should, therefore, be for something real, given that false hope is necessarily a bad thing. Although false hope may relieve despair (at least in the short term), it is always better to inspire hope in things which are possible (Nolt, 2010). Our idealistic hopes should, therefore, be for something that is at least within the realm of possibility, even if it may not be achieved in our lifetime for example.

Beyond the 'feelgood factor' of hope, Lisa Kretz (2013) argues that because hope inspires people to action, which in turn brings about the (potentially) positive changes we wish to see in society, there is a moral imperative to inspire hope. The crucial value of hope is in its power to shape (and indeed, to inspire) action, and to shift trajectory (Rorty, 1999). Joanne Bryant and Jeanne Ellard (2015) position hope as a form of 'future thinking'. For the young people in their study, even when options appear to be limited by the social structure around them, the ability to hope for 'something better', however vague that is, creates agency, giving them the power to direct and choose their futures. The link between hope and agency, as mentioned earlier, is not uncontroversial, and will be explored in greater depth in the next section, but for now let us consider that part of the value of hope, to both individuals and to society, is that it is the "fuel for agency" (Lueck, 2007, p. 256).

Therefore, even where our hopes are for loftier and highly improbable goals, the effects of hope on our actions cannot be overlooked. Although idealistic goals may seem far away, they "can provide an effective psychological breeding ground for many of our more realistic day-to-day ethical hopes to emerge" (Milona, 2019, p. 14). So, hoping for a greater good may help to bring

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about smaller goods along the way. As such, maintaining and inspiring hope, even idealistic hope which may seem unattainable and therefore run the risk of disappointing and frustrating the hoper, is something we should consider to be an obligation. There is, arguably, a sense of obligation which comes with hope, particularly that which involves goals for 'the greater good', for society and for groups.

To suggest that hope is an obligation also means to accept that hope is also more than a disposition or an emotion. It is also something which is created in the social world, and which also *creates*. It is a familiar notion to say that hope is infectious, and that we can feel hopeful simply by being around hopeful people, and it is common understanding that social institutions have a role to play in creating hope (Ojala, 2012; Kretz, 2013; Roser, 2020). Hope is, therefore, a form of practice, by which I mean that human experience is understood as being shaped by normative discourse, which can in turn be shaped by the everyday or transformative practices undertaken by individuals and collectives through agentic power (Connell, 1987). Hope is both created by social discourses (i.e., discourses which define appropriate, reasonable, achievable goals to hope for) and helps to shape those discourses through action and practice. Sarah Wright (2008) puts hope as practice into context in a study of social movements in the Philippines, where she observes the ways in which farmers are encouraged to define themselves as active and hopeful, rather than passive and fearful, and in doing so bring hope into being through action. The act of hoping then, is an act of agency, giving individuals, and collectives, the power to begin to bring their desired futures into being. In 'doing' hope (having a hopeful conversation or thinking in hopeful ways for example) is the potential for transformation.

Hope can also be seen as a central human capability. Capabilities and the capability approach apply mainly within a human development context but offer a conception of hope which is important here. It centres on the question of what individuals are able to do and to be, and on what opportunities are available to them. Martha Nussbaum (2011) lists ten central human capabilities, one of which is emotions, described as

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> Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development) (p.33).

This comes alongside the capacity for practical reason, which is "Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life" (p.34). Therefore, the freedom to feel hope as an emotion, unencumbered by fear or anxiety, as well as to think critically about our lives and futures are central human capacities which should be supported and enabled. Although written with a development context, it is certainly applicable to say that hope, particularly the understanding of goals as possible (although perhaps unlikely) helps to create possibility and action. Likewise, hopelessness can prevent action and cause people to hold back rather than fulfilling their full potential. A little bit of hope and some reassurance that an individual's objectives are within reach can act as a powerful incentive, while hopelessness, pessimism, and stress put enormous pressure on both the will to take action, and on the resources available to do so (Dufflo, 2012). As a central human capability, we might therefore understand a degree of obligation in fostering and enabling hope. Structural and practical barriers to possibilities (lack of resources for example) are obvious limits to the hopes of individuals and groups, but so too are cultural barriers, coming from the narratives and rhetoric we see and hear around us.

In the context of the current environmental crisis, it is this potential for action and hope's ability to empower that suggests there is an obligation to inspire hope. Greta Thunberg famously said, "I don't want you to be hopeful"[4], arguing that we should instead be fearful and in turn suggesting

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[4] https://www.fridaysforfuture.org/greta-speeches (last accessed 26 August 2021).

that hope leads to complacency. Although she was obviously using the term hope in a more everyday sense, I would like to suggest that hope is, in fact, a motivational force which should not be underestimated. Maria Ojala (2012) found that when people felt pessimistic about the environment and issues such as climate change they were less likely to take action. Michelle Lueck (2007) similarly argues that a lack of hope leads to disillusionment and inaction. This disengagement leads to disempowerment as individuals no longer believe in their own efficacy. Knud S Larsen et al. (1993) make the argument that if people believe that only negative outcomes are possible, they are likely to act according to these expectations and so prove themselves correct. This self-fulfilling prophecy, in an environmental context, is surely a disaster. If there is a possibility of working our way out of our environmental predicament, we will need sustained hope in order to do so (Lueck, 2007). The obligation to inspire hope then might be extended to an obligation *to* hope, given the urgency of the situation we ought to think about how our goals might be realised, however demanding or seemingly unattainable they might be.

In a study of Swedish high-school students, Ojala (2015) highlights the ways in which teachers may have influence over their students' emotional responses to climate change. As individuals are influenced by those around them in terms of learning how to react to issues and how to deal with negative emotions. If teachers have a focus on doom and gloom, they are far less likely to inspire hope, and therefore action, than if they have a solution-focused approach to teaching about climate change. It therefore follows that, if we have the power to influence another's capacity to hope, then we should exercise it in a way which inspires hope rather than instils fear and possibly inaction as a result.

There are clear benefits for individuals in feeling hopeful. It feels good and is empowering. At a collective level, hope relieves the suffering of despair and empowers. Goals which are demanding, or indeed seemingly impossible, such as limiting climate change to a rise of 1.5 degrees, help to sustain other actions and prevents the despair which would create inaction and self-fulfilling prophecy. Although there are the dangers of disappointment (which would increase suffering)

and wishful thinking attached to hope, I argue that, on balance, hope is something we *ought* to strive to maintain and to inspire.

Through this section I have defined hope as active and goal-oriented, drawing distinctions between individual, collective, and transformative hopes. I have argued that it is more than an emotion or a disposition, and can also be considered, with some caveats, as a moral obligation. The main distinction between hope and other concepts, and indeed between types of hope, is agency. Whether we hope for something which engages our own agency, increases it, or limits it, or indeed transfers it to another is an important part of understanding hope and how it works. So, having established what hope *is*, I move on in the next chapter to explore agency as a core aspect of hope.

3   Hope and agency

"[To hope] is to experience ourselves as agents of potential as well as agents in fact"

(McGeer, 2004, p. 15)

One of the core aspects of hope, as discussed in the preceding chapter, is agency. As the most visible and observable element of hope, in that it produces the actions which we may understand as hopeful, it is important to fully understand agency if we are to understand hope as well. This chapter therefore focuses on the relationship between hope and agency. In particular, I will consider a relational approach to agency, and how the ways in which we conceptualise agency affect the ways in which we understand people's hopes and hopeful action.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the foundation of hope is agency. An actor's ability to undertake hopeful action, and indeed to imagine what action may be possible in the first place is the very cornerstone of the concept, separating it from optimism and mere wishful thinking. It is also the most observable part of hope. We may not be able to say with certainty what thoughts, hopeful or not, are in an individual's head, but we can observe their actions within their specific context and environment, and so can observe hopeful action. It therefore warrants further discussion here, and so what follows here is a brief digression into a discussion and explanation of agency. Agency is of course a well-trodden area of discussion, although it is not without its debates and controversies. Indeed, the structure-agency debate is arguably one of the most fruitful areas of sociology, and so the intention here is not to go over old ground and repeat it, but rather it is to include those points of the debate which help to explain a relational approach and how conceptions of agency affect our understanding of hope.

To that end, I will first outline the relational approach which I adopt throughout this project, discussing how this affects the ways in which agency and structure are conceptualised more broadly, and contrasting this with other conceptions of agency, such as rational choice which have been very influential in political science. Finally, I will explore the relationship between the concepts of hope and agency more explicitly.

3.1   A brief digression: Relational Sociology

Before exploring the specifics of agency and structure, it is helpful to outline the relational perspective taken here more broadly. Relational sociology is based on the hypothesis that we improve our understanding of social life by studying relations between *interactants* (Dépelteau, 2018). By this we mean studying the interactions and relations between what have been traditionally referred to as agents or actors. Relational sociologists argue that "A society, economy, or an organisation are not entities in and of themselves, nor are they collections of individuals and their actions: they are the sum of the interrelations between individuals" (Burkitt, 2016, p. 523). No individual is fully in control of social processes, nor is anyone simply determined by existing social patterns, (Burkitt, 2016; Dépelteau, 2018). Human beings are a social species, and always exist in some form of relationship with those around them, whether that is as a family, a tribe, a social organisation, or some other form of relationship. These relationships always have both historical and social characters, which affect the individuals within them. Importantly, individuals take on their identities through their social relations within these groups (Burkitt, 2016). The focus of relational sociology, then, is on relations, associations, networks, assemblages, interactions, and other similar concepts.

Relational sociology is a broad, and developing, field, and as such there is not always agreement between theorists, it is an approach rather than a grand theory. There are, however, five key ideas

which are, broadly speaking, consistent across the field[5]. First, the principle of interdependency and, second, the rejection of substances, mean that individuals and entities are what they are and do what they do *because of their interactions with each other* and with the social world. They do, of course, have their own characteristics and existences, but because they are involved in the social fields that they co-produce, they cannot be defined outside of their relations. They are interdependent parts of social processes, though they are not determined by them since they are co-producers. Third is processual thinking, by which we mean that the social universe is a process, composed of sub-processes, sub-sub-processes and so on, which emerge and evolve through interactions and relations. It is not made up of substances interacting with each other like balls on a billiard table. Fourthly is a rejection of modernist dualisms such as mind-body, in favour of the study of interactions. Finally, the principle of co-production means that any natural or social phenomenon is constituted through interactions (Dépelteau, 2018).

A relational perspective is of course not limited to sociology. Moving into political science, Relational Realism is the doctrine that interactions, transactions, social ties, and conversations are the central substance of social life. It concentrates on connections between actors, which both shape individual behaviour and form organisational structures and follows flows of communication, power relations, networks and conversational connections in its analysis (Tilly and Goodin, 2006). Tilly argues that relational explanations sit between the extremes of positivism and postmodernism (Tilly and Goodin, 2006; Demetriou, 2018) and look, not for covering laws, but for causal analogies which explain how social phenomena emerge. It concentrates on connections between people and between social sites, such as households, neighbourhoods, and associations. These connections form social structures at the same time as they influence and shape individual behaviour. Unlike theorists from other perspectives who keep

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[5] There are also several dissonances, not least between those theorists who take social realism as their starting point for relational sociology, and those who begin at a more constructivist stance. For a full discussion please see Dépeleteau (2018) and Vandenberghe (2018).

individuals and consciousness central to their analysis and explanations, relational realists should focus on social ties and transactions between sites, perhaps allowing for partly autonomous individual processes as they do so (Tilly, 2016).

Social phenomena, therefore, are the products of multiple and interdependent people and the interactions between them. We all contribute to producing, changing, and destroying social patterns such as institutions, structures, social systems and, indeed, societies. This also means that, because social phenomena are (for the most part) composed by multiple interactants, we cannot act alone to create or destroy them. Our agency is, also, relational. Agency, according to a relational perspective, is not viewed as "a property breathing life into passive substances", but as a social process which is "inseparable from the unfolding dynamics of situations" (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 294). This is significant for understandings of hope because of the centrality of agency in conceptions of hope. If agency is not an inherent capacity, but instead is coproduced through interaction and context, then it follows that hope is also coproduced through interaction and context, and the broader context in which we observe action and hopeful action must therefore be taken into account when we consider how individuals come to hope for certain things, and how hope and hopeful action are sustained and maintained.

In some versions of relational perspectives, interactions and transactions are not reducible to cognition, intentions, or ideas. Although relational agency, therefore, does relate to the mental states which are intertwined with interactions, it is related most closely to the mechanisms and processes of the interactions, and the contexts in which they occur (Tilly and Goodin, 2006; Demetriou, 2018). Social relations rather than actors' accounts or consciousness are, then, the most appropriate basis for the causal explanations favoured in such relational approaches (Demetriou, 2018). For Tilly (Mische and Tilly, 2003; Tilly and Goodin, 2006; Demetriou, 2018), the relational processes through which our social world is constructed are best understood by paying attention to exactly those processes and interactions, rather than to the intentions, consciousness or motivations of the individual actors, or collective actors, involved in those

interactions. This contrasts with constructivist approaches like that of Alberto Melucci (1995), who argues that a certain degree of emotional investment, implying an emphasis on the cognitive life of interactants, is required for things such as collective identity to be constructed through interactions. "Passions and feelings, love and hate, faith and fear are all part of a body acting collectively" he says, and "there is no cognition without feeling and no meaning without emotion" (p.45). To understand one part of collective action as rational, and another part as irrational, is therefore nonsensical.

This does not reject the relational aspect of construction, but acknowledges that collective identity must be recognised by others as actors (collective or individual) and systems or structures reciprocally constitute themselves through interactions and relationships (Melucci, 1995). The problem with relational perspectives such as Charles Tilly's is that individual consciousness, intentions, and emotion is essentially sacrificed to expose the transactions between social sites, and their importance, and how they build into more substantial or consequential relations between social sites. In sacrificing these, hope, along with other emotions and cognitive processes, becomes obscured.

There are other streams of relational theory which are influenced more heavily by symbolic interactionism, and these are less deterministic than those approaches which are more heavily influenced by more structuralist roots (Dépelteau, 2018). Frédéric Vandenberghe (2018) suggests that without a solid conception of structure, social theory becomes idealistic. Without culture and symbolism, it becomes mechanistic and deterministic, and without a theory of practice structures become reified as anonymous processes, lacking subjects. There is, then, a middle ground which acknowledges the existence of structures, socially constructed as they are, and their effects on individuals and groups, while also maintaining attention to the symbolism, culture, and consciousness which individuals bring to their interactions. Attention to the individual does not mean that we need to assume that the individuals have a fixed set of preferences, interests, and goals which they will follow, as in rational choice theories for example. Neither does it mean we

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need to follow a deterministic view of internalised social norms as drivers of social action, both of which will tend towards the generalised laws which tend to be rejected by relational sociologists as they do not capture ways in which social actors, embedded in space and time, respond to changing situations (Emirbayer, 1997). Relations and interactions between individuals are as constitutive as relations and interactions between organisations and collectives, as indeed they are between individuals and collectives and vice versa. It is in these spaces where we find the creative and innovative responses to issues such as sustainability (see Chapter 5) as well as hope. By maintaining a focus on individuals as well as interactions between collectives and organisations, there is room to conceptualise hope as both relational and dynamic, and as originating both in individuals *and* the spaces, groups, and institutions which they occupy (Cook and Cuervo, 2019).

3.2 Agency

3.2.1 Relational Agency

Agency is a much-debated concept and is therefore not without controversy. As mentioned earlier, my intention is not to go over old and well-trodden ground and repeat it, but rather it is to briefly include those points of the debate which help to explain why a relational approach to agency is most appropriate for exploring and understanding hope. Present-day conceptions of human agency can be traced back to the Enlightenment debates over whether instrumental rationality or moral and norm-based action is the truest expression of human freedom (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Barnes, 2000). Teleological and instrumentalist conceptions of action allowed for the invention of the rational 'free agent', able to make choices for themselves and for society (Lukes, 2006). The location of beliefs in individual experience, and grounding in the social contract by thinkers such as Locke, lead to a conception of agency which affirmed the capacity of humans to shape the circumstances in which they live and established agency as an individualist and

calculative conception of action. This familiar notion still underlies many Western accounts of freedom and progress today, for example underpinning rational choice theories, which are especially powerful in economics and political science (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). These theories, while powerful, are at odds with the relational approach which I take in this thesis.

Essentially, rational choice theory applies the rigour and predictive power found in classical economics to social and political science. By using simplifying assumptions that individual actors are rational, efficient, utility maximisers, behaviour can be modelled and predicted as there is an optimal course of action in any given situation. Individuals are assumed to act as if they engage in a cost-benefit analysis of each situation they encounter, before opting for the option which will maximise their self-interest. Rational choice theories therefore offer a deductive approach from which generalisations and predictions based on observations and data can be made. Moreover, they do this in a parsimonious way, by which I mean they do so with relatively few variables, giving an elegant and uncluttered model of behaviour (Hay, 2002, 2004). As a result of the predictive applications of the theory, rational choice is the approach of choice in many policy environments.

Rational choice theories typically struggle to account for collective action because there are often strong individual incentives to not act or, at the very least, to 'freeride'. A rational actor knows that individual action will have little to no impact on the overall outcome, and, more than that, knows that if others do cooperate, they will reap the benefits of their collective action without having to do anything themselves. Of course, if every individual reaches the same conclusion then collective action would never take place (Hay, 2002). Garret Hardin's (1968) tragedy of the commons is a clear example of this phenomenon; there exists a systematic exploitation of the environment by individual states and corporations, which continues despite a clear collective interest for it to stop. Environmental regulation is costly and impinges on their competitiveness in the international market, and the absence of an international entity which can enforce compliance with environmental regulations means that states and corporations simply choose

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not to burden themselves with extra taxes and costs. The result is the continuing exploitation and pollution of the environment, to the detriment of everyone in the long term.

A relational approach differs from these more traditional sociological approaches to agency, allowing more room for emotion, experience, culture, and society, rather than being more heavily influenced by a cost-benefit analysis. There is more space for collective action, making possible social change and challenging accepted or existing systems as found in local food activism for example.

More traditional theories of agency have conceptualised the power of human agency as centred on the capacity for reflexivity (for example Giddens, 1976 and Archer, 2000). Agency is separated from action, as agency is understood as the conscious capacity for knowledgeable reflexivity (Giddens, 1976) or reflexive deliberation (Archer, 2000), while other forms of action can still be interventions in the world but may be performed unconsciously. In contrast, a relational approach views agency as a moment in action more generally, which may have non-conscious origins, but is always set in relational contexts of interaction and interdependence.

Relational approaches reject the dualisms which Kantian philosophy is based on, and therefore do not follow the notions of action and agency put forward by Parsons and others. Instead, they draw on American Pragmatism (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Rather than viewing action as the pursuit of preestablished ends, these theorists (Schutz, Dewey and Herbert Mead for example) argue that ends and means develop alongside each other within contexts that are themselves ever changing and thus always subject to re-evaluation and reconstruction (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). The dualism between material and transcendental values is rejected since all human objects and purposes are constructed out of social meanings and values. These basic premises lay the foundations for a theory of action that analyses the "conditions of possibility" (Joas, 1992, p. 250) for the evaluative, experimental, and constructive dimensions of agency,

within the contexts of social experience. I argue that this focus on 'possibility' as part of what makes a relational approach most able to accommodate and conceptualise hope.

From a relational perspective, the origin of agency is *not* individual reflexivity. Instead, it begins in non-reflexive and non-cognitive areas of life, such as habits, and becomes subject to reflexivity at particular points in activity or in particular contexts (Burkitt, 2018). Our agency is set by being in relation with others in two ways. The first are impersonal interdependencies with the agency of others, by which we mean that although one's own capabilities and capacities will have a bearing on our actions, we will also be supported by unseen (and seen) others. For example, a teacher's effectiveness is influenced by management, colleagues, administrative staff, building maintenance workers etc. And their agency as a teacher therefore rests on a network of interrelations with others which either enables or constrains it. Second, we may consolidate and actively use the power we get from the network of relations which emerges around us over time, but we do so not through the pursuit of overarching goals, but instead by using goals and strategies which emerge and change because of the shifting relations in which our actions are embedded. Importantly, people are interdependent and are interactants, not lone agents, moving away from the individualism in many other theories of agency. None of us could have differential powers outside of interrelations and interdependencies with others.

This differs from approaches which understand action as being created through norms and rational choice theory which employ a means-end approach to action and agency, whereby people strive for clearly defined goals which are rationally chosen and normatively oriented (Burkitt, 2016, 2018). Hans Joas' (1992) concept of creative action suggests that action always takes place in situated and embodied contexts of communicative interaction. Perception and action are therefore anchored in pre-reflective beliefs and habits, actions which are considered unconscious in other theories of agency. It becomes the focus of reflection only when individuals encounter problems within their situated interactions. At these points of crises, new goals are not the result, rather, the individual rediscovers the 'horizon of possibilities' (Joas, 1992, p. 133).

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Rather than goals, we see 'ends-in-view' which need to be decided upon and which can be refined or abandoned as the situation changes during interactions. As the horizon of possibilities opens up for interactants, the possibility for creative action also opens up, and, therefore, so hope and hopeful action become possible too. Interactants solve their problems dialogically through their communicative actions. Rather than simply searching for new goals, they also reconstruct the meanings of their joint actions within the situations in which they are acting (Joas, 1992; Burkitt, 2016, 2018).

Ian Burkitt (2018) refers to this as 'aesthetic activity', not in the sense of artistic aesthetics, but in terms of how humans make and experience meaning, and how the body is fundamental in this (Johnson, 2007). Feelings and emotions emerge from an interactant's position in the relations which constitute certain situations, which guide and influence how the interactant comes to think and reflect on them. Many of our actions, therefore, are *not* instrumental or normative, but are undertaken because of the meanings associated with them and the emotional fulfilment which this brings. For example, meanings associated with relationships, such as family and friendships, are pursued as ends in themselves (Burkitt, 2018). Perhaps here we also find room for hopeful action, in that meanings attached to acting, whether or not the goal is likely to be reached, are important to interactants in and of themselves. Hopeful action, as discussed earlier, makes us feel good (Nolt, 2010), and so it is possible that hopeful action may be undertaken for the sake of hopeful action, particularly where the ultimate goal seems distant or lofty.

Creative action is, however, only possible in certain circumstances where interactants have the freedom for possibilities to emerge from the situation itself, and in which they have the power to define those possibilities or goals. In many situations goals are set externally by those outside the interaction (Burkitt, 2018).

In situations where interactants *are* able to define their own possibilities and goals, we find creative and innovative action, with fluid and flexible goals, as interactants experiment. For

example, individuals and groups looking to change the existing food system may establish new and novel ways of provisioning for themselves and their communities which operate outside of accepted economic norms and structures (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Schlosberg and Coles, 2016; Schlosberg and Craven, 2019). They are therefore able to set their own goals, rather than accepting those set by established systems, such as high yield and profit, instead favouring small scale production, sustainability, and community well-being for example. The result is often creative and innovative projects and solutions as individuals and groups not only define their own possibilities, but also practically explore them through a process of trial and error.

My understanding of agency is as the power of interactants to produce an effect, which is always situated within wider relational contexts (including the presence of more dominant groups or institutions for instance), and as determined by the individual capacities and biographies of interactants. Reflexive agency is a part of those interactions and may have unconscious origins, meaning that perception and cognition do not precede the interaction but evolve within it alongside the horizon of possibilities or end goals (Burkitt, 2018). So, agency occurs within manifold social relations and between interactants who have various capacities, biographies, and identities. Although for some theorists, such as Tilly (Mische and Tilly, 2003; Demetriou, 2018), it then follows that the study of the interactions which result in such agency should be limited to those interactions and social relations, rather than including attention to the intentions of actors and cognitive aspects of interactions, I argue that there is room for a qualitative understanding of participants' understandings of their own and other's actions.[6] By doing so, we find that there is room for hope, particularly in terms of the creation of possibilities and evolution of goals, and

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[6] This has methodological implications as a relational ethnography would generally look at different groups and their interactions, erring on the side of social network analysis. Instead, I have focussed in on one group, leaving more scope for exploring the interactions between group members and the ways in which they establish and re-establish goals and generate/maintain hope. This will be discussed in greater length in Chapter 6 (Methodology).

also for creative solutions like those included in sustainable materialism in that these occur in spaces between existing institutions and flows and are actively built by participants.

3.2.2   Temporally locating relational agency

Hope is, importantly, future oriented. Although action of course takes place in the present, hopeful goals are situated at some point, perhaps distant, in the future. It is, therefore, necessary to temporally locate both agency and actors (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) in addition to the social nature of agency and structure, if we are to understand hope and hopeful agency. Agency is "a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within contingencies of the moment)" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 963). Agency must therefore be understood within the flow of time. Structural contexts of action are also temporal and relational, overlapping ways of ordering time which social actors can assume different simultaneous agentic orientations towards. Understanding these orientations gives us the ability to explore varying degrees of manoeuvrability, inventiveness, and reflective choice shown by actors in relations to constraining or enabling contexts of action. Through understanding these temporal orientations it may become "clear how the structural environments of action are both dynamically sustained by and also altered through human agency – by actors capable of formulating projects for the future and realizing them, even if only in small part, and with unforeseen outcomes, in the present" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 964). And it is in this formulating of future projects that we find hope and hopeful agency.

There are three temporal elements of agency, according to Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische (1998). They are the iterational element (oriented toward the past), the projective element (oriented toward the future), and the practical-estimative element (oriented toward the present). All three elements are present in all actions to a greater or lesser degree. One will, however,

predominate: the analogy given is of a musical chord, in which one 'note' sounds louder than the other two, though they are nevertheless played together. It is therefore possible to speak of action that is more or less directed to the future, engaged with the past, or engaged with the present. By differentiating between the different dimensions of agency, we can help to account for the variability and change in actors' capacities for imaginative and critical intervention in the diverse contexts in which they act.

The iterational element of agency is based on actors' use of past patterns of thought and action. This will inevitably have been gained through socialisation, as well as being learned over time, and therefore contributes to stability and order in the actors' social worlds by sustaining identities, interactions, and institutions. The practical-evaluative element is present-oriented and is the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgements about possible actions, responding to demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities in evolving situations. The projective element – which is most pertinent for a discussion of hope – is future oriented and involves an actor's ability to imagine future trajectories of action. These may creatively reconfigure structures in relation to desires, fears, and hopes for the future.

Projectivity "involves a first step toward reflectivity, as the response of a desirous imagination to problems that cannot satisfactorily be resolved by the taken-for-granted habits of thought and action that characterize the background structure of the social world" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 984). It allows actors to reconstruct and innovate on traditions, past experiences and accepted responses and actions. They respond to conflicts and challenges by reconfiguring received schemas and generating alternative possible responses constructing changing images of where they think they are going, where they want to go, and how to get there. These images can be conceived of with varying degrees of clarity and can extend to a greater or lesser extent into the future.

Importantly, the ways in which actors understand their own relationships to the past, present, and future make a difference to their actions. As well as the actors' belief in their own ability to effect change, or at least to act, their conceptions of agentic possibility in relation to structure profoundly influences how actors in different periods and places see their worlds as being more or less responsive to human action and imagination. The context in which an actor finds themselves therefore has profound effects on the possibilities and limits of agency, and therefore hope.

Agency is, therefore, intrinsically social and relational, as it centres around actors' engagement in contextual environments in their own structured – yet flexible – social worlds (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Habermas, 2007; Anderson, 2011). Viewed internally, agency involves different ways of experiencing the world, although agency is always *toward* something specific, and it is through these ways of experiencing the world that actors form relationships with others, with places, with events and with meanings. Externally, agency is made up of interactions, in a sort of ongoing conversation. It is always a dialogic process through which actors engage with others in collective contexts of actions (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). This has implications methodologically, in that although the reasons – the justification – for an action may be probed, it is the external result of agency which may be observed, meaning that we can only really explore agency after the fact.

3.3   Structure

One cannot really discuss agency without also discussing structure, as once we begin to discuss how goals may be set for people externally, we must understand where external goals might come from, and one source is certainly structure. 'Structure' simply means the recurring pattern in certain aspects of the manifold relations between people, which in practice are changing all the time. The problem with the term structure is that it suggests a fixed and rigid framework,

which obscures the changing and fluid pattern of social relations. The image of an individual confronting structure which is outside of their control is a powerful one, and one which has a significant impact on the ways in which we think of hope. If structure is viewed as rigid and (largely) outside of an individual's influence, then hoping to overcome it or to change it in some way is immediately rendered less realistic. Perhaps, then, it is worth remembering that we never confront social structure as individuals alone, because we are always nested within some form of social relations, whether these are interpersonal (family, peers etc) or more impersonal (politics, work etc) (Burkitt, 2018).

The problem with traditional notions of structure, as with conceptions of agency, is that they are deterministic, leaving little room for hope and hopeful action, as there is little opportunity for creative action or for actors to alter structures in any meaningful way. Talcott Parsons (1968), typifies this viewpoint, suggesting that individuals make normative choices based on the functional needs of society, motivated by approval from others. This gives primacy to social structures, assuming that it is the social system which ultimately determines human interactions.

On the other hand, social exchange perspectives and theories such as rational choice radically oppose this Parsonian viewpoint. They suggest that structures are aggregates of individual decisions. As actors maximise their interests and evaluate alternatives according to their preferences, they produce social outcomes – structures. Therefore, social structures are entirely dependent on individual actions, not the other way around (Barnes, 2000). Although this helps to solve the problem of determinism, this viewpoint has its own issues. It undermines the concept of structure almost entirely (Barnes, 2000), and as negotiating structures, or altering them in some way, are often the focus of hopes this detracts from the value of hope to some extent. Indeed, there is little room for hope in this position, for the simple reason that structures are often the shapers of hopes, or at the very least the influencers of them, and therefore warrant acknowledgment. Some of the novel or creative responses found in a diverse economies framework (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, 2006a), for example, exist outside of structures, but are

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established as a direct response to them, and so arguably would not exist in the same way without having those established structures and systems to respond to.

To understand why some hopes are deemed viable by actors, and others not, or why some hopes are empowering, while others necessitate a transfer of power to another agent, or, indeed, an organisation, it is necessary to understand the interplay between structure and agency (and so accept the existence of structure and the difference between it and agency). One cannot be given ultimate dominance over the other. In the middle-ground, then, we find Structuration theories. Most notably by Anthony Giddens (1976), these posit that structure and action are mutually constitutive. Rather than being treated as 'social facts', social structures are both the medium and the product of social actions. Although this avoids the determinism of Parsonian theories, and the consequences of rational choice theories which dismiss 'structure' almost altogether, structuration theories are not without their critics. Margret Archer (2000), most notably, criticises the conflation within structuration theories, which, she argues, render structure and agency almost indistinguishable, therefore preventing analysis of their interplay over time.

The solution, for Archer, is to maintain an analytical dualism, keeping structures and agency separate, but with irreducible causal properties. Going further, Archer also stresses that structures are not simply the results of rules and resources as suggested in structuration theories. Rather, they are forms of social organisation, with their own potentials, powers, and tendencies, meaning that:

> [T]he social relations upon which they depend are held to have independent causal properties rather than being mere abstractions from our repetitive and routinised behaviour, and, most importantly, because these relations which constitute structures pre-date occupants of positions within them, thus constraining or enabling agency (Archer, 1995, p. 106).

Instead of atomistic individuals who society contributes nothing to and who generate structure through rational action (who Archer calls Modernity's Man), and instead of indeterminate individuals who are formed entirely by society, structure, and socialisation (Society's Being), Archer offers a middle concept. Society, or structure, contributes 'something rather than nothing', but that this 'something' is not 'everything' (Archer, 2000, p. 253).

Relational approaches to agency and structure also sit in this middle ground. Rather than one creating the other, with structure somehow existing separately and 'above' the micro level of social relations, they constitute and maintain each other. Burkitt (2018) suggests that societies take on their particular character, patriarchal or capitalist for example, to the degree that those relations dominate and influence other relations. These are the relations which shape the 'horizons of possibilities' discussed earlier. Structures are perhaps better understood here as networks or webs of relations and interactions, which are first created and then maintained by those interactions and relationships, creating the context which preserves them by influencing goals and 'horizons of possibilities' for interactants. As agency is understood as the power of interactants, situated within specific contexts and determined by their biographies and capacities, there is, therefore, scope for resistance, as interactants can set their own internal goals as well as taking those set externally through structures. In this way, structure is less rigid and less unassailable than it is in a Parsonian viewpoint, but still maintains relevance and is useful for understanding how interactants define possibilities, goals, and, indeed, hopes.

3.4   Conclusion: Relating Hope and Agency

The conception of projectivity found in temporal accounts of relational agency begins to sound startlingly like hope, specifically transformative hope. We have the individual's agency at the centre, and an orientation toward the future, both of which are inherent parts of transformative hope. Hope, then, at least transformative hope, can be understood as a type of agency, oriented

toward the future, and concerned with bringing about change. Actions can be pre-reflective, which means that up until they reach a point of crisis when interactants must reflect on them, they may not be for clearly defined goals. This is the key difference between simple projective agency, and more specific – and goal-oriented – hopeful action. There is a distinction to be made between agency and hope more broadly, though, and it is one which is important to make if we are to separate hope and agency as concepts; all hope may be (a type of) agency, but not all agency is hope.

As I argued in Chapter 2, separating the concepts of hope and agency requires caution, in order to avoid further over-defining hope and breaking it down into still smaller categories. It is, though, useful to consider that there are hopes which engender more active agency than others (Cook and Cuervo, 2019). Following this notion of hopes which engender agency and hopes which do not, I argue that hopes which are not centred on agency may still be hopes if they remain specific, realistic, and require action to be achieved (on the part of the hoper or otherwise). If the hoper is unable to exercise agency, though, because of individual, material or structural reasons, then they become critical, resolute, estimative, or patient (Webb, 2007, 2008b). They are not, I would argue, non-representational in that they remain specific; to be otherwise would be to become optimism or wishful thinking rather than hope. As previously argued in Chapter 2, optimism and hope are related in that one must feel that change is possible on order to hope, but nevertheless they remain different, primarily in the degree to which a goal is thought of as possible. Although these types of hope are not centred on agency, they do still require effort, significant levels of effort in some cases, on the part of the hoper to be maintained. They should not, therefore, be thought of as passive (Cook and Cuervo, 2019).

I argue that representational hope is effectively the same as transformative hope, which is the term I intend to use throughout this thesis. Like representational hope, transformative hope centres on a sense of agency and possibility and is oriented towards a clear vision of the future which it is working towards. The use of the term 'transformative' rather than 'representational'

indicates that that clear vision of the future is one based on change, social or individual, in a real and practical sense. Projective agency is at its heart, although, as noted, it is more than a simple orientation toward the future. It requires that the hoper have an awareness of the situation which requires change, as well as a specific view of the change that they wish to see, and how to get there. If all transformative hope is projective agency, not all projective agency is transformative hope. Hopeful goals, as stated earlier, have a specific character. They are possible, and plausible, but they are not certainties. Even if the hoper undertakes the necessary action, there is still an element of uncertainty about a hoped-for goal.

Hopes emerge from our past and present interactions with others and with the world around us and so are relational. What we feel is possible is contingent on our interactions, and on those externally who may influence what we feel is possible. In terms of sustainability, the dominant narratives of climate change and the actions which are open to people have a significant impact on how interactants view possibilities. The same is true of food activism, where the actions taken by interactants are influenced by how the food system works, and what interactants are told is possible (for example, planting food on public land is often subject to getting permission from the right people), as well as what their own past experiences and current interactions tell them is possible.

Utopias, which I discuss in greater depth in the next chapter, provide us with grand and totalising hopes, which are of course related to (and perhaps examples of) transformative hope (Mische, 2009). Transformative hope may exist with or without a utopian goal. Perhaps then the same is true of a distinction between transformative hope and projective agency. Transformative hope involves powerful, though less grand, and less total than utopian, visions for the future, and requires projective agency, but projective agency may exist without a transformative hopeful goal. It may exist in the everyday and mundane, which, though no less important, does not have the same character as transformative hope, or indeed utopias.

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Each interactant also has multiple perspectives on themselves and others, drawn from their past experiences, present circumstances, and understandings of the future (Burkitt, 2016). This can make their actions unpredictable at times. Their internal dialogues are not only of those with whom they are currently in interaction, but also with those they have interacted with in other temporal-relational contexts, and the perspectives which others take of them, communicated through their actions and attitudes. As such we may not always be fully aware of the meaning of our actions, as they are so rarely fully transparent. The opportunity to practice degrees of agency depends not only on our personal capacities, such as reflexivity, but from the situation itself and the style of our interdependences (Burkitt, 2016).

Ultimately, agency is the power of interactants to produce an effect. It is always located within temporal-relational contexts, within a society which is the sum of social relations between individuals. There is no macro level of social relations – only micro-relational contexts in that structure is created, and maintained, through social relations rather than existing independently, and there is always scope for resistance on the part of actors. Agency is also determined by the biographies and capacities of interactants, each one with a unique position in relation to their past, present and futures. This understanding of agency allows us to better understand and conceptualise the ways in which external individuals and organisations, as well as broader contexts and environments, may affect our sense of what is possible, and therefore what we hope for.

4 Utopia and hope

Having defined hope and then considered the agency at its core, this chapter will move on to consider one manifestation of hope: Utopianism. In terms of social movements, and certainly within a context of environmental movements and responses to the current climate crisis, hope is often linked to utopianism. In fact, Henri Desroche (1979) even goes so far as to describe the two concepts as "twin sisters" (p.23). So, this section will explore how utopianism and hope interlink, and indeed how they differ, and what that may mean for exploring hope and environmental movements and activism in a broader sense.

One cannot meaningfully discuss hope without also discussing Utopianism, littered as that literature is with references to desire, to possibility, and to hope itself. Both hope and utopianism are future-facing, and both have an important role to play in improving, or at least altering, the present. Thomas Berry (2013) suggests that we do not imagine alternative ways of living until we are faced with moments of crisis. It is in these moments of crisis that utopian thinking attempts to find routes out of the crisis and to map out possible futures (Garforth, 2005). Consequently, Berry calls these moments "moments of grace" (2013, p. 196) as they push us to imagine alternatives and possibilities; another way of referring to them might be as moments of hope. Perhaps the current environmental crisis then is a moment of grace, or indeed hope, in which we can find possible (as opposed to impossible), greener, futures.

At first glance, hope and utopia could easily be seen as having an intrinsic and positive relationship. However, on closer inspection, there are complexities and tensions between the two which mean they remain distinct. Tom Moylan (2000) argues that radical hope is the "correlate socio-political position" (p.157) of utopianism, implying that there are non-radical forms of hope that are non-utopian. Hope, as established earlier, has many manifestations. Some focus on individual action, while others do not. Some may bring about transformative change, while others

may maintain the status quo. As a result, different manifestations of hope have differing relationships with utopianism. To complicate matters, there are differing conceptions of utopia as well, not all of which are compatible with hope. Ruth Levitas (1990a) identifies two forms of utopia: utopia as system, which is transformative and instrumental; and utopia as process, which is centred on wishful imagining rather than will-full action. One is, therefore, an expression of hope while the other is an expression of desire (Webb, 2008a). There is also disagreement over whether utopia and hope are compatible at all. For Bloch (1995) it is impossible to say that hope could be incompatible with utopia, as for him they are two sides of the same coin. For others (e.g. Marcel, 1962) hope is an orientation toward the future that is fundamentally incompatible with utopia. In some instances, utopias (as imaginary reconstitutions of society) never enter the imaginary of the hoper, who may be instead focused on more individualistic hopes, or on hopes which are too tightly tethered to reality. In others, utopianism is a type of presumption where hope should be placed in an 'other' (Marcel, 1962; Dauenhauer, 1986). By attempting to complete an incompletable history, utopias supress the sense of possibility in hope, and are, therefore, hope-crippling (Marcel, 1962; Dauenhauer, 1986; Webb, 2008b, 2008a). Clearly, both hope and utopia are contested concepts, and the relationships between the two are therefore also problematic.

In what follows, I will first explore what is meant by utopia, and then discuss the relationship, and differences, between utopia and hope. I argue that hope and utopia are two separate but *intertwined* concepts that both represent ways of engaging with the world. I argue that not all utopianism inspires the kind of transformative hope that leads to action and change, but that the type of utopianism which *does* is a necessary part of all transformative hope.

4.1 Defining Utopianism

"Utopia is how we would live and what kind of a world we would live in if we could do just that" (Levitas, 1990b, p. 1). Utopian visions, varying in form, content and location, appear in many cultures, so much so that it has been suggested that utopianism is a fundamental part of the human condition (Levitas, 1990b). H.G. Wells said that the central subject of sociology is, or should be, utopia (1906). However, while there is academic interest, understandings of utopia are often coloured by popular understandings of the term which often suggest to people that utopia is an impossible dream, an escapist fantasy, and that those who pursue it are, at best, hopelessly unrealistic, and at worst are actively dangerous (Levitas, 1990b).

Much of this conception stems from the play on words in the name 'utopia' itself. The word 'utopia' was coined by Thomas More in 1516 and combines three Greek words; *topos* (place) *ou* (no) and *eu* (good), meaning that utopia is at once a 'good' place and a 'no' place (Sargisson and Sargent, 2017). That said, it is important to note that there may be a distinction to be drawn between the *word* and the *concept*, which is, necessarily, far more comprehensive philosophically (Bloch, 1995). Although the definition of the term is a useful starting point "to limit the utopian to the Thomas More variety, or simply to orientate it in that direction, would be like trying to reduce electricity to the amber from which it gets its Greek name and in which it was first noticed" (Bloch, 1995, p. 15). Utopia is more than the definition of the word; for Bloch, it is an excessive movement toward something better, and can be found all throughout life (Anderson, 2006).

Bloch's view of utopia is one amongst many. There is a lack of definition, and a lack of consensus, throughout utopian studies as a field (Levitas, 1990b), which means that utopia, and therefore its relationship to hope, is slippery. There are discussions and debates about utopia both in terms of form and function. For the purposes of this discussion, I will focus on the function of utopia, rather than its form.

There are, broadly speaking, two schools of thought on the function of utopia (Levitas, 1990b, 2007, 2013). One argues that utopia is a form of critique. In this view, an ideal society is postulated that highlights the problems with the present. These utopias need not be places we actually want to bring about, nor do they need to be possible; instead, they are a mirror that we hold up to the present, or part of it, to demonstrate what is wrong and what, therefore, needs to change. In this conception, Utopia is detailed and explicit, and is most concerned with what would be 'ideal' rather than what is possible, or indeed with how we might reach that ideal. As a result, this notion of utopia is often dismissed as wishful thinking because the imagined ideal is an impossibility, although there may be value in the critique they provide. The second approach considers utopianism as practically transformative (Levitas, 1990b, 2013, 2017). Rather than stopping at critique and at saying what is wrong and what must change, utopian thought seeks to identify possibility and then to inspire action to move towards one or more of those possibilities. In essence this means that utopias are not just tools for critique but are in fact visions of worlds that we want to achieve. It is this type of utopian thinking that is most intertwined with hope, as I have defined it.

This notion of utopia as something we want to bring about, or a goal to achieve, can result in difficulties, as it leads to traditional understandings of utopia as a blueprint for an ideal future. This fixes the content of utopia in either time or place, and certainly in form, leading to an inflexible vision. Although inflexible, it creates a fixed, concrete point towards which hope may orientate itself, and so is arguably useful for hope (Harvey, 2000; Webb, 2008b). Hope, as discussed earlier, is active, and involves an individual (or collective) acting toward their goal. Arguably, a clear and fixed goal therefore makes sense for hope as it provides an obvious point toward which an individual can orient themselves, with no ambiguity or uncertainty to stall action. That said, there is a sense of possibility and of flexibility in hope as goals are configured and reconfigured over time, and so perhaps hope and blueprint utopias are not as compatible as it might appear at first glance. Blueprints and concrete goals shut down other possibilities in the

future, as well as closing down other possibilities within the utopian visions themselves, therefore closing down the creativity that is at the heart of utopianism. When they are taken as productive or prescriptive, blueprint utopias are also, perhaps, most easily charged with being unrealistic and idealistic, as the inflexible nature of the vision can fail to respond to society around it and is therefore more easily undermined and dismissed (Levitas, 2013).

This idea of blueprint utopias as rigid and prescriptive, as opposed to functioning as mirrors of critique, has often led to negative understandings of utopia more generally, as they are associated with idealism and accusations of unrealistic wishful thinking. Indeed, the term is often used pejoratively. In these negative conceptions, utopia is understood to be an *impossible* goal associated with wishful thinking and unrealistic idealism. It is also often associated with both authoritarianism and violence (Levitas, 2013) because if utopia is a perfect place, it follows that it cannot be challenged. This lack of challenge leads to totalitarianism and a lack of freedom, eventually leading to an Orwellian dystopia (Sargisson and Sargent, 2017) in which action is directed in such a way that closes down space for critique and experimentation (Kinna, 2016). It is this perceived rigidity that leads to a situation where these utopias become somehow anti-utopian. Blueprint utopias, and utopias more generally, should not, therefore, be understood as actually prescriptive. Instead, an understanding of them as less rigid allows them to illustrate principles, model practical operations, and inspire and provide springboards for actions. They are not ends in themselves (Kinna, 2016).

It is more helpful, though perhaps not as neat, to think of utopias as a process, or as a method of engaging with the world. These utopian visions are flexible and evolve over time. They are based on the notion that the world around us is unfinished, and in a constant state of 'becoming'. The future is always 'not yet', even as we move towards it. As such, there is always room for creative thinking and action, for different utopian visions, and for hope. Utopias that are realised lose their creative power and cease to inspire hope as it is no longer needed. Utopia as a method, rather than a concrete goal, exposes limitations in current policy and discourse, demands that we think

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holistically about possible futures, and allows exploration of human needs and human flourishing (Levitas, 2013) as well as of possible futures and the routes toward them.

Perhaps most useful, and most flexible, is Levitas' (2017) definition of Utopia as the "expression of the desire for a better way of living or of being" (p.6). In this we find the beginnings of the more traditional notion of blueprints, although they remain unformed and flexible, therefore remaining attractive, as well as utopia as a method of changing society, and the beginnings of prefigurative projects. Utopias look beyond contemporary social arrangements and imagine something different, possibly radically so. For Bloch (1995), the importance of utopianism lies in this open-endedness. The material world is inherently unfinished and in a constant state of becoming, the future is 'not yet' and is full of possibilities. Utopian thinking looks forward and anticipates these possibilities, and in doing so affects the future (Levitas, 1990a; Bloch, 1995).

Richard Roberts (1990, p.122) suggests that utopianism involves a "stark choice" between allowing hopes to "turn into nothing" or to see in them "the free and unconditional future, and turn [them] into being." This is based on the idea that utopian visions are not just an image of what the 'good life' *could* be, but are instead an image of what life *should* be, "the wish that things might be otherwise becomes a conviction that it does not have to be like this" (Levitas, 1990b, p. 1). Rather than 'no place', Bloch (1995) conceptualises Utopia (and hope) as 'not yet'. Like the 'no' in 'no place', 'not' implies that the object or utopia does not really exist. The 'yet' implies something different to 'no place' though, as it suggests something on the horizon of what does exist, or reality. 'Yet' also implies a sense of possibility, if not quite inevitability. 'Yet' can mean "not so far but expected in the future", "conceivable now but not yet possible", or even "present now but in a problematic manner but yet to come to full realisation" (Anderson, 2006, p. 696). Defined as 'not yet', utopias may be the possible but not certain goals which are necessary for hope.

As explored above, there are broadly two approaches to utopia, utopia as critique and utopia as possibility. This is not to say that there is not crossover between the two. Utopias explicitly say what a better society would contain and how it would operate (Levitas, 2017, p. 6) and in doing so they both identify new possibilities and goals, *and* actively critique the present (Levitas, 1990a, 1990b). For Levitas (1990b), utopias are *not* concrete end points that can be reached. Instead, they are a process and can be ever changing, as with Bloch's notion of the 'not yet'. "Once the world is seen as in a constant state of process, but a process whose direction and outcome is not predetermined, there are always many possible futures, futures that are real possibilities rather than merely formal possibilities" (Levitas, 1990b, p. 102). Anderson (2006) defines utopianism as "a means of transformative intervention in immanent utopic processes that strives to give and find hope through an anticipation of alternative possibilities or potentialities" (p.703). He argues that utopianism is "a resolutely practical method that enables one to affect those utopic processes that a utopian materialism has previously enabled us to be affected by" (p.703). Rather than a prescriptive and fixed goal, thinking in utopias allows for the critique of the present *and* for the identification of possibility. It is this sense of possibility, rather than certainty, that inspires action, and hope.

To go a step further, utopias can be understood not just as method, but as practice. This is based on the notion that utopianism has at its heart the task of intervening in the present to open up new possibilities that must by extension lead to practice (Bloch, 1995; Anderson, 2006).This places the emphasis on the second more practical approach to utopia; although as said above this does not mean that utopias are not also critiques of the present. There are several ways in which this practice might come about. Wayne Hudson (1983) identifies at least four ways in which utopianism can be oriented before practice even begins. These are: present (something better that exists here and now), developmental (something better will come out of here and now), recursive (something better is elsewhere or elsewhen), and eschatological (a radical new and better will come to be elsewhere and elsewhen).

Beyond these orientations, there are myriad utopic practices. For example: those which open up alternatives in existing systems (Kellner, 1997), participatory work which fosters change by working with people to open up new possibilities (Layoun, 1997), and alternative economic imaginaries (Hodgson, 1999) to name just three. In prefigurative practice for example, utopias are imagined, and then are implemented, at least in part, by groups or individuals who wish to change the situation in the present and move towards their proposed utopias (Kinna, 2016). These utopias still shift and evolve rather than being fixed in the traditional sense of blueprint utopias, as actors 'try out' aspects of their utopias and alter them as needed (Kinna, 2016). Although utopias here act as a goal, they are not fixed in the way in which blueprint utopias are, and so avoid the pitfalls associated with them.

4.2   Hope, Utopia, and Prefiguration

As a revolutionary idea, utopias are intrinsically linked to prefiguration. By prefigurative action, I mean actions that embody the forms of social relations that actors wish to see, reminiscent of Ghandi's famous 'be the change you wish to see'. Prefiguration is the project of building a new world in the heart of the old, and as such is inherently utopian. There are tensions, though, in the relationship between prefiguration and utopia, which echoes to a large extent the tensions between hope and utopia. The issue is that abstract utopias focussed on critique lack practical content, and as such can be limiting in terms of action (Kinna, 2016). Blueprint utopias, on the other hand, and as mentioned earlier, close down prefigurative action by focussing on a prescriptive goal (Kinna, 2016). As an active manifestation of utopian thinking, prefigurative action is closely linked to hope and the activeness it implies. It therefore gives a clear intersection between the two terms, that will be explored further here.

There are several ways in which we might engage hopefully with the world, which range from inaction (as with Webb's resolute or patient hope) to actively and practically working towards

one's hopes. One example of transformative hopeful action can be found in prefigurative, or indeed utopian, practice. This practice means that actors work not just to imagine the world differently and to identify possibility, but rather to live those possibilities and differences. They do not just imagine the world differently, instead they *make* it differently (Levitas, 2013).

For some, 'living the change' is an immersive way of life. For example, the small village of Marinaleda in Southern Spain has, for the last thirty-five years, been the centre of a tireless struggle to create a living utopia. In the 1980s, the villagers expropriated land from wealthy aristocrats and have made it the foundation for a cooperative way of life. Today, the farms and processing plant in Marinaleda are collectively owned and provide work for all, the stadium boasts a mural of Che Guevara, and monthly 'Red Sundays' are held when everyone cleans up the neighbourhood (Hancox, 2013). The Mayor of Marinaleda in Andalusia said of utopia and prefigurative practice:

> We're trying to put in place now what we want for the future. But we don't want to wait till tomorrow, we want to do it for today. If we start to do it today, then it becomes possible, and it becomes an example to show others, that there are other ways to do politics, other ways to do economics, another way to live together – a different society (Hancox, 2013, p.33)

There are many different examples of prefigurative projects, not all of which are as entirely immersive as examples like Marinaleda. Many alternative projects lead to the possibility of sustainable transformation and reconfiguring social forms, which may be referred to as 'urban laboratories', 'socio-technical niches', 'real', 'everyday' and, importantly, 'working utopias' (Yates, 2021). What links them all is the desire for a different future and a different society, which is undeniably utopian. Enacting this utopian goal is what makes it a possibility in the present. It is in this enactment that we find hope. The goal, a different society, is utopian, the effort to bring it about in the present, is hopeful.

The process of experimentation that is the basis of prefigurative action allows for goals to be constantly rethought and redefined and is indeed the basis of process utopias. The experiment of the prefigurative project is how goals are discovered. David Harvey (2000) and Webb (2008b) stipulate that hope, and in particular transformative hope, requires a concrete goal. This is because, without a well-defined goal, action toward that goal is unlikely. This does not mean that prefigurative projects, which alter and redefine their goals, cannot be compatible with hope. Prefigurative projects may begin with a more concrete or set goal in view, thus making action both likely and possible. There is then room for goals to be altered and rethought as the process of experimentation brings other alternatives to light for example. In this way, although they strive towards the concrete goals that Webb (2008) and Harvey (2000) argue are needed for transformative hopeful action, they are also ever-changing. Lucy Sargisson and Lyman Sargent (2004) follow this line of reasoning when they suggest that intentional communities are not complete, but that they give the opportunity to explore alternatives and are, therefore, utopia in process (or process utopias). It then follows that prefigurative projects can be thought of both as process utopias and as compatible with hope, particularly transformative hope. Indeed, it is transformative hope that would allow prefigurative, or utopian, practice to flourish.

As with hope more broadly, agency is again at the centre of the relationship between hope and utopia. The two concepts are most closely related when there is a belief in individual agency, particularly in individual action and endeavour. Transformative hope suggests that we are taking an agential interest in the world and engaging in exploring the contours of what might be (Stockdale, 2019). Webb (2008b) points to various moments in history where utopian thinking, and acting, has been prevalent which demonstrate the relationship between hope and utopias in practice. For example, seventeenth-century England saw a flourishing of utopian ideas following the Long Parliament in 1640 and the encouragement of active involvement in politics of the public (although there are problems with this example in that the utopian ideas were perhaps short-lived, the point is more the relationship between utopian ideas and hopeful action) (Webb,

2008b). For the first time, demonstrations and, for example, the spreading of information through pamphlets, enabled people to influence policy and politics. At this time, there was a profound confidence in human endeavour, the possibilities of collective human action, and a belief in humans as transformative participants in history (Webb, 2008b). Although the action described here is not prefigurative per se, it does show that if a wider context is based on a belief in the power of individual agency, then individual belief in agency is also more likely and so, therefore, is hopeful action. Prefiguration places the power of transformation into the hands of individuals, acting by themselves or in consort with each other, and is therefore a clear manifestation of hopeful action aimed toward utopian ideals.

Recently, the term prefigurative projects has come to include sustainable communities, consumer movements and everyday political practices alongside more obvious examples such as intentional communities (Schlosberg and Coles, 2016; Yates, 2021). This is particularly so in terms of food politics and movements. Martha Ostrom (2009) identifies supporters of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)[7] as choosing prefigurative politics over more traditional contentious politics or more mainstream political process. Instead, they are changing their everyday lifestyles and habits in accordance with their values, and changing the ways in which they shop, eat, and cook to better fit with local agroecosystems and the seasons. They do this in order to change their own lives as well as to influence and change the system at a wider level, which is a clear demonstration of transformative hopeful action. Others have argued that CSAs, along with slow food movements, transition towns, eco-villages, and other movements like them do not focus on predominantly contentious forms of action, which we might expect in many forms of activism, but instead focus on creating and supporting networks and actions which alter forms of consumption. These

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[7] Typically, a partnership between a farm and the community where the produce, costs, and risks, are shared.

projects are by their very nature prefigurative, and so may be termed 'food utopias'.[8] These alternative forms of consumption, even where they may be described as relatively conventional forms of local food production, may be thought of in utopian terms as they work to create new ways of being in the present. This will be explored in more depth in the analysis of my cases later.

Food utopias are based on individual agency, or at the very least on the belief in human endeavour. Faced with the food system as it stands (Holloway, 2005), and with the environmental crisis that is looming (partly as a result of the food system as it stands, though obviously not entirely), individuals or groups demand change, and identify what that change should look like (therefore imagining utopias) (Stock, Carolan and Rosin, 2015). They demand a new system based on food sovereignty and rights for peasant producers, they demand communities that can come together over food and growing, and they demand a fair and ecologically sustainable way of eating and shopping. Importantly, they do so by working to bring these utopias about in prefigurative ways. Whether that is in creating a growing community or a foodbank, or in growing their own vegetables or establishing a cooperative (Stock, Carolan and Rosin, 2015), they work to create their imagined future in the present. It is the belief in individual and group agency that enables individuals to move towards their imagined utopias (Webb, 2007), indeed, it is belief in agency which allows them to imagine their utopias in the first place, because in doing so we must imagine what is possible, and therefore must begin to imagine the ways of achieving those possibilities. Without a belief in individual agency we simply couldn't envisage the food utopias that so many are working to achieve (Bryant and Ellard, 2015; Stockdale, 2019). And so, it follows that, without hope and its sense of possibility and emphasis on enabling agency, we could not envisage utopias nor move towards them.

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[8] Food utopias, and other prefigurative projects like them, will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

4.3   Hope and Utopia

I have established that underpinning utopianism in all its breadth is hope. Hope is an ethos, one that embodies an inventive and evaluative relationship with the world, and that focuses on the potentials and possibilities of exceeding what 'is', looking toward what could be (Anderson, 2006). The emphasis is on possibility, rather than certainty, and therefore hope and utopian thinking are creative.

> Hope locates itself in the premise that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act. When you recognise uncertainty, you recognise that you may be able to influence the outcomes, you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several million others. Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists (Solnit, 2016, p. xii)

Uncertainty, and a focus on 'what could be,' is the basis of utopian thought, and so transformative hope, which is the active hope that is central to this project, is necessarily intertwined with utopianism. Utopian visions give this type of hope its goal, or perhaps more accurately its direction. Webb's (2008b) discussion of transformative hope links it clearly to blueprint utopias, for the reasons outlined earlier that a clearly defined goal can be helpful for motivating action. Transformative hope possesses "a profound confidence in the powers of collective human agency" (Webb, 2008b, p. 200), but requires a concrete, explicit, goal. In this sense Webb (2008b) suggests that transformative hope is compatible with blueprint utopia, but risks getting lost in the open-ended projects of process utopia (Harvey, 2000). I would argue that although this tells us something important about transformative hope, namely that it requires something explicit towards which it can move, it also hypostatises utopia in a way that is unhelpful. If utopianism is based on a notion of the 'not yet', then it is not possible to fix utopias in place in a truly 'concrete' way. Similarly, hope is less about doggedly moving towards a fixed point, and more about opening

up possibilities, and in the case of transformative hope moving into those possibilities before opening up more. For Bloch (1995) the open-endedness of utopias is important, as a concrete goal closes down other possibilities, and therefore closes down the creativity of utopian thinking as discussed earlier.

It is helpful to consider the difference between Bloch's (Levitas, 1990a; Bloch, 1995) notions of abstract and concrete utopias. For Bloch, abstract utopia is mere wishful thinking. It involves either only the transformation of the individual's circumstances (a lottery win for example) or a 'future' that can never be realised. Concrete utopia, on the other hand, contains a real will for change, and is rooted in possibility, "it reaches forward to a real possible future, and involves not merely wishful but will-full thinking" (Levitas, 1990a, pp.15). 'Concrete' for Bloch does not mean 'fixed' in the way that blueprint utopias suggest; rather, it means 'possible' or, to risk a new set of implications that will be addressed later, 'realistic'.

There are different expressions of hope, as discussed in previous sections. Notably, Webb (Webb, 2007, 2008b) discusses his five different 'modes' of hoping (see section 2.2) in relation to utopias; Estimative, Resolute, Patient, Critical and Transformative. Estimative hope is too tethered to social reality to be compatible with utopia, and often leads to 'realistic' reforms rather than radical change (such as Fair Trade for example). Resolute hope is similarly too tethered to the reality of the individual hoper and what they might achieve. Without a sense of what is possible as a society, as opposed to as an individual, utopian thinking does not occur to the resolute hoper. Patient hope is also incompatible with utopia, as faith here is placed in a trusted 'Other' who will eventually deliver one's hopes. If we are waiting, hoping, patiently, we do not need to think of utopias, as our trusted 'other' will do so for us.

So far, the modes of hoping identified by Webb tend not to crossover with utopian thinking. That changes with Transformative hope and Critical hope though. These two modes of hope, as argued in Chapter 1, can be collapsed into one another into what I have termed transformative hope.

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They have at their heart a profound belief in human agency and the ability to move toward hoped for goals. They identify what is undesirable in the present through critique and pursue an image of 'something' better. Unlike the other modes of hoping identified by Webb (2008b), they are closely related to utopian thinking in that they have the goal of changing, transforming, what is for something better. For this reason, transformative hope and its relationship to utopia is the focus of this discussion.

4.4 Being Realistic

Hope involves actors identifying a goal and realising that they may be able to reach that goal though they may have to work to do so. As said above, hope involves 'will-full' action (Levitas, 1990a), rather than wishful thinking, and therefore may not have an obvious relationship with more traditional understandings of blueprint utopias (see above). Utopian visions that aim to bring about change (through bringing utopias into being) should not be too far out of the control of the actor to inspire hope and action. Hope also requires its goals to be realistic. This is in a very real sense, in that an unrealistic goal may be wished for, but simply cannot be hoped for. For example, it is unrealistic to hope to grow wings and fly, though we may wish for such a thing. Realistic should not be taken to mean limited though. In colloquial usage, suggesting that someone should be more realistic can be taken to mean that they should lower their aspirations. Here, it rather means that it should simply be *possible*, and conceivable to the hoper. This is most likely if the object of hope, in this case the utopia, is rooted in some way in the hoper's experience. For transformative hope to arise, that which inspires the hoper to take action and move towards their goal (utopia), they must believe that their own agency will be effective in moving towards that goal, and this belief is most likely when the hoper can conceive of the 'how' in their utopias (Stockdale, 2019).

Erik Olin Wright (2009) argues that not all utopias inspire action because not all utopias are realistic, and suggests that 'real' utopias are needed in order to link utopia and practice (Wright, 2009; Fung, Wright and Abers, 2003). Although Wright's conception of utopias as either realistic or unrealistic overlooks the use of utopias for critique, and therefore to some extant for bringing about change, it does make clear that a way of achieving at least some aspects of utopias is important for inspiring action. Utopias, where they are to be striven for rather than solely used for critique, need to be realistic enough to inspire hope, and therefore action. 'Real', used by Wright, refers to proposing desired alternatives that are both *viable* and *achievable.* The pathway to reaching utopian goals is important, if utopias are out of reach and unrealistic then there can be no hope of reaching them and no motivation to try. This is not to say that the utopias we imagine should be limited per se.

Indeed, there is an argument to say that what is realistic, or possible, depends to a large extent on what is imaginable, and to go further, that a function of utopianism is to make the impossible possible (Levitas, 1990b). I argue 'realistic' means only that the utopias we imagine are ones that we can also imagine the routes to, however radical those routes might seem. When an individual, or a group, envisages utopia or utopias, the ones that seem most intelligible, and most achievable, are the ones that will be in some way rooted in our own experiences and which we can therefore envisage pathways towards. For example, imagining a world in which we have technological solutions to hunger, artificial food grown in a laboratory, for example, is unlikely to inspire me to action. Without being a scientist, I cannot conceive of how this would be done or how my own action and agency might help to bring it about. It also appeals to a trusted 'other' that, as mentioned earlier, is not linked to transformative hope. But imagining a world in which our food system is guided by principles of food sovereignty, where chronic hunger is but a memory and the food we consume is produced sustainably seems more achievable in a practical sense, a 'realistic' utopia perhaps. This is in no small part because the person imagining this world is a keen cook, gardener, farmer's daughter, and academic interested in food sovereignty and

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sustainability. Because of the lived experience that informs my own imagining of a 'realistic' utopia, I can imagine the ways in which we might reach that utopia. It follows that this 'realistic' utopia is more motivating than an unrealistic one, I can see *how* to move forward, and so I *can* move forward. In my 'unrealistic' example I am not moved to action because I cannot see how my actions might make a real difference.

For Wright (2009) 'Real Utopias' have three tasks; to explain why we want to change the present system (and in this task we find critique of the present); to explain where we want to go, i.e., envisaging viable alternatives; and proposing how to get where we want to go (Wright, 2009). These proposals of transformation need to be viable, desirable, and achievable. In being so, they provide the goal that transformative hope requires (Webb, 2008b). The utopias in question must be viable, and realistic, but not certain. Although they need to be reachable if they are to inspire hope, if they are too realistic and too likely to come about then we will anticipate them, rather than hope for them (Stockdale, 2019), leading to inaction. We hope in situations where we judge our agency to be insufficient but necessary; if we do not act then the goal will not be reached, but if we act the goal still may not be reached and there is nothing, we can do to make reaching our goal a certainty, only to make it more likely.

4.5   The relationship between hope and utopia

Levitas (1990b) identifies the difference, and relationship, between hope and utopia, saying that "if utopia arises from desire, the transformation of reality and the realisation of utopia *depend upon hope*" (Levitas, 1990b, p. 231, emphasis added). Utopias can be the goal (though not always), and hope is the means by which it can be achieved. Utopias can be an expression of hope, understood "not … only as emotion … but more essentially as a directing act of a cognitive kind" (Bloch, 1995, p.12). In anticipating the possibilities of the future, utopian thought helps to choose which possible future will become the actual future (Levitas, 1990a) by directing hope and hopeful

action. It is the sense of *possibility* found in (some) utopias that enables actors to move towards their utopias, and which makes hope possible (Stock, Carolan and Rosin, 2015).

Utopias without hope, or rather, utopias with resolute, estimative, or patient hope, ultimately, according to this view, would lead to despair, or cynicism. This is because they can never be reached or realised without action. Critical or transformative hope without utopia would be aimless. Utopia and hope are necessary for one another, although they are two separate notions. Similarly to Thomas Berry's (2013) notion of a moment of crisis, or grace, that gives rise to utopias, John Holloway (2005) argues that "it is the very horror of the world which obliges us to learn to hope" (p.8) . It is the situations that we wish to change, and the negativity which surrounds them, that push us to think of alternatives and to move towards them. Importantly, Holloway (2005) argues that the hope which can bring about change, the hope that begins in negation, is active. It does not hope for salvation or divine intervention, it is not resolute, estimative, or patient (Webb, 2008). Hope that does not lead to action, to doing, turns in on itself to become despair, or cynicism (Holloway, 2005). Perhaps the current environmental crisis, then, is also the horror needed to teach us to hope for those possible, greener futures.

The difference between hopefulness and utopianism is that our hopes are our goals *and* the ways in which we hope to achieve them, they are *active*. Utopias are detailed and explicit visions of worlds we wish to live in, they critique and challenge, but they do not state the ways in which they may be achieved. Utopias are not hopes, but they may be hoped-for goals if they meet the criteria of hopes, namely that they must be achievable but not certain. In not being certain, they may be difficult to reach because of environmental, social, or political factors, as well as because of the effects of the agency of others.

The relationship between utopias and agency, therefore, is that those utopias that can be striven for, in prefigurative practice for example, are the ones that we believe we have agential power to reach, albeit with obstacles to overcome. Prefigurative action is an example of utopia in process.

In the face of crisis, "the very horror of the world" (Holloway, 2005, p.8), it is utopian visions of the alternatives that will inspire hope, and it is the hopeful belief that *something* can be done that will give rise to utopian visions. To understand transformative hope, therefore, we ought to try to understand the utopian thinking alongside it.

Hope is, by its nature, difficult to observe. To 'see' hope, we look for hopeful actions. To understand these actions as hopeful, at least transformatively so, they must involve somehow moving towards the hoper's goal. Prefigurative projects, and other ways in which individuals and collectives might work to bring about utopian visions and alternative futures offer ways for us to observe hopeful action. The hopeful action involved in these projects is based on individual agency, on practically making changes and taking steps towards a hopeful goal. Hope is not placed in an 'other' in these projects. This type of prefiguration and everyday activism will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

5 Hopeful food futures and food activism

Having established that hope is active and goal oriented, that it is linked importantly to both individual and collective agency, and that one way in which it manifests in an observable way is through utopian and prefigurative projects, what remains to be considered is how best hope can be investigated in practice. Hope is, as argued in the previous chapter, by its nature difficult to observe. Prefigurative projects, and other ways in which individuals and collectives work towards utopian goals and alternative futures offer practical ways for us to observe hopeful action.

Recently, there has been an efflorescence of examples of diverse economies and sustainable materialism, covering energy cooperatives, repair cafes, transition towns, and 'craftivist' groups, right up to intentional communities living together in alternative ways. These collectives are locally embedded and demonstrate alternative practices in a practical way, such as food provisioning outside of mainstream shops and markets (Deflorian, 2021). These practices are distinct from other forms of action in the everyday life of activists, such as political or ethical consumption (Micheletti, 2003) and lifestyle movements (Haenfler, Johnson and Jones, 2012). They are part of a manifest collective which works practically to present an alternative to mainstream economy and politics, while ethical consumerism (for example) is based on individual participation in an imagined collective, using existing markets as a platform for change (Deflorian, 2021). Participants in these new collectives have motivations ranging from embodying critique of an unsustainable consumer culture and attempting to create a path towards radically different institutions and ways of living (Mincyte and Dobernig, 2016; Schlosberg and Coles, 2016; Deflorian, 2021) to the simple but powerful desire to do something good and being able to see the impact of their actions (Schlosberg and Coles, 2016; Kropp, 2018). The desire to do something practical and to see the impact of actions, or evidence of their agency, suggests that these

collectives are strong examples of hopeful action, where participants themselves take practical and tangible steps towards a greater goal.

One example of these collectives, I will suggest, is found in local food work and gardening, as people find alternative means of food provisioning. Although local food has tended to be approached as a project of ethical consumerism, and has been criticised (for example, Peck and Tickell, 2002; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Guthman, 2008; Harris, 2009) for reproducing, rather than resisting, the neoliberal systems which they purport to challenge, as well as contributing to problems of 'greenwashing' and co-optation, there is value in considering local food through the lens of activism, and as a prefigurative project of sustainable materialism and through a framework of diverse economies. When we widen our gaze to include production this shifts the focus away from simply purchasing and consuming food and towards projects such as self-provisioning or 'growing your own', community gardens, and guerrilla gardening. Importantly, prefigurative local food projects are noticeably utopian in character, in that they enact their goals – alternative ways of living – in the present. This means that they are inherently hopeful, and therefore offer a way in which we might observe hopeful action and so explore how hope works in these contexts. Although, like many forms of everyday activism, local food groups, including Incredible Edible which is the chosen case study for this thesis, may seem apolitical, they offer a powerful way to assess how hope and empowerment are developed in practice through their prefigurative action and indeed through their very everyday nature.

Exploring local food activism provides a way to explore hope in politics. It demonstrates the creative, imaginative, and novel ways in which individuals and collectives may work to create alternative modes of production and consumption, building utopian goals in the present in prefigurative ways. In doing so, they demonstrate the kind of future-oriented action and agency which characterises hope. Exploring these as practical examples gives insight into how hope works in practice. My aim is to consider how hope, or the lack of it, is manifested in these

apparently mundane forms of politics. By doing so I am attempting to 'read for difference' and ask not *whether* these projects will work, but *how* they do.

In what follows I intend to consider first how we can position everyday acts as activism, and particularly how this can be applied in food activism. Specifically, I will argue that the frameworks provided by diverse economies, sustainable materialism, and prefigurative projects are useful and appropriate for exploring this type of activism and, importantly, hope. In particular, I will consider community gardening and guerrilla gardening, and Incredible Edible within these, as examples of attempts to build hopeful food futures in the present.

5.1   Activism and Everyday Activism

That the personal is political is a now familiar notion, but there is still some ambiguity around how everyday action can constitute activism. In this section I suggest that everyday lives and choices can be approached as activism, particularly regarding local food projects, and that a focus on such everyday activism gives us insight into hope and how it influences action. 'Activism' can be defined as "the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change"(Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2004, p. 13). This, of course, includes the familiar images of crowds of protesters with placards and megaphones, of groups of protesters, arms linked, facing down bulldozers, or of campaigners with clipboards knocking on doors. What it might not suggest are community repair shops, groups of gardeners sharing seeds, or people canning vegetables in their kitchens at home, yet all these actions may be consciously political and intended to bring about change and should, therefore, also be considered as activism. At its core, activism is about acts of transgression, solidarity, and collective action.[9]

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[9] There are, of course, myriad examples of individual activism. I do not wish to argue that these individual acts are not activism, only that they are often undertaken as part of a less visible collective.

In demanding political or social change, activism is necessarily transgressive. Change means going against the current situation in some way, which is transgressive, and demanding change often entails behaving in ways which are transgressive as activists attempt to 'be the change they want to see'. This does not mean we must dilute the notion of activism to include all kinds of community service, 'good' works, dietary choices, 'ethical' consumption and volunteering (Nettle, 2014); rather, it means we should look beyond more obvious and perhaps romanticised notions of activism as protest to explore the intentional pursuit of social change in the everyday (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). This is particularly so when considering food activism (discussed below).

It is not my intention to simply dismiss existing perspectives on activism, nor to attempt to redefine activism. Rather, I acknowledge the extant critique that 'everyday' activisms, and actions which are not iconic or explicitly political are often overlooked. In doing so, I follow writers such as Deborah Martin, Susan Hanson and Danielle Fontaine (2007), Naomi Abrahams (1992), Lynne Staeheli and Susan Clarke (2003), and Laura Pottinger (2016) 'down' the hierarchy of political action to consider the activisms which might otherwise not be considered as worth scrutiny. Spectacular or staged actions can draw attention away from more day-to-day, or even banal, practices "of collectively challenging social relations in our everyday lives" (Chatterton, 2006, p. 270). This exploration of the everyday is important because, while activism can of course be iconic and overtly political and full of direct action and protest, it also often takes place in the everyday, for example, in what we choose to eat and how we choose to eat it. It therefore also often takes place in the private realms of our homes and gardens rather than in more visible public spaces.

Attention to the everyday, particularly in environmental activism, is not new (MacGregor, 2021b). Green activists have long been taking steps to live 'the good life', from small-planet diets to living off-grid. What is, perhaps, new is the sense of urgency which has come with the climate crisis (MacGregor, 2021b), and the more mainstream acceptance that, in order to live more sustainably, we will need to change the way our everyday lives are lived. It is not enough to

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demand policy change or to ask businesses and corporations to change. Though we must of course do that as well, we must also change how we live and, more importantly, change the culture in which we live.

Activism which aims to change the way in which we live and to shift culture may necessarily look very different to activism which addresses more specific and targeted issues. Instead of limiting ideas of activism to more traditional notions of protest, then, activism may also include acts of resistance which are composed of people's non-participation in, and challenges to, hegemonic structures, redistributive acts aimed at more equitable distribution of resources and thus toward social change, and radical social action which seeks to structurally transform existing systems (Shreck, 2005). Broader theories of social movements and contentious politics tend to focus on sustained and coordinated collective action and behaviour which has a clear and explicit agenda for social change, and which occurs most often outside of the state and frequently in opposition to it (Traugott, 1978; Tilly, 1984; Touraine, 1992). As Martin, Hanson and Fontaine (2007) (as well as others, such as Abrahams, 1992, Staeheli and Clarke, 2003, and Pottinger, 2016 for example) argue, activism may also include those actions which are more embedded within local communities, and which may not necessarily be obviously or explicitly political, but which nonetheless transform social networks and power dynamics.

Catherine Walker (2017) has considered the everyday activism of young people in relation to the climate, and neatly defines this type of everyday activism as:

> individual and collective efforts to change, adapt or disrupt one's own and others' everyday practices in response to concerns about the negative impact of these practices on the environment as it is known, valued, and imagined… such activism is motivated by relationships of concern and materialised through emotions and practices in private as well as public spaces (p.14).

This would, of course, include things like going to protests and participating in campaign groups, but it also centres on everyday choices and activities which may influence those around us and alter patterns of everyday living and help to bring about cultural shifts. Our concern for an issue and passion for solving a problem does not exist only within the boundaries of our political actions, but also shapes how we live our lives, how we relate to the people around us, and the decisions we may make for the future (Navne and Skovdal, 2021). Political activity, therefore, involves "the 'private' negotiations of the household, the 'personal' coalitions of the neighbourhood, and the 'informal' networks within the community" (Staeheli and Cope, 1994, p. 447), and so 'activism' should include our everyday actions which foster new social networks and power dynamics (Martin, Hanson and Fontaine, 2007). These actions may not be overtly political, but they help to transform communities, in some cases develop formal organisations, and importantly, extend beyond the instigating individual and foster social change. Unlike traditional activism (e.g. via protest), this everyday activism focuses on relevant behaviours and social practices as necessary areas of cultural change, as opposed to larger scale public policies which, although certainly not discounted, are less directly targeted (Trott, 2021).

5.1.1   Diverse Economies, Sustainable Materialism, and a Politics of the Possible

Everyday activism has often been approached as lifestyle movements, or simply as ethical consumption. These approaches tend to be viewed through a lens of individualism, which presents problems as they are seen to "encourage individualized participation in the private sphere rather than collective action in the public sphere" (Haenfler, Johnson and Jones, 2012, p. 12), being based on the belief that one person can make a difference by choosing to live differently (Portwood-Stacer, 2013), and so are also oddly aligned with a neoliberal emphasis on the individual. The emphasis on individual responsibility does not expressly demand change from above, and therefore lends itself to maintaining rather than disrupting existing structures

(Portwood-Stacer, 2013). Diverse Economies, and more recently Sustainable Materialism, may offer a more collective approach to everyday activism, which also gives more insight into hope and hopeful action.

The main point of the Diverse Economies framework is that theorising capitalism as all-encompassing and monolithic represents capital flows as dominant and renders a wide variety of alternative or non-capitalist activities as invisible. This means that they are seen as marginal to, or as subsystems of, a dominant system (Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016) which diminishes their value. These alternative economic activities include, for example, unpaid labour in households, cooperatives, community-supported agriculture, local currencies, social enterprises, and fair-trade movements. The diverse economies literature suggests that these many forms of economy are taking place at once and are mutable rather than fixed. By foregrounding these different economies we help to open up the possibility for them to flourish and to multiply (Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020).

This is important, because 'doing economy' differently – engaging in alternative ways of sharing, working and exchanging – empowers and supports different economies, promoting solidarity and ethical modes of interdependence which may help to address key issues such as environmental degradation and the climate crisis (Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020). So, by creating alternatives in the present, diverse economies help to make alternative futures possible.

Sustainable Materialism has significant parallels with diverse economies, and indeed may be seen as an example of diverse economy(ies), in the sense that it focuses on the ways in which existing flows of materials (through a monolithic capitalism) may be disrupted and replaced by new novel ways of meeting collective material needs. In sustainable materialism, we find a type of activism based on constructing alternative ways of meeting material needs in counterhegemonic ways, and which are politically enabling for its participants. It is focused on everyday life and, specifically, on the flows of materials, goods and power through environments, individuals, and

communities. Practically, it is based on creating alternative practices and institutions which meet our material needs in sustainable ways, while also disrupting and replacing existing flows of material and power (Schlosberg, 2019).

Sustainable materialism and diverse economies both have a focus on 'doing' and practice and can therefore be seen as prefigurative politics. Individuals come together to act upon their values and live them in an alternative way which generally involves looking beyond the market to wider everyday life. They show that an alternative and more sustainable way of life is possible and are therefore subversive and transformative in character. Importantly, they are also transformative for the participants themselves. They link them to a community, teaching skills and self-efficacy, and ultimately inspiring further action (Deflorian, 2021). They also may be characterised by developing and evolving goals as participants experiment, discover and rediscover what may be possible (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Guthman, 2008; Foden, 2012).

As mentioned above, Lifestyle movements typically focus on the individual rather than collectives (Haenfler, Johnson and Jones, 2012) and so tend to encourage individual rather than collective action (Schlosberg and Craven, 2019). Sustainable materialism instead has community at its core (Schlosberg and Craven, 2019) lending itself to more collective action, as well as situating itself in a more public way, as opposed to encouraging participation in the private sphere. Similarly, a diverse economies perspective is based in no small part on community endeavour and a politics of collective action (Gibson-Graham, 2006a).

Within the context of sustainable materialism and diverse economies, collective actions, which Michael Deflorian (2021) terms Collective Alternative Everyday Practices (CAEPs), are the manifest collectives alongside the imagined collectives of wider lifestyle politics. These include the repair cafes, sewing workshops, clothing swap initiatives, community gardens, free-shops, and food sharing (to name only a few examples) which have become so much more common place in recent years. These collective actions centre on alternative provisioning of everyday

needs and offer an alternative to mainstream markets and economies and may also be referred to as sustainable materialism. These movements are self-consciously collective in a way that lifestyle movements perhaps are not, and combine consumption, responsibility and citizenship (Schlosberg and Craven, 2019). Some participants are motivated by the obviously political desire to break away from unsustainable consumer culture as it exists and to create radically different institutions and ways of living (Mincyte and Dobernig, 2016; Schlosberg and Craven, 2019; de Moor, Catney and Doherty, 2021), while others are focussed more on a desire simply to see the impact of their actions and to feel that they are 'doing something good' (Schlosberg and Coles, 2016; Kropp, 2018; Naegler, 2018).

Another reason for considering CAEPs alongside lifestyle politics rather than within it is because there is a degree of immersion implied by lifestyle politics, and there are always instances of individuals who may participate in collective actions without adopting the wider lifestyle (Deflorian, 2021). Arguably, lifestyle movements may be similar to intentional communities, living in new and prefigurative ways but somehow separated from wider society. Sustainable materialism, on the other hand, takes place within wider society (Schlosberg, 2019). Therefore, participants may be involved with sustainable materialism without being fully immersed in a lifestyle. So, for example, they may be involved in community agriculture but choose to go on holiday during the harvest season, or they may take part in repair cafes but upgrade their smartphone every year. There are obvious issues with this type of participation, in particular problems of a variety of motivations and levels of commitment which may limit the scalability of such projects limited (Kato, 2015; Schlosberg and Coles, 2016; Deflorian, 2021). That said, there is room to suggest that CAEPs may become a gateway into wider lifestyle politics, encouraging the adoption of other practices and lifestyle choices as participants develop within them.

Collective practices, diverse economies, and sustainable materialism ought, therefore, to be considered separately to lifestyle movements, though there is obvious crossover. They are necessarily collective, involving active participation in collectives and new institutions rather than

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focusing on a more imagined collective of ethical consumption and some lifestyle movements (Schlosberg, 2019). They are based on prefigurative action, with participants *living* the change they wish to see, thus changing society in the present rather than pushing for future change as with ethical consumption (Schlosberg, 2019). Collective practices, diverse economies, and sustainable materialism can therefore be considered as utopian projects.

As utopian projects, these practices are based on a belief in individual and group agency which enables individuals to move towards their goals (Webb, 2007), indeed, it is belief in agency which allows them to imagine these goals and utopias to begin with. Imagining the ways in which goals might be reached necessarily entails imagining ways of achieving those goals, and without a belief in individual agency we simply couldn't envisage the food utopias (Bryant and Ellard, 2015; Stockdale, 2019) that are the goals of projects of sustainable materialism, diverse economies, and collective practices. Without hope and its sense of possibility and emphasis on enabling agency, we could not envisage utopias and utopian goals, nor move towards them. Therefore, these practices offer an obvious way to explore hope in a practical way.

5.1.2 The power of small wins and everyday activism

A politics of the possible and flexible goals allow for the idea that making small changes in everyday lives will add up to greater change and will help us to move toward a better future, though how exactly that future will look is open to reinterpretation. Everyday actions constitute incremental steps towards a broader goal of wider social change. This idea echoes Weick's (1984) concept of 'small wins', where the focus is on using smaller, more achievable, goals in order to reach a larger one. The size of social problems can be a stumbling block to action, and nowhere is this more apparent than when considering the problem of climate change (Weick, 1984). The sheer scale of the climate emergency, and the urgency of it, can mean that it is seen as insurmountable (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh, 2007), and certainly does not inspire

hope and hopeful action. One way to overcome this is by breaking down the problem into smaller and more manageable problems which can then be more easily overcome and those wins celebrated, which in turn attracts more people to the cause and eventually drives social change (Weick, 1984). Immediate and visible, though perhaps modest, results, are important (Navne and Skovdal, 2021) for sustaining action and for extending it to other individuals and geographical areas, and therefore constitute a form of activism.

Everyday (environmental) activism, as I understand it here, can range from behaviours with a direct environmental impact, such as reducing or altering your consumption habits, to actions with a more indirect impact, such as simple conversation or discussion (Trott, 2021). These actions, and this type of activism, are not without critique. Against the scale of the climate crisis, the significance of everyday actions on the part of individuals – even as a collection of individuals – is often questioned, along with the relevance of private as opposed to public actions. They are often seen as *representing* what the world needs and are valued for their symbolic significance, rather than having any real impact (Taylor, 2019). Worse, within an environmental context, there is a charge of burdening individuals with a sense of personal responsibility for addressing and solving the climate crisis without demanding or offering the transformative change ultimately needed at structural and policy level (Maniates, 2001). There is also an argument that neoliberalism privatises responsibility for the climate crisis, and that individual responses in line with ethical or political consumerism tend to reproduce rather than resist the neoliberal structures which contribute to, if not create, the climate crisis (Maniates, 2001; Huckle and Wals, 2015; Schindel Dimick, 2015). I will consider this argument in depth in section 5.2.3, but for now suffice it to say that, even in light of such critique, everyday actions are still both relevant and necessary as well.

That said, I want to argue that everyday actions are both relevant and necessary. They may not solve the climate crisis on their own, but neither are they futile or insignificant. Everyday actions and small changes are part of a cultural shift which is needed to provide *bottom-up* change.

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Though necessary, cultural shifts are slow, which is why there is a sense of urgency around creating policy and structural shifts which have the potential to provide immediate, *top-down,* change. Dismissing one approach in favour of the other is, however, not a solution. Although, for example, a technological fix for climate change is appealing and immediate in its impact, it could not address the underlying issues of culture and worldviews (such as economies based on perpetual growth, materialism, or viewing the land simply as a resource). It would, therefore, be an incomplete response, and may even perpetuate the same problems in different ways (Van Kessel, 2020; Trott, 2021).

Everyday practices and actions are a main driver of climate change (Roy and Pal, 2009). We live in a consumer society, and our sense of well-being and our notions of 'good' lives are based in a culture of over-consumption and excessive waste. It is, therefore, the culture of consumerism which needs to be addressed if sustainability is to be achieved (Kagan and Burton, 2014; Trott, 2021). What is needed are creative and diverse ways of living which provide a sense of well-being and of prosperity while respecting, and indeed nurturing, the planet on which we live (Hayward and Roy, 2019; Trott, 2021). It is also true to say that culture, and cultural shifts, have a dynamic relationship with policy, as policies can hardly be imagined and demanded, let alone drafted and implemented, in a cultural vacuum (Solnit, 2016). Grassroots social change, and everyday activism, is therefore significant in that it can help to create the possibility for policy change and sow the seeds of cultural change as people live in different ways. Everyday activism is culture shifting, creating the landscape in which big policy change may take place, and as such has both direct and indirect impacts on the climate crisis (and other social issues) (Trott, 2021). This is especially true of prefigurative projects such as sustainable materialism and diverse economies which work to bring cultural changes into the present. It is within this context that I explore everyday food activism.

5.2 Food Activism

Like 'activism', the term 'food activism' can mean different things to different people. It is an umbrella term encompassing different forms, ideologies and levels of political commitment (Counihan and Siniscalchi, 2014; Sarmiento, 2017). What links the 'activisms' within Food Activism is that they all argue for control over production, distribution or food choice, which they express through varying discourses ranging from overreaching political impact to simply seeking closer ties between producers and consumers (Counihan and Siniscalchi, 2014). Essentially, we can understand food activism as "efforts by people to change the food system across the globe by modifying the way they produce, distribute and/or consume food" (Counihan and Siniscalchi, 2014, p.3). The broadness of the field means that you will find within it farmers, restauranteurs, producers, and consumers, all using various practices to insist on and effect change at varying levels. In practice, this ranges from La Via Campesina's campaigning for Food Sovereignty to community supported agriculture projects in Wales, from farmers' markets to anti-GMO movements, and from Slow Food to Food Banks.

Because of this wide variety within Food Activism and having established that I wish to explore everyday activism rather than more traditional protest, I would like here to consider the ways in which food activism may occur in the everyday. Specifically, I use a lens of sustainable materialism and diverse economies to explore one activity in which participants – activists – work to create alternatives to the conventional food system in prefigurative ways. These projects are known as 'Alternative Food Networks' (AFNs) and have at their core a desire to challenge and change the current food system in a positive way (Counihan and Siniscalchi, 2014; Sarmiento, 2017). They look to change our relationships with produce, producers, production, and the land, and as such often have significant crossover with environmental and green activism, as well as with other types of food activism.

There has been a proliferation of AFNs over recent decades, which has caused excitement both in public and amongst scholars. How transformative they may actually be is an important question and Eric Sarmiento (2017), among others, warns against being overly celebratory about them. For example, studies of food localisation (Hinrichs and Kremer, 2002; Hinrichs, 2003) organic food (Buck, Getz and Guthman, 1997; Guthman, 2003, 2004), farmers' markets (Slocum, 2007; Alkon, 2008; Alkon, 2008; Alkon, 2013), and other similar initiatives, have shown that AFNs often occupy tenuous niches of the wider (conventional) food system, which leaves them vulnerable to failure and collapse or to co-optation by the existing system (Sarmiento, 2017). It is therefore sensible to bear in mind the limitations of AFNs rather than simply embracing them entirely.

That said, AFNs are arguably more important now than ever. Perhaps especially in the UK, with issues of trade brought about through Brexit and an ongoing cost-of-living crisis coupled with other economic pressures which cause food prices to rise, there are opportunities for AFNs, which can compete in terms of price or find a niche no longer filled, as relationships with previous producers and providers change. AFNs are also, arguably, at the forefront of a progressive redesigning of entire food systems. They could be part of food futures which are not just healthier, but are also based on social, economic, and ecological justice. The transformative potential of AFNs and the ability which they may have to disrupt the current conventional food system and help us move into a more ecologically sustainable and economically just food system means that exploring and understanding them is both important and necessary. It is also why AFNs should, I will argue, be approached as activism, though they may at times appear more 'everyday' in nature.

5.2.1   Local Food

There is a now familiar argument that the global food system creates pressure which necessitates sustainable food solutions at *local* and *regional* levels (Blay-Palmer, Sonnino and Custot, 2016).

Place-based systems enable communities to identify their own specific needs while building on their own specific assets, and also respecting traditional diets and cultures as required (Blay-Palmer, Sonnino and Custot, 2016). There is, of course, room for supporting structures at a larger, even global, scale, but nevertheless, local is overwhelmingly seen as a solution to the issues within the global food system as it stands. As Terry Marsden (2012, p. 2) states:

> Whilst we clearly must not lose sight of the macro-global picture, we also need to realise that in order to imagine and plan realistic alternatives it is necessary to adopt a more creative eco-economy paradigm which re-'places', and indeed relocates, agriculture and its policies into the heart of regional and local systems of ecological, economic and community development.

For this reason, the importance of the 'local' in food consumption and production has grown in the UK (Firth, Maye and Pearson, 2011), as well as in other areas of the Western world, since the 1980s and 1990s. Other motivations for turning to a 'locavore' diet include concern over the environmental impacts of agriculture and other environmental issues such as food miles, responses to a succession of food scares and scandals (the horsemeat and BSE scandals in the UK for example) and reactions against globalisation in a wider sense (Kirwan *et al.*, 2013). 'Local food' is, therefore, something of an umbrella term, encompassing a wide variety of initiatives and projects. Some are about producing more food and increasing accessibility, while others are about reconnecting people with their food and the supply chain, and about community building (Firth, Maye and Pearson, 2011). What links them together is their sense of place and their emphasis on their geographical scale.

A commonly cited definition of an alternative food network (AFN) comes from Gail Feenstra (1997);

> *rooted in particular places*, [AFNs] aim to be economically viable for farmers and
> consumers, use ecologically sound production and distribution practises, and enhance
> social equity and democracy for all members of the community (p.28, emphasis added).

The key part of this definition is that it highlights the place-based nature of AFNs. This may be attached to producing, processing, selling or consuming within a specific local area (e.g. Marsden et al.'s (2000) 'short chain' networks), or the identification of natural or cultural features of a local area within the products being exchanged (e.g., Ilbery et al.'s (2006) 'locality foods'). The importance of locale in AFNs is used most often to contrast with the lack of any sense of place in the conventional food system and the accompanying sense of disconnectedness (Tregear, 2011).

Among consumers, local food has, to some extent, become a proxy for virtue, as it is seen as a model for a sustainable diet (Hinrichs, 2003; Noll, 2014; Borghini, Piras and Serini, 2021). The local food movement advocates shorter supply chains which operate independently from global agribusiness and which work through socially cohesive and collaborative networks (Feenstra and Campbell, 2014; Sandler, 2015). Arguments supporting local food are most often based on ethical grounds, which are mainly based on environmental or socio-political arguments.

The environmental argument is perhaps an obvious one. The notion of 'food miles' is something we are all familiar with, and means that, as local food necessarily involves fewer food miles it has a lower carbon footprint, which therefore means it has a more environmentally friendly supply chain. Low food miles also mean that capital tends to remain within a community, supporting small farmers, reducing distance between producers and consumers, and giving communities greater control over quality and price, resulting in the socio-political benefit of food sovereignty (McWilliams, 2010; Feenstra and Campbell, 2014; Sandler, 2015).

Shorter, local supply chains tend to be more transparent, increasing trust for both consumers and producers, which is particularly important when people are generally losing trust in (take the

horsemeat scandal for example), as well as knowledge of, their food (Werkheiser and Noll, 2014). It is also commonly argued that local food simply tastes better, as it is not grown for yield in the way that conventionally produced food is, but for taste (Petrini, 2001).

That 'local food' is an umbrella term encompassing myriad projects means that it is therefore important not to simply embrace them all as a panacea for industrial global agriculture as it stands (McIntyre and Rondeau, 2011). Those projects which are informed by social justice, and which are attentive to the critiques of the dominant food system, are those which may be included within an understanding of activism and food activism. In order for local food initiatives to be "effective social movement[s] of resistance to globalism" (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005, p. 364), they need to remain critical and reflexive. Those which are not fall below the minimal conditions for which kinds of local food groups we would include within the category of potential movement activism.

Ian Werkheiser and Samantha Noll (2014) point out that there are different definitions of food, locality, and indeed people. They suggest that there are three sub-movements within the local food movement; the Individual focused movement; the Systems focused movement; and the Community focused movement. The individual focused movement sees people as consumers, is most open to co-option by the existing system, and presents the least potential for radical change. Food here remains simply a consumer product. Much of the criticism of local food projects concerns this individual-focussed movement, in which we find the stereotypical image of an "economically comfortable, neo-liberal locavore who shops at a farmers' market in a gentrifying neighbourhood" (Borghini, Piras and Serini, 2021, p. 5). It is perhaps most easily understood as ethical consumerism and, in this instance, local food is effectively reduced to a brand and nothing more (McWilliams, 2010; DeLind, 2011; Werkheiser and Noll, 2014).

The systems focused movement aims for system level change and focusses on institutions rather than individuals, but as overhauling institutions is so problematic it struggles to instigate real

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change. The final sub-movement, community-focussed, overlaps local food and food sovereignty. It is messy and often includes broader social and political issues beyond food, and as a result tends to receive the least attention (Werkheiser and Noll, 2014). However, it is this community-focussed movement in which we find the most potential for activism, and where we find sustainable materialism and diverse economies.

5.2.2 Local Food, Localism, and the Local Trap

Although there are arguably many benefits of local food, it is not without criticism. First, the concept of food miles is not as straightforward as it might first appear. Focussing exclusively on the environmental cost of transportation misses the environmental cost of production. For example, greenhouses in Britain must be heated to produce tomatoes year-round, resulting in 2,394 kilograms of carbon per ton of crop, compared to only 630 kilograms per ton in Spain, where greenhouses do not need to be heated. Local food production is also often not able to capitalise on economies of scale which result in more fuel-efficient transportation. Large quantities over large distances in large vehicles often result in a smaller carbon footprint than small quantities over short distances in small vehicles (Wynen and Vanzetti, 2008).

There are also ethical, and social, critiques of local food. For some, local food movements do not deliver reform that is needed and may go so far as to reinforce existing structures and systems, local food systems can be just as unjust as global systems (Starr, 2010), and ideas of localism are inherently political as well as often problematic. There is therefore a danger in approaching local food without a measure of critical scepticism (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Carolan, 2012), and although the benefits should not be easily dismissed, we must also work to avoid the 'local trap' (Born and Purcell, 2006).

The local trap is the assumption that local food is inherently good. There is nothing inherent about the goodness of local food – sustainability, social justice and certainly nutrition depend on much

more than locality (Carolan, 2012). Rather, the goodness of a food system – local or otherwise – depends on the actors and agendas that are involved in that food system (Born and Purcell, 2006). This means simply that local food systems and cooperatives can be as unjust as global systems (Starr, 2010), though they may arguably be more transparent and perhaps easier to change based on their size. Avoiding the local trap means that it is necessary to consider not just what we mean by 'local', but also how and why the local, and localism, are inherently political.

Localism draws lines and borders between places, people and ways of life which are considered local, and those that are not (Carolan, 2012), which can give rise to defensive localism (Hinrichs, 2003). This can lead to elitist and reactionary movements (Hinrichs, 2003), demonising any group not defined as local (Winter, 2003) and valuing certain places and people to the detriment of others (Carolan, 2012). In order to avoid the local trap, we must be reflexive about the reasons which people do, or do not, buy or grow locally in order to understand the barriers which surround involvement in localism (Carolan, 2012), and to maximise the potential goodness of local food movements and activity.

If 'local' is championed above all else, broader structural issues are overlooked. When this happens, the ability to engage in the local food movement is concentrated into the hands of the privileged few (fuelling the idea of local food as a consumer preference rather than something more 'valuable'), and real structural constraints and limitations are obscured. For example, the shift towards in-season and home-produced foods increases the burden of primary care-givers (largely women, meaning that local food may also come with its own issues of gender inequality) (McIntyre and Rondeau, 2011; Carolan, 2012), and those who live more rurally, away from well-serviced urban areas, or who are food insecure, or who simply lack the resources (time, skills, space, expertise or finances) are seriously constrained from engaging with local food provisioning.

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That said, local does not necessarily need to mean 'parochial', and while there is danger in unquestioningly embracing the local, simply dismissing it is also problematic. As Rebecca Solnit (2016) very lucidly captures,

> The embrace of local power doesn't have to mean parochialism, withdrawal, or intolerance, only a coherent foundation from which to navigate the larger world. From wild coalitions of the global justice movement to the cowboys and environmentalists sitting down together, there is an ease with difference which doesn't need to be eliminated, a sense that if the essentials of principle or goal are powerful enough you can work together, and that perhaps differences are a strength, not a weakness. A sense that you can have an identity embedded in local circumstance and a role in global dialogue, an interest in networks of connection and a loss of faith in the reality of clear-cut borders. And this global dialogue exists in service of the local. (p.99)

Although local responses to the food system are limited in scale, they are very much a part of responses to wider problems. Although they may be charged with being inwardly focussed, they are nevertheless a part of a global response to a global problem.

5.2.3   Resistance or Reproduction?

Perhaps the biggest question mark over a local food movement, AFNs, or indeed food activism more widely, is the suggestion that they may reproduce the very issues and systems which they ostensibly are trying to resist. This substantial critique suggests that AFNs, which are presented as alternatives to the mainstream (neoliberal) food system, in fact reproduce the neoliberal subjectivities which they purport to oppose (Guthman, 2008; Harris, 2009). By neoliberalism, we mean

> a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional

framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade

(Harvey, 2005, p. 2).

AFNs, and the scholarship which supports them, the argument goes, reproduce neoliberal governmentalities (Guthman, 2008) and reinforce a system which affords local actors and organisations responsibility (through food choice) without power, and grants institutions – particularly the international institutions in control of the industrial food system – power without responsibility (Peck and Tickell, 2017). They are a part of reproducing the neoliberal subjectivities which value consumer choice and responsibility, and which seek to expand on them, rather than offering opposition (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Harris, 2009).

A similar critique is levelled at lifestyle politics and ethical consumption. Participants in these types of activism may well see their actions as tied to others, and believe that many individual actions will collectively add up to social change (Haenfler, Johnson and Jones, 2012; Schlosberg, 2019), but they are generally a part of an *imagined* collective, rather than a manifest one (Deflorian, 2021). These types of activism tend to be focussed on individuals, and a search for individual identity and integrity are central to them, as opposed to collective action. The argument is that lifestyle movements "encourage individualized participation in the private sphere rather than collective action in the public sphere" (Haenfler, Johnson and Jones, 2012, p. 12), and may therefore be ultimately depoliticising, taking the pressure to make change off the state for example. By effectively substituting socially responsible consumers for collective organising and political mobilisation, the necessary means to combat ecological threats and social injustices are essentially stymied (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Guthman, 2008; Lockie, 2009; McClintock, 2014; Thompson and Kumar, 2021). The emphasis on the individual and the belief that 'one person can make a difference' simply by choosing to live differently (Portwood-Stacer, 2013) lends itself to maintaining rather than disrupting existing structures. The responsibility for change is placed on the individual rather than on states or corporations (Portwood-Stacer, 2013).

In what follows, I question this critique and its inherent scepticism. Drawing on Gibson-Grahams' (1996, 2006) model of reading for difference, I suggest that there is a danger that by applying a discursive lens of neoliberalism, we will only see neoliberalism. We will also run the risk of obscuring work which is taking place in AFNs which does not, perhaps, fit with this lens. These critiques tend to foreground individuals as consumers, and so to approach AFNs as primarily ethical consumption, which I argue only captures AFNs in part, rather than in whole.

5.2.4   Reading for dominance or reading for difference?

By approaching the local food movement with a neoliberal framework, and primarily as ethical consumerism, we find that it essentially perpetuates the system which brought about the situation which we wish to change. Although there may be truth in this, this reading of the local food movement effectively obscures the difference and possibility which we are seeking. Gibson-Graham (2006a) suggest that this argument involves reading a situation for dominance; looking for the neoliberal structures and systems, and finding them, rather than looking for difference. Reading local food activism as ethical consumption foregrounds the existing food system and the ways in which consumers may work within it, rather than the other creative and novel ways in which actors may work *outside* of it.

If we accept that situations are typically read for dominance, then we can see how this foregrounds the dominant and hegemonic aspects that we *expect* to see (Gibson-Graham, 2006b). For example, reading for dominance shows that localism is predicated on a normative assumption that local food is 'better' than food sourced from conventional systems. This is justified based on the notion that localism helps to support local economies and reduce environmental impacts, which can be achieved by adjusting individual consumption (Harris, 2009). This emphasis on consumer choice and responsibility as the basis for combatting the socio-environmental injustices of the conventional food system fits with understandings of

neoliberalism (Harris, 2009; Peck and Tickell, 2002). Encouraging the valuing of consumer choice is central to neoliberalism, as it enables governance through the regulated choices of individuals (Rose, 1996). Therefore, the emphasis in local food activities on "'making choices', 'voting with your dollar' and 'knowing where your food comes from'" (Guthman, 2008, p. 1176) explicitly links the knowledge of locality with choice, and in doing so reproduces a central tenet of neoliberalism (Harris, 2009).

If, instead, we 'read for difference', AFNs and localism become spaces of opposition rather than of reproduction. A reading for dominance sees power as located outside of local food networks, securely in the hands of globalised agro-industrial corporations and institutions, supermarkets and other institutions involved in maintaining neoliberal order (Harvey, 2005). Reading for difference allows us to reimagine the distribution of power across AFNs and systems that are more dominant. If we reject the binary of centralised power on the one hand, and localised resistance on the other, then we begin to see diverse and mediated arrangements of power instead (Allen *et al.*, 2003; Harris, 2009).

Local food activity, in this reading, becomes an attempt on the part of participants to recultivate themselves as subjects, and to change their personal politics (and food choices) by enacting a different ethics within the food system, rather than simply responding to dominant and powerful discourses (Harris, 2009). Rather than understanding the seeking of knowledge about where food comes from as a project of self-improvement, it becomes a project of self-education, aimed at better understanding and renegotiating possibilities (Harris, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 2006). By reading for difference, we can understand local food activity not as an alternative to the current system (in which case it may have already failed), but as a move towards alternatives which may bring about positive eco-social change (Harris, 2009) and the creation of *possibility*.

Reading for difference illuminates the possibilities for an alternative, more sustainable, future, which might be obscured if we assume that the local food movement simply reproduces

neoliberal subjectivities. That is not to say that there are not aspects of the local food movement which may be problematic, or that may, indeed, reproduce neoliberal subjectivities . Rather, it is to say that there are other aspects which do not have these issues but would otherwise be overlooked or seen as less important if we prioritise the neoliberal – dominant – aspects and narratives.

In the same way, if we approach the local food movement as a type of activism, such as an example of sustainable materialism or diverse economies, rather than as ethical consumption, we illuminate the possibilities created by local food activity, as well as being more able to consider activity outside of consumption. Local food actors create possibilities for different futures by demonstrating different ways of living and interacting, which, as discussed earlier, can surely be approached as activism. Although ethical consumption is often described as a political project, understanding local food as activism opens up the possibility for a wider spectrum of political activity, and for influencing much more than the market and economy.

We also are more able to find hope. Gibson-Graham (2006a) suggests that in reading for difference we find the strands of hope which we can pull together into revolution. I would tend to agree that, in viewing the local food movement, or at least activities within it, as activism, we find action which is oriented towards a possible but not guaranteed goal of a sustainable and more equitable future. And in that goal, we find the possibility for real structural change in the long term, which is revolution. It is true to say that the local food movement offers ways of procuring and consuming food which are similar to the dominant food system as we know it, in that consumers may choose and purchase their food as they would normally do, except that the source of that food is geographically closer to them. But it also offers ways of engaging with food, the local area, and with people which are different, and which do offer real alternatives.

The necessarily economic nature of the food system means that the local food system has tended to be understood as being about "creating and investing with meaning social and economic space

around modes of production and exchange" (Starr, 2010, p. 487), and therefore as ethical consumerism. "An inchoate longing and urge to protect things that never should have been marketized in the first place—health, ecology, farms, locality, artisanship, community relations" (Starr, 2010, p. 486) seems to pervade local food action, suggesting that there is more to local food than economy (and perhaps more to economy and economics if we follow a diverse economies line of thinking). If we foreground these aspects, rather than the economic factors, we may be able to see and understand local food activity differently.

5.2.5   Reading local food for difference

Reading AFNs as consumer projects which are open to (if not already so) co-optation by the very neoliberal system which they seek to resist and disrupt, simply does not capture the entirety of the local food movement. The practices of many participants in the local food movement go far beyond new places to shop and alternative products to buy, however much pressure this may put on corporations. Instead, they are about living a prefigurative embodiment of a particular, new, set of values and practices (Schlosberg, 2019). By focussing on the consumptive side of the material chain (Schlosberg and Craven, 2019), we see the consumers, but we miss the producers. The group that I chose for my case study analysis is part of the Incredible Edible network. They grow food on public land, and then give it away, share it, and encourage people in the area to pick their own. They are not boycotting other means of provisioning, and they exist alongside more traditional markets. They focus on production and community, rather than on consumption. What they offer is clearly something different to ethical consumerism, but their emphasis on food and locality means that they are surely a part of the local food movement. How, then, can we read the local food movement differently?

By moving our focus away from consumption, we can ask new questions, perhaps about production. What power can a producer involved in the local food movement wield, beyond

offering the consumer new choices? If a consumer moves from simply buying local food to participating in growing, are they exercising more, or less, power over the food system? We also shift our focus away from the imagined collectives which consumers see themselves as a part of when they choose to buy local, and onto manifest collectives, where groups of individuals actually come together to work on an alternative to existing politics and economies (Deflorian, 2021).

Reading for difference allows for the inclusion of those activities which might not fit in to a narrower way of understanding local food. Frameworks of neoliberalism foreground traditional procurement activity. By moving away from those frameworks, we can explore activities such as self-provisioning, giving away food and types of community and urban agriculture, and we can see the ways in which they might offer alternative ways of living and of relating to the environment and to each other.

There are many activities within local food which are not based on exerting consumer power, and which try to build alternative systems entirely rather than trying to influence the existing system from within. They are designed to offer alternatives to the existing food system by creating new systems and networks. These systems do not just include consumption, but also production, as well as materials, waste and ultimately re-use (Schlosberg, 2019). One simply cannot hope to understand a movement by only considering one part of it. For example, if we only considered the people who choose to consume fruit which they have harvested for free from a community orchard, we would perhaps miss the people who have spent time tending to that orchard, and we would see that the fruit picked is an alternative to that which could be bought in a supermarket, but miss that the trees the fruit is picked from are alternatives to those in commercial fields.

Rather than expressing individual responsibility through consumer choices, there is instead a recognition that responsibility lies with those "whose actions contribute to the structural processes that produce injustice" (Young, 2004, p. 388). While this does not absolve individuals

of responsibility, as simply going along with an oppressive system serves in some way to perpetuate it, it does imply that there are actors who are more responsible than others. It is not, therefore, only the responsibility of the consumer to change their habits, but also, and arguably primarily, of the food system as a whole and the corporations within it. So instead of trying to alter the practices of corporations and the like, the emphasis is on building alternative structures and starting afresh. It is not the responsibility of the consumer to change the existing system, but it is within the power of the individual to create alternatives.

5.2.6   ~~Eat~~ Grow local!

Central to the idea of sustainable materialism is a focus on changing flows of material. While ethical consumption projects do alter these flows by influencing the market through consumer demand, a more radical way is to replace old systems entirely by changing the production as well as consumption. There are many examples of producing, rather than simply buying, local. Talking of production quickly recalls farms and other commercial ways of growing and raising food, but production also encompasses gardens and public land, as well as a diverse range of economies, not all of which are monetary. Alongside more commercial endeavours, these include community gardening projects, political gardening, guerrilla gardening, and simply growing your own.

5.2.6.1   Growing Your Own

Although many 'green' narratives of food focus on shortening supply chains and relocalisation, they rarely discuss 'growing your own' (also known as home gardening, household/domestic food production, and food self-provisioning (FSP)) (de Hoop and Jehlička, 2017). This is surprising, although perhaps less so if we assume that these are practices which would be overlooked if food production was read for dominance, as growing your own is arguably the most radical form of localisation, supply chains simply do not get much shorter than from garden to house. It also

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profoundly reconnects production and consumption, and embeds them both squarely in everyday social life (de Hoop and Jehlička, 2017). Perhaps then, changing the way we 'read' growing your own food can expand more possible food futures that would otherwise be visible.

The emphasis on commercial transactions and neoliberal economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006a; Taylor and Lovell, 2014) means that self-provisioning or growing your own is often overlooked. Home gardens also tend to be conceptualised as trivial (Taylor and Lovell, 2014) and more practically, home gardens are often far less visible and accessible in a practical sense than other ways of growing food, as well as coming in a huge variety of forms, functions, sizes and locations, all of which create obstacles to researching them (Taylor and Taylor Lovell, 2014) as well as adding to a sense that there is perhaps not much 'difference' to be found.

It is possible to situate home growing within a 'bundle' of local food activities (Schupp and Sharp, 2012; Taylor and Lovell, 2014). Instead of being understood as simply leisure or private, home gardening can be conceptualised as a response to food security issues and to a need to take control of local food systems. Home gardens can be viewed as a space of resistance and empowerment as well as of community development, and a source of environmental and social resilience (Taylor and Lovell, 2014). Like involvement in local food more broadly, these could be related to environmental concerns, nutrition, or issues with the conventional food system (such as animal welfare, or conditions of farmers) (Allen, 2004; Schupp and Sharp, 2012; Taylor and Lovell, 2014) amongst others, and as such merit investigation.

The quotidian, mundane, and indeed private nature of gardening at home or on an allotment for one's own consumption is perhaps why self-provisioning may be overlooked in terms of activism. Pottinger (2017) argues that it should instead be understood as a "'quiet', 'gentle', 'slow-cook', 'dirt under the fingernails' kind of activism" (p.21), which is strengthened through its quietness, its subversive nature, and its commitment to practical action. Gardening can of course simply be about feelings of wellbeing and fulfilment, but it can just as easily be about opportunities to care

for others and for nature, particularly, or perhaps especially, when it results in the sharing of produce and of seeds. These acts of sharing demonstrate a generosity which perhaps runs counter to dominant corporate food systems and can easily be framed as a part of broader environmental activism. Viewing self-provisioning as an act of resistance rather than a trivial or private activity helps to illuminate the possibilities of new ways of provisioning which disrupt existing dominant systems.

Like other lifestyle movements and politics, tending a garden can allow individuals to express, embody and develop their social and environmental ideals (Pottinger, 2017), though this does, of course, mean that the critique of perceived individualism and localisation as complicit in processes of neoliberalisation (Guthman, 2008; Pudup, 2008) as a dominant reading of local food activity looms as large in home gardening as in other activities. Although gardening, especially that which is carried out in private or semi-private spaces, looks radically different from more recognisable formal protest, and sits apart from ethical consumption, there are political potentialities and orientations to be found in these spaces. Everyday food cultivation, preparation, and exchange are all permeated by political sensibilities and are inextricably a part of how we create the world in which we want to live (Hall, 2011; Smith and Jehlička, 2013; Wilbur, 2013; Pottinger, 2017).

5.2.6.2   Community Gardening

> The huge growth in interest and participation in public gardens and community orchards, together with the way that food ethics and a concern for sustainability and responsibly sourced products have entered the cultural mainstream in recent years, means that allotments have become popular again, even cool, their promise of self-sufficiency, thrift and health coinciding with a broadsheet emphasis on environmentalism… they offer an alternative to a life of getting and spending (Farley and Symmones Roberts, 2012, p. 108)

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Community gardens have often been enthusiastically promoted as interventions which enhance food security and improve nutrition, while also helping to alleviate poverty and being an important tool for sustainable community development, although they have not often been seen as viable alternatives to wider food systems, and as with other food growing projects also come in for criticism for reproducing, as opposed to resisting, neoliberalism as discussed earlier (also see for example (Pudup, 2008; Ghose and Pettygrove, 2014). Like gardening at home and in other private spaces, community gardening can also be an expression of gardeners' social and environmental beliefs.

Community gardening may instead be approached as something which presents new possibilities for social relations and larger scale alternatives to dominant food systems. Nathan McClintock (2014) argues convincingly that urban agriculture, and therefore community gardening as well, is neither wholly radical nor wholly neoliberal, but "may exemplify both a form of actually existing neo-liberalism and a simultaneous radical counter-movement arising in dialectical tension"(p.148). There is a sense that these alternative forms of provisioning must be able to function alongside existing systems, at least for the foreseeable future, and that is individuals are not required to move into an intentional community, then they too must be able to move between systems if they are to function within society. As such, community gardens may instead be understood as representing a shift *towards* sustainable materialism, based on collective and sustainable action and politics rather than individualist approaches. They can also be seen as examples of prefigurative ways of bringing new and alternative ways of being into the present (Schlosberg, 2019).

5.2.6.3 Guerrilla Gardening

Gardening in the community is not, of course, limited to community gardening. Guerrilla gardening typically involves volunteers who may act either individually or collectively to plant on

neglected land (either public or private) without the landowner's consent (Flores, 2006; Adams and Hardman, 2014). It is a global movement which can be found across the world from Africa to Asia, the USA and the UK, and is practiced by people from all groups, including (but not limited to) students and the elderly, businessmen and the disenfranchised alike (Reynolds, 2008). There is a spectrum of guerrilla gardening too. Incredible Edible, for example, gardens on public and neglected land, but does so with permission. There are arguments that these practices help to shorten supply chains and work towards self-sufficiency, though in practice they often seem to focus more on bringing together communities and other social benefits. The small spaces available mean the yield is often small, and so recreational and social purposes are as important as the food grown and harvested (Wiltshire and Geoghegan, 2012; Hardman *et al.*, 2018).

Like home gardening, which is often overlooked in favour of community gardening, guerrilla gardening tends to be overlooked in favour of urban agriculture more broadly. That said, there are several themes which emerge from both popular and academic authors on the topic. These include notions of subversion, critique, playfulness, spontaneity, self-organisation, illegality and anonymity (Pinder, 2005; Tracey, 2007; Hou, 2010) all of which mean it sits well with conceptions of activism. It is an example of self-determined, local, critical and expressive action, which allows for exploration of notions of sustainability and of how sustainable communities are produced rather than planned (Crane, Viswanathan and Whitelaw, 2013), and so has the same sense of experimentation, flexibility and possibility as we find in sustainable materialism and diverse economies. It also is necessarily a 'bottom-up' action, rather than a 'top-down' one, again very much in line with notions of diverse economies. Interestingly, it has, in places, been utilised by more official entities as part of a broader urban agriculture strategy, suggesting a similar "dialectical tension" (McClintock, 2014, p. 148) to community gardening projects and adding to the concept's 'fuzziness'.

Indeed, there are instances where 'guerrilla' gardening is actively encouraged by local authorities in a bid to regenerate land and communities. In Salford, for example, an urban farm acts as a hub

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for community regeneration, and other productive spaces (orchards, allotments, and community gardens for example) are linked together to create an urban agriculture network. The city council also uses a variety of marketing tools to encourage guerrilla gardeners to enable this urban agriculture and to help regenerate the land (Hardman *et al.*, 2018). A core group here is Incredible Edible Salford, who began by guerrilla gardening before legitimising their activities. This model is echoed around the country by other Incredible Edible groups. In fact, the Incredible Edible group that I researched for this thesis has a close working relationship with the local council, and their activities are a key part of the town's 'green' and community policies and activities.

This legitimised version of guerrilla gardening means the term 'Guerrilla' may be a little misleading, in that it implies illegal and aggressive activity, which is certainly not true of all guerrilla gardening! Most groups and individuals who choose to grow without permission do so in no small part because of unwieldy and inaccessible planning systems rather than through any real desire to partake in something illegal or in any way aggressive (Reynolds, 2008; Hardman *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, in the UK, growing (food or otherwise) does not constitute criminal damage, and as such there have been no arrests (although detention has been threatened, incorrectly or otherwise) (Reynolds, 2008; Adams, Hardman and Larkham, 2015). Though not exactly criminal, the activity is certainly informal, and is also transgressive, in that it acts outside of normal gardening and growing practices, and demands change in doing so (Jordan, 2001) meaning it is easily accommodated within notions of food activism.

Michael Hardman et al (2018) found that there was a view that guerrilla gardening was a fun and informal practice which acts as a catalyst for bringing people together. Although the use of the term 'guerrilla' may imply subversive and clandestine activity, there is a warmth to guerrilla gardening which is as much about community as it is about sustainability and direct action. It is a movement which revives spaces at the same time as raising awareness and encouraging engagement in the wider community (Hardman *et al.*, 2018). As with community gardening, it often sits alongside urban agriculture more broadly, and so is open to the same criticisms of not

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properly challenging the systems which it purports to oppose. But, as it tends to focus on community and wider notions of sustainability as well as (and often over and above) feeding populations, guerrilla gardening is important because involves active and future-oriented activity which allows participants to actively construct sustainable spaces and communities (Crane, Viswanathan and Whitelaw, 2013), creating possibilities in the present through prefigurative activity and sustainable materialism..

Perhaps, instead of thinking of the now familiar slogans, 'buy local' and, 'eat local', we should consider local food as an exhortation to, 'grow local'. Widening our gaze from consumption to include production as well as broader material flows opens up possibilities for sharing, bartering, swapping and simply giving away. We can see entire (possible) alternative systems and flows. Instead of spaces in which neoliberal subjectivities are reproduced, home gardens, community gardens and guerrilla gardening sites can instead become spaces of possibility, where participants are trying out new ways of meeting material needs outside of existing flows of power, and where participants are much more than simple consumers. Gardeners are participating in new collective institutions, actively disengaging from existing flows of material, and instead producing their own food. They may also make food available in their community, further disrupting existing systems by offering alternatives to those around them, especially where that food is free.

5.3   Hopeful Local Food

What sustainable materialism and the diverse economies framework have in common is a sense of possibility, a 'Politics of the Possible'. Participants try out new ways of producing, consuming, and distributing food, demonstrating possibilities, and in doing so make other actions, other economies, and other material flows possible. As these new possibilities open up and new futures become plausible, so the goals of people working in these movements can shift. As John Jordan (an activist and writer in the global justice movement) writes:

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Our movements are trying to create a politics which challenges all the certainties of traditional leftist politics, not by replacing them with new ones, but by dissolving any notion that we have answers, plans or strategies that are watertight and universal… We are trying to build a politics… that acts in the moment, *not to create something in the future but to build it in the present*, it's the politics of the here and now. When we are asked how we are going to build a new world, our answer is, "We don't know, but let's build it together."(quoted in Solnit, 2016, p. 93, emphasis added)

In this sense of possibility, alongside the emphasis on action, doing, and practice we find hope. Hope is practical, in that it requires action on the part of the hoper. Sustainable materialism, unlike ethical consumption for example, and diverse economies do not work within the existing system, but instead build new ones alongside it, a prefiguration of a possible alternative system. This means that individuals may choose to operate in whatever way they prefer. Whether that is growing their own produce to give away, operating systems of sharing and exchange, or moving production into the public sphere and planting on common land. This wide scope of possibility empowers individuals and groups in a way which is specific to these forms of activism. It allows for goals to develop and shift, and for new local food futures to be brought into being in the present. Participants are empowered by a sense of possibility and of the efficacy of their actions, and are also sure that without action, those possibilities would not be attainable. Sustainable materialist movements and diverse economies are, therefore, inherently hopeful.

This means that the everyday activism found in diverse economies and sustainable materialism, and especially within the local food movement, gives us an insight into the ways in which hope works in a practical sense. As prefigurative projects, they enact their goals in the present, demonstrating the agency and empowerment which is at the centre of hope as a concept. Local food activism especially demonstrates how individuals and groups may come together to take practical steps towards large or lofty goals (changing the existing food system, or wider

sustainability goals such as limiting climate impact to 1.5 degrees for example) which might otherwise be seen as improbable or even unlikely.

6 Methodology

In the preceding chapters I have established that hope should be explored as politics, and that local food activism, particularly through examples of sustainable materialism and diverse economies, is a good forum in which to do so. I have also said that hope is, by its very nature, difficult to observe. The observable aspect of hope is the future-oriented action which it inspires in groups and individuals, while further evidence that these actions are in fact hopeful must necessarily come from the accounts of those groups and individuals as awareness of limitations and obstacles and a sense of agency are both harder to observe in a practical way.

Therefore, exploring hope requires the depth made possible in qualitative methods. We need to listen to those involved, and to allow them to define what hope means to them, paying attention to the context in which they are working. To do that I have relied largely on interviews and observations, but also the inclusion of texts and documents, pointing to ethnography and qualitative methods as the most appropriate choice for this thesis (Merriam, 2014; Kleres and Wettergren, 2017).

The aim is to pursue a holistic and exploratory approach which allows significant meanings to emerge rather than to be selected at the outset, enabling those less observable aspects of hope, in particular individuals' motivations and the meanings that they attach to their action, to come to the fore. To this end, I felt it was important to focus on interpretation and discovery, rather than hypothesis testing (Merriam, 2014). I also felt that it was important to consider those actions in context as well as working with participants' descriptions of those meanings and actions, so I was also keen to go beyond using just speech as data and to use activity and interaction in the projects I was studying. The most obvious route, therefore, was to produce an ethnographic case study of local food activism, allowing me to focus on "interpretation in context" (Cronbach, 1975, p.123).

Ethnography focuses on seeking to understand from the inside, emphasising discovery, rather than suggesting or assuming what answers will be found (Schensul and LeCompte, 1999). In this sense, it is both exploratory and emergent, as the researcher uses the method to discover the significant questions, rather than having them all at the outset (Spradley, 1980; Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Schensul and LeCompte, 1999) giving space for participants to convey their own meanings and explanations, rather than being 'lead' by a more closed type of questioning. My interviews were largely conversational, and the grounding in a relational understanding alongside an ethnographic approach led to a generally conversational approach overall, with data feeding into reading, and reading influencing the shape of fieldwork.

Arguably, there is no method which can fully capture the complexity of life (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), and it is never possible to fully know events (Law, 2004), and this is perhaps particularly resonant with a concept such as hope, so much of which is linked to the cognitive, and therefore 'unobservable', lives of participants. Ethnography's strength in the face of this is its emphasis on understanding events from the *inside* (Grills, 1998). Participant observation, as part of ethnography, allows the researcher to try to experience the participant's world, and to therefore gain some understanding of it. The goal, as Pink (2015) describes, is "to seek to know places in other people's worlds that are similar to the places and ways of knowing of those others" in order to "come closer to understanding how those other people experience, remember and imagine" (p.25). On a practical level, it was unfortunately not possible for me to become a volunteer at the projects I studied and immerse myself in the way I would have liked. I did, however, participate on the days I was present, and avoided wherever possible being a wholly passive observer.

Although I arrived at the projects with ideas of which techniques I would use, and which might be most effective, some methods proved more fruitful than others, and so my fieldwork involved an element of experimentation. It was made up of qualitative interviews, with both individuals and groups, in a variety of settings, participant observations, attendance at public events, and document analysis. At its heart, my fieldwork involved 'being' at the sites, which allowed for

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serendipitous learning (Pink, 2015) and the surprises (Willis and Trondman, 2000) which are key to this type of understanding. I will outline this approach in what follows, including how and why sites and individuals were selected, as well as introducing my participants and their projects. More detailed pen-portraits will follow towards the end of the chapter.

6.1 Participants and site selection

Ethnography, as described above, requires sustained contact with a group in its usual setting over time. This is to gain familiarity and a deeper understanding of the lives and experiences of the participants, and indeed of the sites which they occupy. Although this produces a rich and detailed case study, it is often challenged as producing only that, resulting in a limited view of the example being studied, rather than giving any generalisable or representative findings. This criticism overlooks the value of contextualised knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and neglects the notion that, in studying the particular, we may explore how the macro and micro mingle, and may question theories and generalisations (Gobo, 2004; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Cases, it should be remembered, are also multiple in that they include multiple individuals (Stake, 1995). A small number of cases taken in context may also offer insight into wider issues through comparison with other investigations or with theory (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Bearing this in mind, my choice of cases has been influenced not by an attempt to identify a representative sample, not least because this is virtually impossible when studying people (Gobo, 2004). Instead, my choice of cases has been guided by a need to gain meaningful information about the issues (Mason, 2002), as well as by practicality.

I have included multiple sites in this project, not to provide a formal comparison of case studies and variables, but rather to treat them collectively as one case study across different geographic sites. All the sites are connected through the participants who work together or are connected through a common organisation. Treating them collectively is an attempt to gain a broader

understanding. Studying multiple sites also allows consideration of reasons for variation and similarities, and what they suggest about food activism more generally.

At an early stage, I began to 'cast the net' for case studies (Crang and Cook, 2007). This involved searching online and finding local contacts, as well as attending events in various locations around the UK. This was limited primarily in terms of access, as sites needed to be relatively close to me so that I could travel to visit them on a regular basis. The groups chosen also needed to meet some criteria; They needed to be involved in local food activism, although it is accepted that the participants, and the group itself, may not define their activity in that way. A group that engages in both production and consumption was sought because this demonstrates the tangible and transgressive type of agency as explored earlier. The group also needed to engage with the community in some way, in a way that an allotment site for example perhaps would not, as this demonstrates a move away from purely individual action to that which is more socially focussed and aims to effect change (Friedland, 2008).

6.1.1   Incredible Edible

I was aware of Incredible Edible (IE) as a movement before starting this research and contacted some of the IE groups near me as part of the 'casting the net' process. Several responded, and I settled on two IE sites, with some interviews with IE volunteers from neighbouring projects, and attendance at some wider IE events. IE matched all the criteria identified above and was therefore a natural choice.

Incredible Edible is a network of groups across the UK, and internationally, which aspire to create connected communities through food. Their slogan is 'if you eat, you're in'. They began in Todmorden, Yorkshire, in 2008, where they used growing as a visible sign of a kinder, connected, community. They started growing edibles in public spaces and on disused land, aiming to create a more connected community, as well as giving people access to fresh local produce. The founding

motivations were both green, in response to a less than hopeful rhetoric of environmental disaster, and social. Their emphasis on a 'belief in small actions' is inherently hopeful, making them an obvious choice for this study.

I have used multiple groups in this ethnography but will primarily focus on one group in Abermor, North Wales[10]. Additional interview data is provided from discussions with group members in Froifanc and Abercwm and at an Incredible Edible 'gathering' of Welsh members. Abermor is a North Welsh coastal town, where the group has a garden share where they bring on plants, as well as public beds around Abermor town and in Trefrheil (a neighbouring suburb). They are a well-established IE group, with 'beacon' status, meaning that they work with groups in the surrounding areas to help to them get established, offer advice etc. Volunteers from Abercwm IE group were also interviewed, and I attended a 'gathering' of Welsh IE groups at an early stage of the research. All the groups are made up of men and women, locals and 'incomers', with varying backgrounds. They are, generally, united in their interest in growing and community.

6.2   Ethics and responsibility

Prior to fieldwork I secured ethical approval from Keele University by outlining how I would prepare for and address potential ethical issues as part of the ethical approval process. This provided a framework, but it is worth noting that there are no explicit rules for ethical fieldwork, as what is right and ethical is often dependent on context and, as such, is unpredictable (Hamersley and Atkinson, 1995; Lofland and Lofland, 1995; DeLaine, 2000; Crang and Cook, 2007; Hay, 2010). The guiding principle which is most important to follow is to seek to do no harm

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[10] Please note that all place names used are pseudonyms. As all the places used in this study are Welsh, I have used Welsh words for alternative names:
1- Abermor means estuary
2- Froifanc means young, or new, vale
3- Cwm means valley, and aber is a commonly used prefix in Welsh coastal towns
4- Trefrheil means township

(Murphy and Dingwall, 2005; Hay, 2010), and this is best achieved by developing relationships of trust, empathy and respect with research participants (DeLaine, 2000).

Ethnographic research takes place over a sustained period of time, which means that questions arise over whether informed consent is possible (Schensul, S and LeCompte, 1999; Murphy and Dingwall, 2005), and even more so in public spaces such as at the 'gathering' I attended as part of my fieldwork (Watts, 2011). As such there was extra responsibility on me as the researcher to act with integrity throughout the research process. I followed informed consent procedures to ensure that participants were aware that they could choose whether they wanted to participate, and of their right to withdraw. I am aware, however, that once some people had chosen to participate, others may have felt awkward about choosing not to, and at other times it simply wasn't practical to get informed consent from everyone who attended the project on a given day. In these situations, I made sure that everyone at least knew that I was there and that I was there in my capacity as a researcher. All those who chose to participate, and those who regularly attended the project, were given an information sheet explaining the project and its aims, what their rights as participants were, and giving the contact details of people at the university if they had any questions. They also had the opportunity to discuss my research and the implications for them with me. I also made sure to remind participants prior to interviews that they could say at any point if they touched on an issue which they would rather I did not include in my write-up of the project.

In line with the university's ethics guidelines, all participants will remain anonymous using pseudonyms for individuals, organisations and locations, and participants were informed of this. Many replied that they would be happy to be named, although some seemed to visibly relax when they realised that any contribution would be anonymous. I think that this was more out of self-consciousness rather than for any other reason as there is very little sensitive data included in this project. That said, it was still important to ensure that participants would not be able to identify each other in cases where comments might be seen as controversial within the group

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(although there weren't many of these). All data was and will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act and university ethics guidelines to safeguard participants' anonymity and will be deleted following completion of the study.

All necessary and reasonable precautions regarding safety (for both participants and the researcher) will be taken throughout the study.

6.3   Mothering in the field

For practical reasons, I took my toddler with me into the field. It is, I believe, relevant to mention and discuss this here as it not only threw up practical issues with carrying out my research design, but also had interesting effects on my fieldwork and on my reflections on it. When I began my fieldwork, my child was nine months old and very much a baby. As fieldwork progressed, and she grew and became more mobile, the challenges and effects of having her with me on field visits altered.

I often had to move between 'researcher' and 'mother' several times during interviews and observations. I would need to feed my daughter halfway through an interview or need to be keeping an eye on where she was going while we were walking in the garden. This meant that, on one level, it was difficult to immerse myself in the fieldwork as a researcher. I did not have the luxury of long uninterrupted tracts of time to focus exclusively on my participants. On the other hand, it meant that I needed to be very 'present' in the field and aware of my surroundings and what was going on around me. This gave me the opportunity to really experience the project as an individual, rather than solely as a researcher, and gave a richness to my observations as they could include details which I might have missed had I not been watching my toddler go exploring.

She spent time strapped to me in a sling as we moved around the garden, in turns sleeping and babbling away. She also spent time moving around the gardens, at first crawling and later walking, and around the space where we were taking tea breaks and other gatherings. Although caring for

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a toddler while undertaking research was challenging, it also allowed for a different kind of exploration of the sites and for new interactions with the participants. They picked raspberries for her, and watched her walk among the vegetable beds, interested in what she might choose to stop to investigate, or to taste.

I also found that, as Danielle Drozdzewski and Daniel Robinson (2015) reported, my identity as a parent was important, or at least interesting, to my participants, and our conversations often were as much about family and children (though still related to food, gardening, and the other topics at hand) as they were about the project itself. "Mothering is always a public text, visible and open to scrutiny" (Eversole et al, 2013, pp.164-165) which also provides common ground and connection. Being in the field as a mother as well as a researcher gave opportunities to connect with my participants in different ways, as well as to explore the projects in ways in which may not have been possible otherwise.

Motherhood most certainly had an impact on the ways in which I could build rapport with my participants. They related to me in their own roles as parents and grandparents, and importantly they related to me as someone other than just a researcher. I found that I was more approachable in general. At the gathering for example, people came to say hello to the baby, or to chat to me about what she was doing (playing with flowerpots and string on the floor), which then lead on to introductions and discussions with me about my research and the work that they did. On the other hand, it also introduced a level of distraction which at times could interrupt the flow of conversation. My daughter features in almost all my interview tapes, babbling or playing in the background, or otherwise interacting with both me and the interviewee, or indeed going on a raid of the raspberry bushes. To an extent this helped the conversations to feel more natural, and certainly less formal, though meant that I often found myself seeking clarification either in follow-up conversations or in subsequent e-mails with participants. I was also lucky in that everyone at the group seemed very pleased to have her at the project and were happy to let her play and to interact with her. Had this not been the case, and people had been less comfortable or less

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enthusiastic about children then I might have had a very different experience of taking a baby into the field.

6.4   Methods

6.4.1   Getting to know people and sites

As is typical of ethnographic studies, this project took place over an extended period of time. Fieldwork began in April 2019 and continued for a period of approximately six months. This was limited in part for practical reasons (I had a period of maternity leave, and growing seasons also affected activity level, followed by the pandemic of 2020) but still gave a good amount of time for relationship building and regular visits to the sites. My fieldwork involved getting to know my research sites and my participants in several ways. Principally, participants would tell me about themselves and about their projects (in interviews). They would also show me their projects and guide me around the sites, and, wherever possible, I would participate in their activities. The following section explores these ways of getting to know the sites and the participants.

6.4.2   Interviewing; Tell me a story

Principal among my methods were qualitative interviews. Initial interviews followed a loose guide, beginning with a broad 'tell me a bit about yourself and how you came to be involved in the project' question, and including questions about what they thought was important about the project. Subsequent discussions were informed by previous interviews but were largely unstructured. That said, where possible I did follow Amsler's (2006) description of the three aspects of discourses of hope, and include questions to try to uncover the 'what-exists-but-is-undesirable' (Amsler, 2006) by understanding how participants understand the current food system and problems within it, and environmental issues, which they may be responding to through their activities. Further questions about what participants want to achieve through their

actions, and whether they believe them to be part of a collective effort, were also used where possible as these explored the 'what-is-desired-but-not-yet-existing' (Amsler, 2006) portion of hopeful discourse. Finally, questions about how participants' activities will enable the realisation of stated goals were used to try to illuminate notions of agency. Questions about why participants choose to engage in local food action rather than other types of action were also used where I could, to try to get an understanding about what it is that local food activity offers that other sustainability projects and activities do not.

The open-ended questions and largely unstructured interview style allowed participants to tell their stories, present their own narratives and identify for themselves what they thought was important or interesting. Beginning with a question such as, 'tell me about how you came to be involved with Incredible Edible' often lead not just to the story of how they started with Incredible Edible, but also to a longer history, situating their involvement with Incredible Edible in a wider life story. Through this I was able to begin to understand varying motivations for involvement, how Incredible Edible sits within a wider ethos and alongside other activities, and to begin to consider stories of hope and activism within wider life stories. Individual narratives and those of the collective cross over or come together at a certain point to create an overall story of community, food, activism, and hope.

Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and three hours, though most lasted around an hour and a half. Conversations with participants were generally led by the interviewees, and some were simply more talkative than others, while other interviews were constrained by practicalities of time or taking shelter from the weather. I recorded interviews, rather than making notes during them. This helped participants to 'forget' that the conversation was in fact an interview and made it easier to move around as most interviews took place outside and I often didn't have space to write. Interviews were later transcribed, and appended with notes about the setting, any significant non-verbal interactions, as well as my initial reflections.

6.4.3 Moving around the sites

> To show something to somebody is to cause it to be seen or otherwise experienced –
> whether by touch, taste, smell, or hearing – by that other person. It is, as it were, to lift a
> veil off some aspect or component of the environment so that it can be apprehended
> directly (Ingold, 2000, p.21-2).

At each site, the first visit always involved some form of 'tour', where one or more of the participants would show me around the site(s). This allowed me to orient myself in the space in a practical way, and to get an overview of the project as a whole. It also allowed me to see which parts of the site or project interested and animated my guide the most; did they emphasis the herb beds, the composting sites, or the wild parts of the garden for example? This gave me a sense of how they viewed the project, and how they situated themselves within it.

Interviews generally took place outside, taking the form of conversations while we moved around the garden or undertook tasks. When we were stationary, we were typically sat in the garden or another area of the site with people moving in and out of the space. We often chatted over coffee as a group, and it was this natural, informal, and dynamic setting which was important. Participants were not static in their projects, they were busy. Either working in the gardens or interacting with one another. Including this fluid aspect in the data gathering allowed reflection of the active nature of the work participants did, rather than a static description.

Some of the interviews took place sitting down in the house at the garden share, in cafes, or in the garden itself. Others took place while work was ongoing and while moving around the garden and project space. Moving about the space offered the opportunity to observe, rather than to just take down an account, combining interviews with participant observation to a degree. Moving away from a more formal, traditional, interview setting also reduced any sense of formality, and seemed to help the conversation to flow more naturally. Rather than unnatural

pauses which can occur in the somewhat contrived setting of a traditional interview, pauses in conversation happened as jobs needed to be done, paths crossed, or people were encountered.

Physically being in the space, and moving around it, also offered me the opportunity to experience the site in a way that the participants might also do. The physical and tactile nature of gardening and growing is an integral part of this type of local food activism. It was therefore important to experience the physicality of the environment, the feel, sounds and smells of being in the garden or at the projects all contribute to the 'sense' of the project overall.

6.4.4   Taking part and joining in

I have already described the ways in which I tried to participate in the sites, by being present and taking part wherever possible, I also made extensive field notes and observations whenever I participated in this way. Therefore, as a complement to interview data, participant observations make up a large part of the data in this project. These provide first-hand, natural accounts of hope and local food activism, as opposed to the often-artificial feeling of interviews and the second-hand nature of the data generated. These observations will also provide context for interview data and contribute to generating questions and lines of enquiry for subsequent interviews (Merriam, 2014).

Participating also allowed me to experience the project from a participant's point of view to some extent. Getting involved, and essentially imitating the bodily practices of others in the space, gave me the opportunity to learn beyond what I was able to merely observe (Pink, 2015). It also helped me to integrate into the group. By contributing, or 'mucking in' where I could, I became a part of the group, or at least less of an outsider, which helped participants to relate to me, as well as giving me the chance to experience things from their perspective.

Observations of participants engaging in local food project activities and related action in their everyday lives is used to contextualise descriptions of agency within interviews, and to build a rich case study. These participant observations during field visits and volunteer events enabled a fuller understanding by observing action as well as including words and narratives. They also allowed exploration of the structures which constrain action, and of the contexts and places in which action takes place (Orne and Bell, 2015).

If hope is to be understood in relation to agency, then it is important to understand the actions that people take, as well as the things they say. This is not only to triangulate data, but also to capture the actions which people may not notice that they take, or which they do not deem important enough to raise in an interview. Indeed, comparing the actions which people choose to refer to in an interview with those which they take in a more everyday setting could shed some light on how people define activism, and what they consider to be important.

6.4.5   Time for Tea!

Tea and coffee breaks often formed an important part of my visits. This allowed for time to sit and talk to participants, in a one-to-one situation or as a group. Although these conversations were generally more stationary than the ones which took place in the garden, they were no less rich in context. Surrounded by the group, I was a part of varying and wide-ranging conversations, and got to see the group 'off-duty'. The social interactions within the groups were a significant part of the day's activity, and these often centred on the sharing of food and drink, whether in the form of tea and biscuits, as shared meals, or in the distributing of surplus produce throughout the group before heading home.

Sharing meals, tea breaks, and produce, offered another layer of participation for me. As well as experiencing the group in the garden, I was able to integrate better into the group in these settings. Everyone was 'off duty', including myself to a degree. Although I made sure that

everyone was aware that I always maintained my role as a researcher, these conversations felt much more natural and were entirely undirected, which gave me a much more natural place in the conversation. I was also able to experience the social, or 'off-duty', side of the project for the participants. The importance of the group dynamic, and the social nature of the project came up frequently in interviews and discussion, so it was interesting and illuminating to experience this side of things, as well as the actual work of growing and distributing food.

Although I had not *not* anticipated tea breaks, I had not considered their importance beyond the need for rest. These breaks became rich sources of information for me, as well as wonderful opportunities to build relationships with people in the groups.

6.4.6   Document analysis; understanding the context?

Part of getting to know both the sites and the participants involved the use of the Incredible Edible website and the social media feeds from the groups studied (note that only publicly available images and text were used, and comments from individuals were not included in order to avoid any ethical issues with consent, see section 6.2)(Morgan, 2022). On a practical level, this helped me to 'explore' my sites and the work of my participants from a distance, compensating, in some ways, for a more limited time in the field than would perhaps have been ideal for an ethnographic study (Morgan, 2022).

Textual analysis of photographs and literature (websites, pamphlets etc.) produced by the individuals and the group helps to support and contextualise both observation and interview data, as well as to offer insight into what the authors of the documents deem to be important (Silverman, 2017). It is important to understand how participants present their activity to the outside world; do they portray it as activism? Do they use hopeful language? If not, what kind of language *do* they use? Do participants feel that others will understand their actions in the same ways that they do themselves?

Understanding this allows for exploration of the ways in which participants construct meanings and, indeed, the world around them (Morgan, 2022). It also gave me a source of data which I had not been involved in producing. As a researcher and participant in my interviews and conversations, I was of course involved in the production of that data. Even more so, the notes that resulted from my observations were of course produced by myself and so reflect my own position as much as what I saw as I necessarily interpreted things for myself (Morgan, 2022). Using texts already produced by the participants gave me a way of 'triangulating' my other data, ensuring it's accuracy, as well as providing context for things which I might not have fully understood as I learned to take notes in the field and managed my child, as well as simply checking that my interpretation matched (or didn't) the ways that participants saw themselves, or at least wanted others to see them.

I used the Incredible Edible website, mostly focussing on the 'about us' pages and their 'news' articles. The news section of the website contains numerous blog posts and articles, so I searched for those which were about or contained the themes and topics which resulted from my analysis of my observations and interviews. For social media posts, I focussed on the most recent posts, preferring those which were produced over the duration of my study rather than looking too far back into the past. I felt that this gave a more accurate picture of how the group saw themselves *now*. I also felt that this period could be included ethically, while participants may not necessarily have felt that they had given me permission to look through historical posts. I did, however, look for historical posts about specific events which participants discussed with me.

At times, I looked for latent meanings in the language used by participants (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), and at others I took a more descriptive approach, using explicit meanings and examples from texts as illustrative examples in my analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). That said, rather than quantifying instances of words and phrases in documents, they were approached in a similar way to interview transcripts and observation notes (see below). They were coded in the same way, and meanings rather than words were the focus of analysis. Codes were not established at the

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beginning of analysis, and instead developed as I went along. For example, a code, or theme, could be split into two or renamed if it better reflected my understanding to do so. This helped me to uncover and explore unexpected themes and meanings, rather than simply summarising the data in front of me (Braun and Clarke, 2013). It also required me to be reflexive, acknowledging that my interpretations are affected by my own commitments, assumptions, and scholarly knowledge and interests. My themes, as a result, reflect patterns of shared meanings between myself and my participants (Morgan, 2022).

6.4.7 Narrative Analysis

As I began interviews, they quickly took on a narrative form, as participants told me their stories and told me the story of the group more widely. As a result, narrative analysis was an obvious and appropriate method of analysis.

Narrative inquiry, which is what my interviews turned out to be, simply means to gather, analyse, and represent people's stories as told by them, and can refer to a wide variety of methods of gathering data, from personal anecdotes and news stories to folktales and oral histories (Cortazzi, 2007). Narrative analysis is concerned with the meaning of human experience; in the stories that people tell we find subjective meanings as well a sense of self and identity (both individual and collective), both of which are especially relevant when exploring hope. These stories are reconstructions of a person's experiences, remembered and told at a particular point in their lives, to a particular person (in this case me as a researcher) and for a particular purpose (Cortazzi, 2007). This will have a bearing on how the stories are told, and indeed on which stories are told in the first place. They do not, importantly, represent 'life as lived', but instead they show our representations of those lives as told to us (Cortazzi, 2007).

Rather than giving an objective 'truth' to be proven or disproven, narratives give us memorable and interesting knowledge, giving layers of understanding of a person, their culture, or how they

have created change (Polletta, 2006; Cortazzi, 2007). In listening to stories, we hear the storyteller making sense of the past and creating meanings as they tell us – or show us – what happened to them. The shape of the story is equally as important as the information contained within it. It helps to organise how people interpret events; the values, beliefs and experiences that guide their interpretations; and their hopes, intentions and plans for the future as well (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Cortazzi, 2007). Narratives are ways in which we translate knowing into telling, so to tell a story is to come to know something (White, 1981). This is true not only for the participants telling their stories, but also for me as a researcher, as in writing the ethnography – in telling my own story and those of others – I come to know something about hope and about local food activism.

We can find complex patterns, descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction, and evidence of social discourses that impact on a person's knowledge creation from specific cultural standpoints. Knowledge from narrative inquiry is situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterised by multiple voices, perspectives, truths and meanings, but is no less valid and important for being so (Polletta, 2006; Cortazzi, 2007; Davies, 2007). In this case, I have explored the narratives of stories of identity within the group, as activists, food growers, etc, as well as for themes of hope or other motivations. The stories which participants tell about themselves within the context of the group and the work which it does come together to tell a wider story of the group, the movement, and how people might engage with local food activism and wider sustainability discourses.

Narrative analysis can focus on the structure of stories, or on the content and meaning of them. In this case, I have focused on the content of the narratives presented by participants and the meanings conveyed by them, beginning with the position that their stories are socially constructed and situated (Cortazzi, 2007). Analysis involved applying concepts derived from theory and from the data itself and was ongoing in that it took place, as with all my analysis, alongside data collection (Pink, 2015). The emphasis is on co-construction of meaning between the researcher and the participants (Cortazzi, 2007; Davies, 2007). As a researcher, I have been

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necessarily involved in conversations and constantly taking in what is being said and comparing it to my own personal understandings. 'Gaps' in the narratives should not be filled in with 'grand narratives', though, and I have avoided doing so wherever possible. Instead, the goal is to understand how the narratives relate to one another, and how they make sense together. As such, stories will be re-presented in ways which maintain their integrity. In practice this means that larger tracts of conversation, rather than short quotes or 'soundbites' will be used to illustrate points, to try to give a sense of how the conversation went, rather than taking words out of context.

Narrative analysis treats stories as knowledge *per se* which constitutes "the social reality of the narrator" (Ethrington, 2004, p. 81) and conveys a sense of that person's experience in its depth, messiness, richness and texture, by using the actual words spoken (Cortazzi, 2007). It should include some of the researcher's part in the conversation to be transparent about the relational nature of the research and the ways in which stories are shaped through dialogue and co-construction, as well as providing a reflexive layer regarding the researcher's positioning, and as such, my voice is as much a part of the research presented as the participant's voices are. In this way, the writing of an ethnography becomes a narrative in itself. It is a story of the research process, analysis and discovery by the researcher, as well as of reflexivity (Cortazzi, 2007; Davies, 2007).

6.5   Fieldwork timeline

I started my fieldwork in February 2019. I began by reaching out to an Incredible Edible group near to me and went to Froifanc where I interviewed a key contact twice, once in the garden, and once in a market which the group had links to. I also had a tour of their garden and other growing sites. My contact in Froifanc put me in touch with Caroline at Abemor, who suggested I come along to the Incredible Edible Welsh gathering.

The gathering gave me a chance to attend a day of talks and presentations from members of Welsh Incredible Edible groups and the founder of Incredible Edibles. I took part in breakout sessions in which we talked about what each group was doing, what worked or didn't work, what they planned for the future, and how they might increase engagement.

Following the gathering, I had some email discussion with members of Incredible Abercwm and travelled to meet with and interview one of their members in depth.

I was approached by members of Incredible Abermor, who agreed to participate in my study. I visited Incredible Edible Abermor between May 2019 and January 2020. On each visit I spent time interviewing each of my key participants, took part in group work, and sat down with the group as a whole for tea breaks. I also went to the two major annual events which the group participates it; the Honey Fair and the food festival, as well as going to the group's summer barbecue. I spent most of my time at the group's garden but was also given a tour of the growing sites around the town by Caroline and visited them again when I attended the events in the town.

My fieldwork finished in March 2020 before my second baby was due. I had intended to go back into the field when writing up after I had taken some time off for maternity leave, but the COVID-19 pandemic meant that this was impossible. Instead, I e-mailed participants whenever I needed clarification or wanted to expand on a point and took part in group zoom calls whenever possible. My conversation with participants very much continued, despite the new socially distanced ways in which we now had to work.

6.5.1 Fieldwork timeline table

Date	Participant	Activity
Feb 2019	Julia	Site visits and interviews in Froifanc
March 2019	Members of Welsh Incredible Edible groups	Attended the Welsh Incredible Edible Gathering. Participated in group discussions, watched presentations from key Incredible Edible members, and made contacts with several individuals and groups.
April 2019	Geoff	Visit to a site just outside of Abercwm, lengthy interview
May 2019 – Jan 2020	Members of Incredible Abermor	- VISIT 1- Initial conversations with Caroline, Katherine, Colin and Jill, and Jackie, Group discussion during coffee break, lunch, spending time in the gardens. - VISIT 2- Initial conversations with Rebecca, Jackie and Matt, Follow-up interviews with Katherine and Caroline, and site visits around the town and to the edible hedgerow and school plot. - VISIT 3- Follow-up conversations, some interviews with other members of the group (not quoted) - VISIT 4- Members' summer barbecue. - VISIT 5- Follow-up conversations/ interviews. - VISIT 6- Spending time in the gardens and town. - Emails were exchanged with participants throughout as I sought clarification/ elaboration.

July 2019	Abermor members	Visit to the honey fair event in the town, spending time with the group at their stall and around the event
September 2019	Abermor members	Visit to the town's annual food festival, spending time with the group at their stall and around the event
March 2020- May 2021	Covid 19 lockdown and maternity leave. We had a zoom call as a group before I went on maternity leave, and a call after my daughter was born. We exchanged e-mails and kept in touch while I was on leave.	
May 2021- July 2022	Abermor members	Email follow-ups and clarifications from Katherine, Matt, Rebecca and Caroline. Caroline also put my questions to the group for me.

6.6   Analysis

As is often stressed in discussions of ethnography, there is little distinction between the fieldwork and analysis stages of this project. Although much of the analysis occurred once my time in the field was 'completed', the theoretical thought and critique which I have engaged in, and interpretive understandings which I have reached, are essentially inseparable from the encounters from which they arose (Pink, 2015). Practically, analysis of interview data, observation notes, and documents produced by Incredible Edible as an organisation has followed a quite traditional route of coding. Interview recordings were listened back to, several times, and transcribed. Observation notes were typed up to be viewed alongside transcripts, and documents were saved in ways which meant they could also be viewed alongside. They were then read through and coded for recurring themes and tropes so that they could be organised and re-presented.

Writing, particularly in ethnographic studies, is as much a part of analysis, and of methodology, as it is about presenting findings. Care has been taken to employ thick description when

describing the field sites and interactions with participants, to faithfully present them. This has naturally led to narrative analysis, rather than dissecting data as such.

As described earlier, from the outset I wanted to theorise *from* my fieldwork, rather than before it, allowing significant meanings to emerge from the data and focusing on interpretation and discovery. This suggests that a Grounded Theory approach was appropriate for me to take. As Kathy Charmaz and Antony Bryant (2011) put it;

> Grounded theory is a method of qualitative inquiry in which researchers develop inductive theoretical analyses from their collected data and subsequently gather further data to check these analyses. The purpose of grounded theory is theory construction, rather than description or application of existing theories (p.292)

Taking a constructivist position, analysis will focus on understanding participants' meanings, assumptions, and definitions of terms and situations in order to understand a broader picture and begin to generate hypotheses and theory (Silverman, 2017). Anselm Glaser and Barney Strauss (1967) proposed grounded theory as a general method of comparative analysis which generates theory from qualitative data. The method that they propose is too mechanical to apply to ethnographic fieldwork, but the general principle of developing concepts by continually moving back and forth between data to reach a gradually refined set of categories and themes is consistent with the ethnographic approach taken here (Davies, 2007).

Grounded theory can, arguably, be criticised for a naïve assumption that data can ever be approached and interrogated from a theoretically neutral position. Indeed, I have not been able to do so here, as reading and theorising needed to start before my fieldwork for various practical reasons. As such, although a broadly inductive approach has been adhered to, some deductive exploration of hope has been a part of my analysis. Deductive reasoning is, however, grounded in experience in the same way that inductive reasoning is. Researchers will draw on personal and scholarly experience, as well as previous research with the subject matter, to propose

comparisons, suggest insights, and pose questions. Although induction is needed to present perceptions of participants in the most faithful way possible, and inductive analysis is central to an approach which theorises from the data in a bottom-up way, it need not be undertaken to the exclusion of deductive analysis (Berg and Lune, 2012).

Just as the structure of my fieldwork developed during research, as findings and reading influenced where and when I went, and with whom, so the structure of my thesis itself is heavily influenced by my analysis. Through engaging with my data, I identified three main themes: community, empowerment, and nostalgia. An in-depth analysis of these three core concepts will make up the second half of this thesis.

6.7   Reflexivity

I began this chapter by stating who I am and what my interests are, and I have attempted to keep that self-awareness and knowledge present throughout my writing and analysis. This is because I take the position that no social research can be truly detached and objective, and therefore research should be reflexive. The need for reflexivity is based on the belief that knowledge claims are conditioned and partial, and that it therefore matters who the researcher is and where they are situated socially as this may impact the study and findings in various ways (Lichterman, 2017). There is always a relationship between the researcher and the researched, and they will inevitably affect each other (Davies, 2007). Different social positions, such as gender, race or sexuality, create affinities for some concepts or questions over others, just as different academic, policy, or social activist positions will inevitably lead to different research interests and agendas (Lichterman, 2017). In ethnography in particular, the relationship between the researcher and researched is typically closer than in other research designs, and reflexivity is therefore even more important (Davies, 2007). It matters that I have a background in food and sustainability, and long-

standing interests in local food and produce. It also matters that I am a PhD student, a mother, and white middle-class woman.

That said, my positionality is not everything. Throughout my research I have taken a broadly interpretive stance, and my approach to reflexivity is no different. Although it matters that I am who I am and bring the history that I do, it is not *everything*. A relatively simple realist epistemology assumes that social position is something 'out there' which works on the ethnographer in a somewhat mechanical way. The problem with this viewpoint is that if social position is real, it is not 'out there' in the abstract, it is inevitably mediated by ongoing interpretation and communications in the field as fieldwork is ongoing (Lichterman, 2017). Explanations based on social position may also be wrong. Problems or misunderstandings in the field may be caused by social position, but may just as easily be caused by different experiences with cultural structures, different experiences of feeling, and different capabilities in terms of understanding symbols and interactions (Lichterman, 2017). Although it is important to note the researcher's social position, it is equally important to show how ethnographers reach their interpretations, as this is what makes the research transparent and disputable (Lichterman, 2017).

Throughout this project I have taken care to make my presence obvious to the reader, and to make clear where I am making interpretations which may be based on or affected by my position and facilities. I have discussed the possible impacts of my daughter's presence, and my reasons for choosing the sites and participants which I have. I also take care to include my voice in the excerpts which I include in analysis, acknowledging where I have taken part in constructing the data I have gathered through conversation and interaction, and, indeed, my writing about the project and the story which I will ultimately tell will necessarily be my own voice.

6.8   Analysing my data: Looking for patterns

Following my fieldwork, I had a large collection of fieldnotes, interview transcripts and recordings, printed materials – copies of websites and social media posts as well as Incredible Edible literature and pamphlets I had been given – and photographs.[11] My aim was to take an interpretive approach to consider what is meaningful about the project I explored, and how it comes to be so (Mason, 2002). To that end, I did not set out to test any particular theories, although some themes were prominent in my mind when I began looking for patterns, such as hope, and utopias.

Analysis, as I have stated already, is a continual process throughout ethnography (Hamersley and Atkinson, 1995; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Crang and Cook, 2007; Pink, 2008), and so I revisited materials throughout my fieldwork, reading and re-reading fieldnotes before and after field trips for example. I did need a dedicated 'phase' of analysis though, when field trips stopped, or at least paused, and I was able to engage in systematic reflection. To do this, I spent time looking for patterns and identifying themes (Crang and Cook, 2007) in a process of getting familiar with my material, and seeing the connections within it as well as outside of it to a wider context beyond the site I studied (Pink, 2015).

Practically, this meant sorting through my materials and making notes about ideas and points I wanted to revisit and organising everything in a way which meant I could view things alongside each other and together. Coding, naming themes, allowed me to identify links between my various materials, and to link items together through various concepts. I began with a list of concepts from my research interests and questions and added in those which became apparent from my content. This method of coding is 'open', to ensure that participants meanings are not obscured by concepts which I have applied, and to keep concepts and analysis rooted in the field materials.

Once I had coded my material and identified concepts, I began looking for patterns and counting recurrences to get a sense of dominant concepts. I spent time reflecting on coherence across narratives, as well as variations between them (Yin, 2003), making sure to ask what those expressing ideas might have in common, or not. I reflected on what effect I might have had on the field, and how my presence, and my daughter's, might have impacted events, as well as considering the external ideas that I was inevitably bringing to the analysis of my materials.

As I developed more coherent notions of concepts, I revisited materials to check for resonance. I wanted to ensure that I hadn't been led away from what had actually been said and keep my writing true to the narratives which the participants had presented to me. Inevitably, some of the connections I made were more fruitful than others. Some simply led nowhere, or remained as inconsistencies, while others led back to theories and concepts which I could then explore in greater depth. By bringing together the salient concepts from this process, the structure of this thesis emerged as well. By matching research questions to concepts I was left with the key themes which would structure my analytic chapters.

6.9 Reflections

I was not sure how to be an 'ethnographer', particularly as distance (geographically) from the project I studied, as well as wider life, made immersion in the project difficult. So, I adapted my methods as I went, relying on various methods of following up (e-mail, engaging with the group's social media) to supplement my interviews and field notes. I worried that not being able to properly immerse myself in the project would limit the rapport I was able to build with my participants, but overall felt that people were relaxed and open. To a large extent I think that bringing my daughter along on my field trips helped to 'break the ice' and to establish relationships more quickly, perhaps, than I would otherwise have been able to.

One reason for not being able to immerse myself in the project, and for a reliance on distance communication for follow-ups, was the 2020 pandemic which began shortly after I had finished my main in-person interviews and observations. In part I think this may even have been beneficial, in that participants were suddenly more used to communicating by e-mail and Zoom calls, and so some of the 'naturalness' which had been a feature of my initial conversations was carried forward in subsequent follow-up chats and communications.

I had intended, at the beginning, to use topical interviews and conversations to follow certain themes and answer particular questions. However, as I began my conversations with participants, narratives began to come through, and I ended up following these instead. The result was a lot of information I had not expected, covering topics I had not necessarily anticipated, but that were fascinating and relevant, nonetheless.

Another surprise was the level to which writing became a part of my methodology. In writing up my interviews, describing the participants and their projects, and then writing my analysis, I came to know the projects and the people in ways that I might not otherwise have done. Attempting to accurately portray my participants, the work which they do and the meanings which they conveyed involved a careful choice of language and a level of analysis which continued beyond the 'analysis' stage of research and throughout the writing process.

One of the most important points I came to fully understand through this project is that my presentation of this project can never be a fully comprehensive or 'true' account (Crang and Cook, 2007). Multiplicity, partiality, and mess are as much a part of this story (Law, 2004) as are my attempts to systematically analyse and to accurately present. Inevitably, certain perspectives are missing and so this version of the project is from a particular point of view, mine, and from a particular point in time. I hope that my writing will be evocative of those people and places which I experienced (Pink, 2015), and that I can demonstrate how they resonate with wider theories (Law, 2004) in a way which is both meaningful and interesting, while still remaining faithful to

those people who have worked with me and to the organisation which I have come to admire and respect. Although this is a clear attachment on my part, Amanda Coffey (1999) argues that there is no reason to assume that detachment offers a greater truth. While detachment may offer more objectivity or impartiality, it also sacrifices the intimacy which brings a deeper understanding of, and access to, participants' feelings, understandings, and motivations. Indeed, personal attachments are often inevitable during fieldwork, and provided that reflexivity is maintained the benefits of this closeness should not outweigh the risks to accurate and honest analysis (Grills, 1998; Coffey, 1999).

6.10 Introducing the gardeners

My intention here is to introduce you to my participants and the area in which my fieldwork took place. I offer something of a montage of information about the area and the project, and an introduction to the key participants who took part in interviews. Much of this bricolage of information comes from my own fieldnotes, as well as contextual information from Incredible Edible as the umbrella organisation, and the context of the local area. All names and place names[12] used here, except for the name 'Incredible Edible,' are pseudonyms.

6.10.1 Incredible Edible

Incredible Edible began in Todmorden, a northern market town. A small group of friends saw unloved places and spaces around the town and wondered if by planting vegetables, and other edibles, in them and encouraging people to take what they needed from them, they could create a conversation that would enable people to think differently about the power and potential of

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[12] Except for Todmorden, which is the town where Incredible Edible was established, and which is named publicly on their website.

their future. And they did just that. They cultivated areas of disused land, the grassy area in front of the police station and beside the doctor's surgery and put planters full of herbs at the train station and elsewhere around the town. They found that these growing spaces led to conversations that encouraged people to imagine that there was power in these small actions, and that they could help enable people to live happier, healthier, more prosperous lives. The emphasis was placed on creating connected communities, and on actions and activities being owned *by* the people and *for* the people.

> At Incredible Edible we have one overriding truth – that people have the power to create places they are proud of with futures full of hope, where anyone can be involved. If you eat, you're in!
>
> (https://www.incredibleedible.org.uk/our-story/)

Since it was set up, Incredible Edible has spread from Todmorden to groups around the country, and indeed abroad. Although all can identify themselves as Incredible Edible groups, they do not have to sign up to a formal structure, and can run themselves as they wish to, maintaining emphasis on people taking ownership of their own communities and solutions. From its inception, Incredible Edible sought to show how ordinary people can transform their own landscapes and turned disused plots into abundant sources of healthy food. Working with local volunteers, they try to create connections between people and local areas through food, aiming to get people working together rather than simply as individuals.

The various groups around the country feel very different and take on different activities. Some only have public 'pick-your-own' beds, while others have garden shares and, in some cases, even farms. Many partner up with local organisations ranging from Councils and schools to the Girl Guides and local businesses. Inevitably, some groups are more active, and more successful, than others, and like any other group of people, there can be factions and politics which make the work of the group difficult.

Although separate, all the groups can come together as and when they wish. I met the group which I subsequently worked with at a 'gathering' of all the Welsh Incredible Edible groups for example. At the gathering, there were various sessions for sharing ideas, visiting the plots of the host group, as well as sharing lunch together. There is a warm, almost family, feel amongst the groups, a real sense of mucking in and being part of something bigger.

One reason for selecting Incredible Edible as a case study is that it is utopian. On the face of it, it represents a specific and bounded form of utopianism, in that it addresses particular localities and a very particular range of activities. However, by looking more closely and in-depth, as qualitative ethnographic methods allow for, we find connections between these specific actions and broader utopian goals and prefigurative practices.

6.10.2 The local area

Abermor is a town on the North Wales coast. It has an Old Town, with medieval walls, a castle, pedestrianised streets, and a promenade along the harbour. There is a wealth of independent shops and places to eat; indeed, when Costa came to town it quickly went out of business. Surrounded by old town walls it feels every inch the British tourist destination. That said, like many British seaside towns which depend on tourism for a large amount of their income, it has 'well-to-do' tourist areas and less well-off areas.

Surrounded by the national park on one side, and the sea on the other, the town is in a genuinely beautiful setting, and it is perhaps not surprising that the town has a thriving local food 'scene' partly as a result. The annual food festival, honey fair and seed fair are all well attended.

Trefrheil is a small satellite town of Abermor. It feels quite different, given that it is a newer town which sprang up around the railway, as opposed to Abermor's historical feel. There is not much in the town apart from a handful of convenience shops and pubs. There is also a business park with a leisure centre and a Welsh Government building. In Abermor, I spent time moving around

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the town as the beds are spread out, as well as going to the honey fair and the food festival which sprawls out across the town. In Trefrheil, I spend most of my time at the garden share, and so the bits which I see are limited mostly to residential areas. These are mostly nicer housing estates, seemingly filled with those white bungalows you see in so many British seaside towns. It has a quiet, sleepy feel to it, though I'm sure this is because of where the garden share is, rather than a reflection of the town centre, where the housing is more like the terraces you might see in other railway towns and the density of population increases.

6.10.3 The garden

The group use several sites for growing. They have public beds for people to pick produce from around the Abermor town and around Trefrheil. They also have a garden which they use as a nursery, and as a gathering place for the group. The garden belongs to a large private house owned by Lily Williams, who has opened her garden, her kitchen and heart to the Incredible Edible group. Although not one of the gardeners, she is resolutely a member of the group, and welcomed me, and my baby, into her home when we first arrived. She plays a large part in strengthening the group by providing a great meeting place and growing area, not just for plants but also for people.

Garden shares have a reputation for being challenging, but Lily recognised that a more permanent space would allow the group to flourish. Rebecca, one of the founding members of the group, was already helping Lily in her garden, and they came up with the plan for the garden share together. In 2015 the group began to work in the garden, firstly in raised beds that were already there, growing potatoes and doing bits and pieces around the garden. When Lily saw the group were flourishing, she offered them the use of one of her existing glasshouses and was kind enough to allow the group to put up a polytunnel for propagation.

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Approaching the house and garden, which are behind a wall, you can't really see either. And having driven through a residential area typical of any other seaside town I was not sure what to expect. But then I went up the drive, parked in front of the house, and found myself in something of an oasis of green, underneath large trees, with what looks like an allotment site to one side and an old, welcoming looking house to the other. The garden includes vegetable plots, a shed, a glasshouse and polytunnel. As well as a walkway under the trees and a willow arch to sit underneath in the shade, and space for composting and for bonfires. Beehives are used around the garden (which look lovely, but I avoided them due to an allergy), and areas which are not being cultivated are allowed to grow quite wild, giving the whole space a meadow-like feel, full of flowers, grasses, and insects.

The group meet at the garden once per week, and it has become an important part of the week for them. They start with a planning meeting in the kitchen of the house over coffee and biscuits, which has also enabled the group to feel more connected. They have proper coffee, and nice biscuits, which people add to the kitty for, or they bring along their own treats such as flapjacks and the like. Often new people come along, and this gives the group the opportunity to welcome them in a trusted space and bring them into the fold. When I first arrived, it was just before the coffee break, and I was immediately enveloped into the group, handing around teapots and plates of biscuits, chatting about my journey over while keeping an eye on just how many biscuits my daughter was managing to get her hands on, and getting up to speed on what work had been going on that morning.

After coffee, work is then undertaken around the garden and in the propagation spaces, and the group later comes together for lunch, with Lily, before more work and plans for the following week are made. The conversation is raucous and lively, chatting about weekend plans, work in the garden, and other general conversation. The atmosphere is warm, welcoming, and convivial. Coming together to share food and conversation is a central part of what the group does, as important perhaps as the growing which they do.

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During the summer months, we sat together on garden chairs around upturned packing cases in a mown area beside the 'meadow' for tea breaks and for lunch. We had evening barbecues in the same place, people taking it in turns to cook or bringing dishes to share, passing around drinks, and watching my daughter playing in the grass.

The garden share part of the project is set in stone with an agreement between the group and Lily, which sets out which parts of the garden can be used, when watering will take place, and other practical issues for the group, as well as some safety issues for Lily, such as being aware of dogs etc. This means everyone's expectations are met and there are no unpleasant surprises, as well as giving it a more formal feel and providing some security for the group. That said, it does not feel at all 'official', more like a group of friends working together.

6.10.4 The pick-your-own beds

There are several public beds which the group works on. The nearest to the garden are a group of raised beds on the way to the new primary school. These are filled with herbs, salads, and leafy vegetables for people to help themselves to. The bed nearest to the primary school is shared with the school, and the gardeners regularly have sessions working on the bed with the local school children.

Also, in Trefrheil is the 'edible hedgerow' which the group is particularly proud of. Along the side of the playing-field there is a row of fruit trees, blackberries, raspberries, currants, and other 'hedgerow' fruit plants. The effect is really quite attractive, and the emphasis on fruit rather than vegetables here is really nice. The hedgerow does not have the foot traffic that some of the town beds do, although it is next to a footpath and the playing-field, so it remains visible in the community. It is lovely to see something like this in an otherwise predominantly residential area. The beds in the town feel like they are as much for tourists and visitors (which is no bad thing

really) as they are for the local residents, whereas the hedgerow, and the school beds, feel very much like they are for local residents and for the local community.

In the town there are a number of beds; the wishing well which is by the main pedestrian crossing for the castle, the tourist information centre which has pots and a selection of raised beds, the church which has pots in various places and has a space for produce from the garden to be left for people to help themselves to in the entrance, and the toll house garden, which was once a kitchen garden for the toll house on the suspension bridge and now has vegetables, raspberry bushes and plum tree amongst other plants, and space for composting.

The beds are all very visible, and so people stop to chat when they see the gardeners working on them. There are signs labelling all the plants and indicating when to pick and when to wait. There are flowers for pollinators in amongst the edibles, and flowering herbs which also add to the aesthetic, alongside wicker structures for climbing plants like beans which give the beds a very attractive look. They are all part of the 'Abermor in Bloom' trail which the gardeners are very proud of! People do stop to pick produce on a regular basis. When we were in the Toll House Garden and my daughter was busily helping herself to golden raspberries several people popped in to get a handful of herbs or to join in with her enthusiastic fruit-picking.

There are regular volunteer evenings to do the watering (which involves filling up watering cans, loading them into wheelbarrows, and traipsing round the town as there are not any hosepipes. This is, I feel, a real labour of love) and to work on the beds in town. There is also space next to the tourist information centre under a gazebo for the group to do demonstrations or to have a stall. Throughout the pandemic they had a stall for people to help themselves to seeds or to produce while maintaining social distancing. Incidentally, they also had a project where they delivered seeds and produce to people who were self-isolating and donated to the local food bank.

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Although the vast majority of growing and gardening takes place at the main garden, the group seem to really enjoy working on the beds in the town. They also actively take part in events like the food festival, the honey fair, and the seed fair, which gives them a chance to chat to local people, link up with local businesses and to raise the profile of their own Incredible Edible group as well as those elsewhere.

6.10.5 The Gardeners

There are several gardeners involved in the project. People attend when and where they can, so some will only go to the sessions working on the beds in the town, while others will only be able to make it to the garden sessions. Still others will attend either setting on an ad hoc basis. I spent time at the beds in town as well as at the garden, and went along to events like the honey fair, so I got to meet most of the gardeners. There were several who I spoke to most often, though, and who took part in interviews and discussions. These are the people who I have introduced below, and who will be referred to most often in the rest of the discussion that follows, though other names may crop up from time to time.

6.10.5.1 Caroline

Caroline is one of the two founding members of the group. Originally from Yorkshire, she moved down to the area with her husband. She was running a community composting project when Rebecca got in touch with her about starting an Incredible Edible group and, by her own admission, was sceptical at first. But once they got going, she found herself swept up in the group and its aims. Now she is the 'leader' of the group, although the group does not feel at all hierarchical, and she doesn't seem to like to describe herself as a leader. She is the main point of contact for people getting in touch with the group, and she leads on things like setting up the Welsh 'gathering', a meeting of all the Welsh Incredible Edible groups. Incredible Edible Abermor has been given 'beacon' status, which means that they are used as an example for new groups

starting up and are available for other Incredible Edible groups to come and visit for ideas, guidance, and advice. Caroline is really quite modest about this, although you can see she is genuinely proud of this accomplishment. She is warm and down to earth and seems to really love what she does. She cares about the environmental impact of what they do but is also very driven by the social factors and talks often about the real impact it has had on the members as well as how important it is to involve the local community. She also tells me about work that the group is doing with a local bail hostel, and about donating produce to those in need, and seems most enthusiastic about these aspects of the project.

6.10.5.2 Rebecca

Rebecca is the only real 'local' of the group, in that she was born and raised in the area, everyone else is, really, an 'incomer'. You can tell she was a teacher; she is passionate about what she does, and good at explaining it, and distinctly no-nonsense. She has a fierceness about her, you can picture her on protest marches, perhaps because she is so clearly passionate about the things which she cares about. Gardening is something she has always done, and which is important to her. She describes it as her 'therapy', and it has been a large part of her caring for her mental and emotional wellbeing. Community also matters to her, and the way in which the group comes together and works with the local community is especially important to her. Rebecca is, I think, perhaps the most passionate about the environmental aspects of the work they do, although it certainly is a factor for the other members too. She talks with gusto about the need to disrupt the existing food system and to live in a greener, more sustainable way. She seems particularly frustrated by people on flower committees who would rather have big blousy blooms than plants which are good for pollinators for example. Like Caroline, she is modest about the group's achievements, though still clearly proud of all they have achieved. As one of the founding members of the group she also has a role like Caroline's, as a point of contact and with an aspect

of seniority, although, again, the group doesn't feel hierarchical, so maybe this comes more from a simple fact that she and Caroline have been involved (slightly) longer than the other members of the group. I enjoy chatting to Rebecca about the group and the work that they do, she is passionate and fiery, as well as warm and welcoming.

6.10.5.3 Matt

Another 'incomer', Matt also moved to the area with his wife when they retired. They joined the group looking for community as well as for an opportunity to garden, having had allotments in the past. Interestingly, they had tried out an Incredible Edible group in their hometown before they moved, and found them cliquey and exclusive, but decided to give it another go once they moved and found a very different atmosphere in the group. Matt also has a background in sustainability and clearly cares about the environment and about green issues. He and his wife are both very active members of the group, and were a driving force behind the edible hedgerow, something which they are both proud of – and rightly so! Matt is warm and keen to chat about the work the group does. When I first use the word 'activism' he seems unsure, though after a thoughtful conversation he feels it is a sort of quiet activism (his phrasing), teaching people by doing, but feels that Incredible Edible is different to more confrontational activism and action which is going on. He seems to particularly care about the ways in which people grow (as people) when they join the group, gaining confidence and skills as well as comradeship.

6.10.5.4 Colin and Jill

Colin and Jill have an interesting story. They retired early for health reasons, as working in the city and at the pace they were doing became so damaging that Colin got quite ill. They left the city, moved to the coast, and started an entirely new life at a more sustainable pace. They joined the group initially for friendship and to give something back to the area they now called home. But in

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doing so, have discovered a love, and talent, for growing, and have learned about a more sustainable, in a green sense, way of living. Jill is especially charming in her unrestrained enthusiasm for growing and planting, for learning and for getting more involved in things like recycling and the environmental projects which the group is involved in. They both love to chat to tourists and to locals as they pass by when they are working, keen to spread the word and to send ideas home with people. In our first interview we spent an hour or so working on the beds nearest to the garden share, me with my daughter napping in the sling, just chatting about the vegetables we were planting, and about how they came to be involved. The group has been transformational for them both, and important in more ways than one.

6.10.5.5 Katherine

Katherine loved the help yourself beds in the town so much she moved here! She really does love the work that the group does, and much prefers growing in a social context to growing at home. She also cares deeply about the environment, and this shapes much of her approach to the group and to her other activities. She is a member of various groups, including Friends of the Earth and Fairtrade, which aligns very well with Incredible Edible. She also went on the climate march with Extinction Rebellion. She is, aside from Rebecca, one of the most vocal about the need to address the climate crisis we are currently in, and about Incredible Edible's place in that. Like Rebecca, you can really see Katherine as an activist, a rebel of sorts. She is passionate and unrestrained in her assertion that we *all* need to change the ways in which we live if we are to protect the planet which we all share. Katherine was one of the keenest to talk to me about my thesis, approaching me at the Welsh Gathering to suggest that I come to Abermor in the first place. She seems genuinely keen to get the message out about living in kinder, more sustainable communities, and as such seems to be one of the more overtly activist members of the group. She is quiet somehow,

but strong. She also seems to take real delight in my daughter's exploration of the garden and stops in our interviews frequently to play with her or to offer her something new to discover.

6.10.5.6 Jackie

Jackie is a relatively new member of the group. She was friends with Rebecca already and was looking for a way to get outside more and to learn more about gardening. She is an artist, a mother, and a new grandmother, as well as a lover of the outdoors. She initially struck me as quiet but was keen to sit down and talk about her thoughts about the project. Although quiet, Jackie is strident in her views that we need to change the way we live in order to do something to protect our planet. She also has a lovely faith in young people, arguing that many, particularly young women, are aware and energetic in their response to the need for change. Community, friendship, and care, both for people and for our planet, are all important to Jackie, and her involvement at IE Abermor is an expression of this.

7 Nostalgia for the future

One of the prominent themes which was apparent when analysing my fieldnotes and interview data was nostalgia. There was often a sense of a longed-for past and an implication that things in the present are not as they should be. This often occurred alongside talking about and planning for the future, bringing together the past, present, and future all at once.

This chapter will begin with an exploration of nostalgia as a concept, before considering four nostalgic aspects of narratives that arose in the fieldwork. These are going back to go forwards, a rose-tinted vision of the past, digging for victory, and constructing the sense of home which is central to nostalgic thinking. I will then argue that the nostalgia shown by participants is not backward, but rather forward-facing, and concerned with the future as much as the past.

There is an old-fashioned feel to a lot of what goes on. I'm not sure whether that's just memories of gardening with grandparents and parents as a child, or whether it actually is. Maybe it's just because gardening just isn't very modern? Or at least modernised. It's the same as it's always been – garden tools, people getting their hands dirty, carting wheelbarrows around. It looks the same as it did when I was a child and I'm sure it looked the same then as it had done for generations before me… When we stop for tea, it's proper tea, in proper teapots… Whenever we chat everyone always mentions, at some point, that

*they are <u>getting back</u> to the soil, or <u>getting back</u> to community. Or that they are rebuilding something that has been lost. It doesn't feel like it's about making something new, it's about going back, or at least feeling like you are? I don't know how realistic that is though – I'm not sure that what they are doing **is** something that's been done before, so it's not really going back. But it does feel like they are rebuilding somehow. Maybe it's truer of the food – did people grow their own more in the past? Did they eat more homegrown (local or their own) veg?*

No one seems to be looking backwards really, they all talk about the future, plans for the garden, plans for the town, how we need to look after the environment for the future etc. But it still all has that cosy feeling of going home… When we arrive, I'm immediately offered tea and given a plate of biscuits to pass round the group. M toddles off under the table and seems to do pretty well for biscuits from people's plates! There's a proper family feel, no standing on ceremony, and I immediately feel like I should be here and am as much a part of the group as anyone else… I think that's as much about the group being welcoming as it is about the work though. I've been to other IE projects (elsewhere in the country, names deleted) that haven't felt like this, and they didn't have the same 'homely' feel. There was still a sense of regaining something though, which I think is important. This group are regaining control of unused land, regaining influence in the food system, regaining a connection to the environment, and regaining (perhaps?!) a connection to each other and to the community around them.

(Compiled from my fieldnotes)

7.1 Nostalgia

There is a sense of nostalgia in the background, and sometimes the foreground, of community gardening as an activity, and the Incredible Edible group studied here is no exception. This is,

perhaps, to do with modern community gardening's roots in wartime and post wartime efforts to provision and to rebuild. The inherently old-fashioned nature of gardening itself, in contrast to mechanised food production and the low maintenance gardens we need to fit in with the 'faster' pace of life today creates a sense of 'going back' which cannot be ignored when considering the role of community gardening in local food activity today. Indeed, the work of community building more generally often feels nostalgic to a certain degree, as it happens in relation to the different, less settled, at least physically so, ways of life we have today.

Nostalgia is, by definition "sentimental longing for or wistful affection for a period in the past" (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2004, p. 976). Sustainability is not an easy word to define. It is *not* a practice, relationship or institution which undermines the economic, environmental, or social conditions of its own viability. Eroding the land which is used to grow crops at a faster rate than fertile soil can naturally regenerate is not sustainable agriculture, ultimately leading to failing farms and hunger. But sustainability does not only refer to the survival of specific practices, relationships and institutions, it also is, and should be, about ensuring that future welfare is not undermined by present needs, and this concern for welfare should extend beyond those directly involved in those practices, relationships and institutions to people and animals which might be distant in both space and time, indeed, in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, the extent of concern is expansive. Sustainability is typically understood as efforts to be less wasteful, but it also pushes us to understand both the world and ourselves better, cultivating a sense of responsibility for maintaining and improving the social, ecological and economic networks on which we rely. Doing so typically involves not just conservation, but also change (Thiele, 2016). To draw on the definition of sustainable development developed in the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED): Our Common Future (1987)[13]

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[13] The definition used here was the first widely accepted definition of sustainable development, though it is by no means without controversy, not least because of its generality. The literature gives criticism on the primary definition, its objectives, the coherence of strategies and even of the reasons for its

which was among the first to be proposed and widely used, sustainability concerns human activity which attempts to minimise environmental degradation by avoiding the long-term depletion of natural resources with a view to maintaining the environment in the future. Nostalgia is thus oriented toward the past, while sustainability is concerned with the future. Similarly, hope is future-facing, concerning itself with actively moving forward toward a goal. At first glance, then, nostalgia and hopeful sustainability are juxtaposed and incompatible. As the opening lines of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (2002) suggests, though, the relationships between "time past", "time present" and "time future" are complex and interwoven. In the present, it is necessary to position ourselves in relation not only to what we are becoming, or where we are going, but also to what we have been. There is, therefore, an overlapping of nostalgia and sustainability, and so of nostalgia and hope, which warrants exploration.

Tom Clucas *et al.* (2019) argue that contemporary definitions of sustainability are informed by a nostalgia for the past, while nostalgia is motivated by a desire to sustain the past for the future. Cultures cannot envisage a sustainable future without drawing on nostalgic resources of the past. They suggest three ways in which nostalgia and sustainability are connected. First, they both involve constructions of how cultures develop over time, and inevitably involve an element of evaluation as individuals assess whether these developments constitute improvement and progress, or degradation and decline. Secondly, both concepts involve aspects of curation and stewardship, as individuals in the present work to shape the environment for future generations, actively selecting which aspects of the present to preserve and which to disregard. This often involves a nostalgic investment in some values and traditions, as well as projection of values and traditions onto the future to imagine how the future should be sustained. Finally, both nostalgia

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appearance. This critique comes from different disciplines, political standpoints, and even civil society (Osorio, Lobato and Del Castillo, 2005). Nevertheless, no matter the ambiguity of its definition, no institution has questioned the necessity of reaching the ideal of sustainable development. As there is not space here to fully explore the term and the debates around it, the original definition, and its generality, has been kept here.

and sustainability involve a utopian ideal of creating a permanent home in the world; nostalgia, in its original sense, denoted a form of extreme homesickness and therefore a search for home, while sustainability is necessarily concerned with creating a sustainable home in for the future.

Nostalgia is, however, often dismissed or disparaged as simple looking back, and as 'remembering' a past which did not exist, or at least one which is viewed through rose-tinted glasses. It is often seen as regressive and unrealistic, the very enemy of progress (Smith and Campbell, 2017). If it is these things then it is not compatible with hope, which is by its very nature future-oriented and concerned with progress. Nostalgia, it is argued, looks backwards, perhaps *is* backwards, while hope looks forwards.

I argued in Chapter 2 that hope is essentially made up of three components: action, agency, and future orientation. It may seem odd, then, to focus on nostalgia with its orientation to the past. I want to suggest that nostalgia can, in fact, be future-oriented, and that it is linked to utopian, and therefore hopeful, thinking. As I will demonstrate through data from my fieldwork, nostalgia's concern with the past is not always a wish to return to it but can be a wish to recover the possibilities which were available in the past and are not now. Perhaps it is a way of providing comfort and surety in the face of otherwise daunting paths forward. It may also provide us with 'tried and tested' methods of progressing through lessons from the past. It does not try to go backwards, but instead makes going forwards more possible. Nostalgia, I argue, can be hopeful and, in fact, can exist in relationship with hope, with one 'feeding' the other. Nostalgia can be for the future as well as for the past.

7.2   Nostalgia isn't what it used to be

Nostalgia as a term has developed over time, and now finds itself some distance from its original meaning. Coined in the seventeenth century, the term 'nostalgia', as said earlier, originally referred to a form of extreme home sickness, and referred to a specific medical condition

(Blokland, 2003; Clucas *et al.*, 2019). Etymologically, the word is Greek, and is made up of 'nostos' meaning to return home, and 'algia' meaning a painful condition. At the end of the nineteenth century the term came to mean a psychological or social affliction rather than a physical one. As technology and transportation had advanced, access to 'home' became more feasible, and so the yearning for a place which typified the original 'condition' of nostalgia became a yearning for a time (Boym, 2007; Clucas *et al.*, 2019). Nostalgia is now thought of less as a condition, and more as a method of remembering and critiquing the present which has somewhat fallen out of favour (Wilson, 2005).

Christopher Lasch (1984), rather scathingly, argues that,

> To cling to the past is bad enough, but the victim of nostalgia clings to an idealized past, one that exists only in his head. He is worse than a reactionary; he is an incurable sentimentalist. Afraid of the future, he is also afraid to face the truth about the past (p.65).

Although this is something of an oversimplification, it is an example of the way in which nostalgia is often seen in twentieth century thought. In his assessment that the 'victim' of nostalgia is afraid of the future, Lasch points to the notion that "recollections of the past reveal at least as much about their interpretations of the current social reality as about the way life used to be" (Blokland, 2003, p. 191) The nostalgic individual is unhappy with the present, and looking to a romanticised past for comfort. Nostalgia may therefore be conceptualised as a search for refuge in the more stable past from the turbulent present (Hutcheon and Valdés, 2000). Through nostalgic thinking, the individual turns to the past to find, or to construct, sources of agency, community and identity which are felt to be lacking, blocked or threatened in the present (Tannock, 1995). The past is positively evaluated and seen as a source for those things which are missing in the present. Some of the key tropes in nostalgic thinking are a 'Golden Age' and a subsequent fall, a homecoming, and the pastoral, though none of these are unproblematic.

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As noted, nostalgia is often seen as reactionary, uncritically invoking an idealised past in reaction to the present. Indeed, David Lowenthal (2015) went so far as to describe nostalgia as pathological, or irrational and unreasonable. This reactionary character of nostalgia means that it is often associated with equally reactionary right-wing politics. For example, a nostalgic view of English heritage may sanctify traditional privileges and serve to maintain inequalities (Lowenthal, 1989). Here, the past is viewed through a deeply sentimental lens, leading to the desire to construct a past which was better than the present (Smith and Campbell, 2017). The problem with this view of nostalgia as reactionary is that it conflates nostalgia with the conservative, often dominant, groups which utilise it (Tannock, 1995), and it is worth pointing out that nostalgia is as often used by the left as it is by the right (Bonnett, 2010a). From the "seventeenth century Diggers to the Land Chartists and the radical labourers of our own time", writes Raymond Williams, "the happier past was almost desperately insisted upon, but as an impulse to change rather than to ratify the actual inheritance" (Williams, 1973, p. 43).

In an effort to separate nostalgia from its reactionary and irrational image, Svetlana Boym (2001, 2007) identifies two types of nostalgia. Although she acknowledges that these types are by no means binaries, and that there is room to consider other aspects of nostalgia between and around these two main or overarching forms, her categories are restorative, and reflective. Restorative nostalgia focuses on the 'nostos' aspect of nostalgia, seeking to rebuild and recreate a lost home, replicating the past in the present. Reflective nostalgia has a different character, focusing more on individual narrative and memory. It is less serious and tends to view the past less as an absolute truth or something which needs to be rebuilt and restored in the present and is instead used to open up potentials and possibilities in the present. The main problem with restorative nostalgia is in the idea of restoration itself. In restoring the past in its entirety, which presumably entails not just the good, but also the issues of the past, including more rigid class barriers, patriarchy, and homophobia (to name a few).

In reflective nostalgic thinking, the home, the nostos, is in ruins, or is at least no longer recognisable and therefore cannot simply be restored to the present. Reflective nostalgia is rather a narration of the relationship between the past, present, and future. Restorative nostalgia is a desire to *recreate* the past, while reflective nostalgia is an ability to *learn* from it. In this way, nostalgia can be related to the future, as we take the lessons from the past and apply them in the present, and indeed the future. It can therefore be argued that nostalgia is as often about the present and the future as it is about the past (Blokland, 2003; Boym, 2007; Bradbury, 2012), and indeed, can be prospective as well as retrospective.

There is a growing body of literature[14] which seeks to explore this prospective and productive aspect of nostalgia, moving away from the more condescending opinion of nostalgia which has otherwise dominated. Those taking this position stress that nostalgia can be sincere, authentic, enabling, and future-oriented. This is not to say that nostalgia is never reactionary or that it is always progressive, only that it is not *necessarily* or *inherently* either, and can be mobilised in different ways (Smith and Campbell, 2017). There is often a sense of loss in remembering, as well as an acknowledgement that the past was not perfect. But it also involves remembering and identifying those aspects of the past which are worth remembering, and perhaps also reaffirming for the future. It is worth noting that the speed of social change, and in particular rapid deindustrialisation, have often lead to a desire to regain a sense of community and belonging, and a sense of place, which has otherwise been fragmented or lost (Smith and Campbell, 2017). This helps to give activities such as community gardening and other community-building projects like it an air of nostalgia.

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[14] See Herzfield, 1997; Strangleman, 1999, 2012; Dicks, 2000; Blunt, 2003; Pickering and Keightley, 2006; Smith, 2006; Oushakine, 2007, 2013; Bonnett, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2016; Keightley and Pickering, 2012; Bonnett and Alexander, 2013; Ange and Berliner, 2016; Muehlebach, 2017

Nostalgia can be progressive and critical; indeed, it can be radical (Bonnett, 2009, 2010a; Muehlebach, 2017) and can also actively be involved in social change (Smith and Campbell, 2017). Individuals and groups can use nostalgia to envisage new futures in which their own forms of social values, which they feel were more apparent in the past, matter (Smith and Campbell, 2017) and so nostalgia may be used in a similar way to utopian visions, imagining possible reconfigured futures. Looking back to the 1960's and 70's, the beginnings of a green movement which celebrated visions of a pre-industrial and folk past, used nostalgia to create a counter-culture which can only be described as radical (Bonnett, 2009) and has definite echoes in present day examples of sustainable materialism and diverse economies such as is found at IE Abermor. This prospective form of nostalgia is present in many of the narratives offered by participants in IE, sometimes overtly and at other times as a more subtle sense of nostalgia in the background. As they discuss an almost utopian project of community building and changing the food system, the nostalgia they invoke is necessarily tied up with notions of social change and a progressive view of the present and future. Nostalgia, therefore, exists in a relationship with hope where the two influence each other: nostalgia influences the vision for the future and notions of what is possible, while hope enables moving towards that vision for the future.

The ability of nostalgia to be prospective allows it to cross over with notions of sustainability. Sustainability, as a concept, is inherently concerned with the present and the future. The most commonly accepted definition of sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 41), invoking both the present and future. Its orientation toward the future and its aim of transcending history creates the suggestion of an indefinite postponement of loss in the face of environmental catastrophe, and means that sustainability is itself utopian (Davies, 2010). It is also hopeful, as it seeks to actively move toward a goal. That goal is, essentially, a stable home (Davies, 2010), which is precisely the object of nostalgia (although restorative and reflective nostalgias may propose different ways of reaching that home) (Boym, 2007; Davies, 2010). We

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can therefore look nostalgically toward the future because it is in the future that the present, once preserved, will be inhabited as our home. In the future, we will be coming home (Davies, 2010).

It is possible then, to conflate a pursuit of sustainability with restorative forms of nostalgia[15], though this could easily then lead on to a reactionary and paranoid attempt to preserve a whole, real or imagined, which is too literal minded (Boym, 2001, 2007). . It is, however, necessary under the conditions of ecological crisis that we preserve and restore in order to protect ourselves (Davies, 2010), although reflection is important when deciding *what* to preserve and what to abandon. Indeed, the participants at IE Abermor did not demonstrate a desire to replicate the past, or to preserve the present in any completeness. Instead, they referred to aspects of the past which they wished to regain, and to feelings and values which they felt had been lost and subsequently regained which they wished to carry forward, as will be explored in the following sections. There was a strong sense of reflection alongside any notion of restoration. Although, as noted earlier, Boym does not claim that these types of nostalgia are absolutes, that they appear to exist alongside one another creates difficulties. In Boym's conception, Restorative nostalgia is based on an ultimately incorrect view of the past and rejecting the present. Reflective nostalgia sees that what came before is now in ruins and cannot be restored as it was. It is therefore necessary to find some grey area between the two conceptions which allows for a sadness at the loss of something (whether real or imagined to some extent), the critical comparison of the past (again, real or imagined) and the present, *and* a desire to rebuild aspects of the (real or imagined) past in the future.

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[15] This does not, of course, include *all* pursuits of sustainability. There are visions of sustainability involving high technology and modernisation which would appear to be very much at odds with any form of nostalgia, restorative or otherwise.

Susan Stewart (1993) offers a conception of nostalgia which may help. For her, nostalgia is always critical or sceptical *as well as* naïve or utopian, and so rather than nostalgia being either restorative or reflective, it is both. She suggests that nostalgia denies any gap between sign and signified, reimagining a narrative in which desire is not marked by absence, just as narratives of progress within sustainable development guarantee the constant presence of its own material basis by freeing itself from any threat of irreversible loss. In the same way that hope can be critical or transformative, passive, or active, at times simultaneously, so too can nostalgia. It can critically reflect on the past, learning lessons and comparing the past to the present and to imagined futures. At the same time, it can select which aspects of the past are worth restoring to the present or preserving for the future.

7.3 Backwards towards the future?

This dual sense of nostalgia was evident in interviews when participants spoke of getting back to something, suggesting both restorative and reflective elements of nostalgia (Boym, 2001). All the participants often suggested that they were 'getting back' to something. Jackie was particularly ardent in her assertion that we need to get something back, indeed, that we need to *go* backwards.

> I think we need to go backwards, I really do, backwards towards being more responsible for ourselves, for us as human beings I think and more responsible to each other you know, how are you? How's life treating you? Rather than I'm doing this today and I'm ignoring you... I think it's fundamental.

> I think we used to have that, I think families used to take care of each other you know, when you got old your family looked after you and now there's no, oh it's a responsibility of the government, it's not though, there's something, I think there's something slightly sinister there in the expectation of what the government should provide.

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It goes right the way through, right down to education, it's not child centred anymore, children aren't able to just be individuals.

The image that she paints is one of a past in which families are more close-knit, communities come together and care for each other, and children are valued. The implication is that the present, by comparison, is disjointed and uncaring. The future that we need to go "backwards towards" is at least in part an image of the past. In the phrase "backwards towards" we find an element of both restorative and reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001). Jackie is at once using a comparison of the present and past to reflect on values which we have lost and lessons which we could learn, as well as suggesting that these values should be restored and returned to, presumably along with the way of life which went with them which, as noted earlier, is not an unproblematic view given the less desirable values of the past often present alongside the good.

The notion of 'going back' came up frequently whenever the conversation turned to seasonal eating. "Well it's that supermarkets are full of food from all over the world all year round and that's not right, to me that's not right" (Jackie)

Again, Jackie constructs an image of a different way of life in the past; one which was more wholesome and more in touch with the seasons. In using less plastic, it was more environmentally friendly, and in using the greenery for rabbit feed it involved less waste as well. It was also 'right' in comparison to the present which is "wrong". Again, she is not suggesting that we need to restore the past in its entirety, but we do need to return to some past values towards food and the environment if 'rightness' is to be regained or restored.

Do you think that doing this has changed life beyond the group here? (Me)

Oh yeah definitely, being here has definitely changed the way I think about things. I think about food and where it comes from a lot more, we need to get back a bit to eating more seasonally … I've realised how seasonal things are, I mean, I've never thought about it before (Jill)

Jill also talks about getting 'back' to eating more seasonally, suggesting that this attitude to food, and the environment, is something we have lost and need to regain in the future.

On the topic of the way we eat, Rebecca does not refer explicitly to seasonality but does imply that there are values towards food provision which have been lost and need to be restored. She says of the vegetables that the group grows.

> they're organic too, which I'm really big on, because it's good for the environment, and because you don't really know what you're eating anymore and I think that's important, and to take back a bit of control of our food system

By saying that we don't know what we're eating *anymore*, she suggests that we used to have this knowledge, in a past which was more connected with its food and the production of it. The idea that we need to take *back* control of our food system also implies that we once had control of it somewhere in the past, and that we need to regain that.

The food system can, broadly speaking, be said to have involved much more self-provision at some point in the past. Katherine invokes this notion when she also comments on the way in which we produce food, saying that.

> We should be getting everyone to grow veg in their gardens. But do people even know how now? We have a different attitude to gardens now, they're not seen as places to produce from.

Again, the suggestion is that in the past we had a particular attitude towards gardens, gardening, and food production, and that in the present this is something which has changed and been lost. The knowledge and ability to grow your own is also something which Katherine implies we once had but says is now lost when she asks if people know how to grow food anymore. The point she is making is that this attitude towards gardening and growing food, as well as the knowledge of how, is something we should be striving for, or going "backwards towards".

The present which is juxtaposed with the image of the past invoked here is not a particularly flattering one. When Jackie talks about what the group does, she says that,

> The fact that you're giving something away, that's a nice concept for people you know, you can do that, it doesn't have to be about striving for yourself in a completely selfish way which is how it's been sold to us for so many years

Suggesting that in the present we are encouraged to be selfish and to strive as individuals rather than as a group, as opposed to the image of the past which she suggested, where family and community are more important. Matt also suggests that the present is different to the past when he says that.

> Originally when allotments started it was all about, you know, you can grow food much more cheaply than you can buy it. Well, that's just not the case anymore, if you add up the costs of time, seeds, equipment, and stuff, it's not a cheap option, but it's about satisfaction, and knowing chemicals haven't been used and things you know, maybe it tastes better, maybe it doesn't, but if it's just based on costs then you'd think well why do it?

The present here is more expensive, and less conducive to personal food production. Time is somehow more valuable in the present than it was in the past, at least in terms of financial value. The present is also a place where chemicals are ordinarily used to grow crops, as Rebecca also suggested, and so the past was healthier for both people and the environment (if you accept the notion that organic growing is indeed better for people and the environment, there are of course arguments against that idea) making organic growing projects like Incredible Edible even more valuable.

The participants seem very consciously to be building something different. They do not speak of wanting to restore the past in its entirety. They do reflect on the past. Even when this is not done explicitly, the stories which they tell show the ways in which they have moved from their pasts

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into their presents. The past is therefore understood in relation to the present, and to the future. As Williams (1973) suggests, the past is used to create an impulse to change, rather than to maintain the present or to reinstate the past in its entirety. It is used here as a mode of critique, rather than the participants retreating into a nostalgic past (Tannock, 1995; Bradbury, 2012). Therefore, the participants' use of nostalgia echoes the use of utopia as critique, as well as a goal to reach for. And so, their use of nostalgia is a hopeful expression, one which is conscious of obstacles (in the present), which has a possible and plausible goal to reach for in the future, as evidenced by the past, and which requires, and enables, action on the part of the hoper. There is a tendency to view nostalgia with suspicion, and to reject it as conservative and reactionary (Bonnett, 2009, 2010a; Bonnett and Alexander, 2013). What the participants at IE Abermor demonstrate is a way that hope, and its orientation toward the future and to social change, may be fostered and encouraged by and through nostalgia. While it is perhaps not wise to accept all nostalgia as we find it, as not all existing suspicion is unwarranted, it should not be dismissed out of hand as only backward facing and its possible links to more radical visions of the future and ability to maintain hope should be taken into consideration.

7.4   Rose-tinted glasses

A frequent feature of nostalgia is a yearning for a simple and stable past, which is often reflected in environmental awareness rhetoric. Pre-industrial, and even pre-agricultural, society is often praised for its non-exploitative use of resources, as well as for models of ecological harmony with an inherent respect for nature (Lowenthal, 1989). But, as discussed earlier, nostalgia is not simple reminiscing or remembering. Because it involves comparison to the present, as well as a desire to return to the past or aspects of it, it involves a creative process of actively reconstructing the past and of actively selecting and reordering the facts (Wilson, 2005; Pickering and Keightley, 2006). There is often a sense of unreality attached to nostalgic images, particularly in the media,

as well as a tendency towards a reactionary nature, which glosses over the imperfections and problems of the past (Lowenthal, 1989), and nostalgia's complicated relationship with reality is therefore often criticised. Rather than consider the difficulties with the past, and the events within it which still haunt our politics and our culture today, whole decades are consigned to the 'good old days' (Lowenthal, 1989), and invoked with rose-tinted fondness.

When I asked what they thought the group was trying to get back to, the participants' answers were interesting. There was often vagueness, and a restating that we need to get back to growing more food for ourselves, to eating more sustainably, and to working together as a community. Matt was a bit more specific.

> Living in closer synchrony with the seasons and the natural world, a simpler existence where communities were close-knit, less wasteful, more self-reliant, and considerate. It all has the feel of going back to 'how it used to be'. However, if that was indeed 'how it used to be', it must have been at a time before my personal experience because I don't remember it. I think that our group does aspire to it, though, so for me I suppose it is something new. I do remember there being more wildlife, and I would like to go back to that (Matt)

This image of the past echoes the one which Jackie, Rebecca and Katherine also presented, in its reference to seasonal living, closer-knit community, and a more environmentally friendly way of living more generally. Matt also suggests that this is not an accurate picture of the past though, or at least not one which he can remember himself. This image of the past, then, could be drawn from collective memories or popular understandings of how the past 'was' in a 'golden age'. This is not, it would appear, done unconsciously, as Matt openly and clearly acknowledges that the 'way things were' which they are trying to get back to may not be the way things were at all. Nonetheless, the 'feel of going back' is still important, and useful, in the group's activities.

Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley (2012) argue that we may engage with memories of the past which others may have experienced, but which we ourselves have not, these are inherited memories. When we do so, we engage our imaginations, enabling more than simply bringing the past into the present. Imagination exceeds lived experience through combining ideas, experiences, and objects into something new and qualitatively different. We combine our own sensory experience with other categories of understanding (in this case inherited memories) to create meaningful combinations for ourselves. Kant describes this process as "the act of putting different representations together, and of comprehending their manifoldness in one item of knowledge" (Kant, 2007 [1781], pp. 103-104). In saying that he is trying to 'get back' to a past which he himself did not experience, Matt is demonstrating this act as he understands memories of the past through means other than his own experience and recreates an image of the past, which is simpler, closer-knit, less wasteful, and more considerate.

Nostalgia may not necessarily be for a remembered or experienced past, nor is it necessarily for an accurate picture of the past. The 'feel' of going back to 'how it used to be' is as important as actually considering 'how it used to be'. Understanding something as having been in the past, proves that it is possible, and therefore renders it more achievable and less daunting (Bradbury, 2012). Rooting imaginative possibilities for the future in the past tethers the imagination in the experienced past (by someone, though not always the individual doing the imagining), and therefore in the realm of the possible and realistic (Keightley and Pickering, 2012). Imagining a new future to move towards, which has not been experienced and is therefore unpractised and untested, means pressing forward on roads untravelled, whereas going back to where we were means familiar, and unthreatening, territory. This feeling remains even when 'where we were' is something imagined. In this way, looking back enables moving forwards, and so is hopeful. This shows that, unlike established understandings of the concept, hope has not just to do with the future, but also with looking back. As an important dimension of practicing hope, looking back in this particular way enables moving forwards towards a hopeful goal.

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Nostalgia is often for a past that did not really exist, or at least did not exist in quite the way we are remembering it. It takes place somewhere between the head and the heart, the head knows that the nostalgic image isn't really the way things were, while the heart takes comfort in the image, and the result is comfort and security (Wilson, 2005). In the context of the participant group, this security and comfort is part of what makes their action possible, and therefore part of what maintains hope and hopeful activity. When we remember, we do so imaginatively, engaging with what we have retained from the past and rearranging it into a more coherent narrative, from which we may carry forward various elements (Keightley and Pickering, 2012). There are few people who would really exchange modern comforts and achievements for the 'good old days', in spite of a sense that life in the past was happier, more peaceful, less polluted, and more connected (Lowenthal, 1989).

7.5   Digging for Victory

One nostalgic trope which several participants invoke is that of 'digging for victory'. When we were discussing sustainability specifically, and how they thought Incredible Edible fitted in with wider efforts to achieve sustainability (if at all), participants often suggested that we needed to be 'digging for victory'. This was sometimes said with a smile, and sometimes not, but it always referred specifically to the familiar (in Britain at least) cultural image of the Dig for Victory campaign of the Second World War.

Incredible Edible as an organisation also draws on the trope, making a direct comparison between the Dig for Victory campaign and the way the Incredible Edible (and others) respond to crises. The following appears in their news section:

> Over and again through crises of this size the one thing we all know is that food becomes central to keeping people well, connecting people and supporting them through difficult times. **From the Dig for Victory campaign during WW2 to the way the Incredible Edible**

Todmorden folk come together and support their community during the horrific Calder Valley floods, food is always central to the response within communities. It pulls people together, creates kindness and connects everyone. But most importantly food forces people to leave their agendas at the door and focus on those who are struggling and in times such as these that is vital

(Venn, 2020, emphasis added)

The Ministry of Agriculture's "Dig for Victory" campaign began one month into World War Two in 1939. It called on every adult in Britain to keep an allotment, as well as beginning the ploughing up of unused and roadside verges, and the use of flowerbeds in private gardens and municipal parks for growing vegetables in a response to food shortages caused by German U-Boat blockades (Lowe and Liddon, 2009). This is echoed not insubstantially in Incredible Edible's use of public land, including roadside verges and other public spaces, for growing vegetables to give to the community.

The participant's invocation of the notion of Digging for Victory suggests several different ideas. First among them is the notion that we are facing a climate catastrophe which will lead to shortages akin to those suffered by Britain during World War 2, necessitating austerity and a collective response. There is also an inescapable comparison between the external threat of an aggressive state and the external threat of climate change. The response is inevitably one of defensiveness, feeling that a way of life is under threat and needs to be protected. Indeed, when we were chatting about the climate crisis, and what might be done, Katherine went as far as to say that, "We should be on a war footing; we should be getting everyone to grow veg in their gardens."

In doing so she implies that collectively we need to make lifestyle changes, and that these will likely require sacrifice (as being on a war footing did in the past) as well as change. The link to wartime Britain here is explicit, suggesting that the environmental crisis we face today poses at

least as much of a threat as bombing and potential invasion did in times of war. Although she does not refer directly to the Dig for Victory motif here, she does imply it in the notion that we should be getting everyone to grow vegetables in their gardens, as this is exactly what the Dig for Victory campaign did.

She also says that "we all need to be poor really, you know, poverty for all, we need to be consuming less," which, although radical and not uncontroversial, draws again on the notion of sacrifice and 'making do' which permeated the Dig for Victory campaign and appears throughout discussion of wartime Britain.

Invoking ideas of Dig for Victory also draws a direct comparison between the present day, where we are primarily consumers of industrialised agriculture and have very real environmental concerns, and a past in which resource use was radically lower, and where people were often producers as well as consumers (Ginn, 2012). It can, of course, be instructive to look to the past for examples of how food crises have been dealt with before, particularly when considering future food security (Kirwan and Maye, 2013), and so Dig For Victory can be approached through reflective nostalgia. That said, the nostalgic idea that communities pulled together and were more cohesive in wartime Britain than they are today, which seemed frequently to be part of the image that participants were invoking when they compared their work to digging for victory, is not at all unproblematic but pervasive in popular culture, nonetheless. The reason that Dig For Victory is so pervasive an idea and so effective is that it is based on a narrow and fetishized version of history which selectively ignores certain aspects of the reality of it (Ginn, 2012). That is not to say that communities *didn't* come together during wartime, or that there was no value in the campaign, or indeed that there is none now, but it is worth remembering that it is generally viewed in a rose-tinted way, much like other nostalgic ideas. Sonya Rose (2003) points out that although the nation may have pulled together in the face of common enemy, there were still fissures along the lines of regional, class, race, and gender lines which meant that not everyone experienced, or benefitted from, national unity in the same way. In fact, the notion that wartime

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Britain was united in some form of heroic self-sacrifice is, though not untrue per se, questionable. For example, the 'Blitz Spirit' has been unpicked in Angus Calder's *The People's War* (1969), there were strikes in some key industries during the war's final years, a prevalent black market, and open resentment of the government controls at the time (Barnett, 1986; Ginn, 2012). That said, like nostalgia more broadly, references to Dig For Victory in the present day do not generally provide logical information about the past, rather they are an affective appeal to imagined historical authenticity (Ginn, 2012).

The Dig for Victory trope also suggests a voluntary austerity and simplicity in food consumption and production which is often championed by the local food movement and by other environmental groups, and so it is perhaps not surprising to find it here, though no less powerful for that. Indeed, the Dig for Victory notion often comes up alongside concerns about industrial agriculture, sustainable consumption, climate change and food security, and is part of what gives their activity it's political rather than leisurely feel. They are not alone in drawing these comparisons. In wider campaigns NGOs and local groups, including Incredible Edible, often campaign for local production and distribution of food for the same reasons. These groups frequently draw on the image of 'Dig for Victory' as well[16]. Rowan Williams called for people to 'dig for victory over climate change' by growing more at home for example (Webster and Gledhill, 2009), while the president of the Soil Association suggested that the Dig for Victory 'spirit' is imperative for the future of the UK's food security (Hickman, 2008). Dig for Victory suggests a tried and tested method of low-resource food production and consumption, which helps to make an otherwise radical idea of food consumption outside of the mainstream system more palatable and attractive (Crouch and Parker, 2003). Again, the nostalgic past provides proof of the possible. The nostalgic Dig for Victory rhetoric of the participants, and of the grow your own movement more widely, draws on a shared understanding of the past and orients it towards the future (Ginn,

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[16] For a review see Hinton and Redclift, 2009; Bramall, 2011

2012). Drawing on understandings of Digging for Victory demonstrates a reflection on the past, as well as the attempted selective restoration of it.

Sue Campbell (2003, 2006) has argued that much of our remembering is in fact relational. Although we may approach the way in which we deal with the past with integrity, and try to present a faithful image of it, our remembering is most often supported and facilitated by listeners and by those we are remembering with. Our memories, particularly social ones like the dig for victory campaign which is, for many, not in living memory, are co-constructed. The dig for victory campaign is a particular example of a collective memory which is widely reinforced. The members of IE Abermor draw on this collective memory when they use the trope, but they also reinforce and co-construct a sense of nostalgia more generally when they refer to 'how things used to be' and that sense of 'getting back' to something better than we have in the present. All the members use these ideas and phrases in telling their stories to me, but also in group discussions and conversations, helping to strengthen an underlying nostalgia in their relationships and in their work.

In research on 'sustainable flood memory' (Garde-Hansen *et al.*, 2017) it is argued that people with living memory of floods, and those with inherited memories of floods (as knowledge is passed from generation to generation), may draw on their memories to respond to new flooding issues as they occur. Collective memory serves as a tool for community resilience. There are obvious comparisons here between flooding as an environmental disaster and the climate crisis as an environmental disaster, the need for community resilience in responding to both, and the use of memory in concern for the future. As with the 'Dig for Victory' trope in food activism, Joanne Garde-Hansen et al (2017) note that the 'Blitz Spirit' is often drawn upon when discussing flooding of the past in Britain. This draws on the same notions of community pulling together and resilience in the face of crises, but may also draw a comparison to perceived narratives of vulnerability in contemporary crises with notions of resilience during wartime (Furedi, 2007).

Certainly, the participants here cast the present in a negative light compared with their perceived pasts.

The obvious difference between flooding and the climate crisis is that there has not been a climate crisis in living memory, and therefore remembered knowledge of how to survive one does not exist. It is reasonable then for people to look to the past (consciously or otherwise) for ways to survive *aspects* of the climate crisis, in this case food security. The Dig for Victory campaign is an example in recent memory of local food growing, and of individual and community gardening as a response to food, and other resource, shortages. It gives an example of when these issues, which it is suggested we will face again as part of the climate crisis, were faced collectively and successfully (though perhaps not always as cheerfully as is nostalgically presented).

7.6   Constructing the 'nostos'

It is the notion of 'home', and of returning home, which makes nostalgia nostalgic. It is not simply a reference to the past. The participants frequently talk about feeling at home and welcome in the group, and attribute this to the people, the community, around them. Although they are, to a large extent, fulfilling a basic human need for social support and company, they are also constructing in the present a kind of home – a 'nostos' – which they feel is something from the past, which they are returning to. The nostalgia which infuses a lot of their activity and narratives, is not just looking backwards, but is practical, in that it informs action in the present, which is in turn future facing. The emphasis placed on kindness and on community is what creates a sense of home, both in the present and the future, which in turn gives the narratives a sense of nostalgia as they construct notions of a welcoming 'home'.

Colin and Jill joined the group specifically to find new friends and community after they moved to a new area. They were, very literally, starting a new life and wanted to put down roots, so it is perhaps not surprising that Colin is very explicit about the way in which the group's activity

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constitutes home-building for him. He says that "we've made a new life for ourselves here, and I feel really strongly about what we're doing here".

He is passionate about not only the work that the group does, but the group itself, particularly the way that they welcome newcomers. Similarly, Caroline emphasises the importance of creating a sense of belonging in what they do, and in suggesting that people can find a sense of place through their work, she is drawing heavily on that feeling of coming home which is so central to nostalgia.

> It's not just about growing, this is about making the connections in the community, bringing people together to do something good and everybody finding a bit of sense of place in their own local environment... and when you've done something like that in your community *you feel like you belong* don't you, I think that's missing in a lot of communities isn't it (emphasis added).

Katherine also talks about the way in which the group's work is related to finding a sense of home. We had been having a chat about the community event the group held when they planted the edible hedgerow, and she had said how it had felt a bit like an old-fashioned fete. I remarked that there can be something very welcoming about old-fashioned events like that. We moved on, talking about the way local communities used to come together, and Katherine said.

> We are trying to get back to the things you mention, but not just through nostalgia but because we think growing your own, and therefore eating seasonally, and fostering community is a happier way to live. But we also think that with the looming, indeed present, climate crisis, it is a better way to live going into the future. I don't think it is a surprise that five group members (six including my husband who joins in with the social activities but doesn't garden) all joined when they moved to the area, we are indeed looking for a community. But as the group has 'gelled' we have become more willing to absorb extra people who may find groups more difficult.

Seasonal and locally grown food provides the basis for "a happier way to live" and stronger community, with sustainability and the climate crisis as a background, something which they are all aware of but that they tackle in a more indirect way. Through community and living differently, perhaps in a more old-fashioned (at least it is perceived as such) way, they work towards sustainable solutions. This is instead of facing the monolithic task of tackling the climate crisis head-on, and as such is comfortable and comforting.

There is an element of Weick's (1984) 'small wins' here, in that the goals and desires of participants are articulated in ways which are manageable and achievable. This is what makes this nostalgic narrative hopeful. It provides the realistic, or at least plausible, goals which participants can realistically work towards and achieve. In the face of otherwise overwhelming challenges, this is comforting and sustains hope and hopeful action and is therefore an important way in which IE Abermor helps to bring about and maintain transformative change.

Lowenthal (1989) suggests that contemporary nostalgias have a point of commonality in that they tend to envisage a time when communities, and people, did not feel fragmented, and when action was not only possible but also led to intended and desired goals. It is not surprising, then, that the interview data from participants contains a sense of home which is intrinsically tied up with notions of community, and 'togetherness'. Incredible Edible as a movement also constructs notions of 'home', when it specifically refers to ideas of togetherness, and of creating a world which will be a nicer place to live. Katherine's emphasis on creating a 'happier' way to live invokes a sense of warmth and cosiness often associated with nostalgic recollections of the past.

Interestingly, Katherine is the only participant to explicitly identify nostalgia (I did not mention the term in my questions myself) and is also keen to distance herself from the nostalgic element of their activity, perhaps because of the negative associations of over-sentimentality and stasis which nostalgia often has. Matt also felt it was important to point out that the vision of what they were 'getting back to', was not necessarily an 'accurate' vision of the past, and to show his

awareness of that fact. Although nostalgia does permeate the group's activity, and is therefore important, it is not often explicit, and emphasis is instead often placed on the forward-facing aspect of the group. Katherine does this when she moves on from her mention of nostalgia to talk about creating ways in which to live in the future. In doing so she demonstrates the ways in which the past, and nostalgia, is linked to the future through the present.

7.7   Conclusion: Nostalgia, hope, and utopia

Nostalgia, as discussed earlier, has traditionally been viewed as a retreat from the present, as a loss of faith in the future and as a defeatist and melancholic response against progress (Pickering and Keightley, 2006). This does not seem to fit with the otherwise hopeful nature of the participant group, and with local food activity more broadly, though. This shows there is an alternative way of conceptualising the nostalgia which is evident in the interview data, and which adds an important new dimension to understanding how hope is practiced in this context. Indeed, I have argued here that nostalgia is as much about the future as it is about the past. It is not a question of "dealing with the past which might already be at our disposal or not at our disposal", depending on the accuracy of our memory of the past, it is instead a "question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow" (Derrida and Prenowitz, 1995, p. 27).

Nostalgia and nostalgic activities represent a desire to reconnect with the past, or to hold onto something which is past rather than lose it simply because time marches on. They also signal a desire not only to reconnect with something which has apparently been lost, but also to reassess what has apparently been gained. Nostalgia, therefore, brings the past into a dynamic relationship with the present, opening up the possibility of critique (Keightley and Pickering, 2012). By identifying those aspects of the past which we wish to regain and restore, we are implicitly comparing the past to the present, and finding the present wanting. By trying to regain

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a 'happier' way of living from the past in the present, we are necessarily saying that the present is currently an unhappier way to live.

This is much the same as the ways in which utopias, as imagined futures, may be used to critique the present. The participants invoke an image of the past, whether it is accurate or imagined, which they are implicitly comparing to the present, as well as to the future. Whether it is a sense of community which they feel has been lost, a more sustainable way of living, or wildlife which is now missing, they offer up the things from the past which they wish to get back to and suggest that there are aspects of the present, and therefore also the future, which need to be improved. Rather than nostalgia as a desire to return to the past, it can instead be seen as a desire to recognise those desirable aspects of the past which can be used in the future for renewal (Pickering and Keightley, 2006). Conceptualised in this way, the nostalgia displayed by participants is more positive, identifying the ways in which modern approaches to food, community and the environment are lacking and aspiring towards a better future (Pickering and Keightley, 2006).

As argued in Chapter 4, utopias arise from desire, and the transformation of reality, or the realisation of utopia, depends upon hope (Levitas, 1990b) in that it is hope and its type of agency which enables the pursuit of the utopian goal. In this instance, the desire which utopian goals stem from arises (in part) from nostalgic memories of the possibilities of the past, which in turn anticipate the possibilities of the future, and so helps to choose which possible future will become the actual future (Levitas, 1990a) and directs hope and hopeful action. It is the sense of *possibility* which makes not only the goal achievable, but also action and hope (Stock, Carolan and Rosin, 2015). Nostalgia is used here as proof that alternatives are possible, as in the references to the Dig for Victory campaign. In order for hope to be sustained, there must be examples of successful change (Courville and Piper, 2004) and these examples may just as easily come from the past (nostalgia) as from other places. Hopeful, forward facing nostalgia is not simple melancholia, instead it is utopian (Boym, 2001; Pickering and Keightley, 2006). In this way, we can see that

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nostalgia adds important new insights to our understanding of those three elements of hope as identified in Chapter 2: future orientation, agency, and action.

There is an element of remembering who we were in the past, and the sense of possibility which comes from looking into an uncertain future (Bradbury, 2012). The past is certain in a way in which the present is not. In looking back, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see the possibilities which lay before us, and the paths we could have, or did, take. It is impossible to look at the present in the same way, never mind the future (Lowenthal, 1989). Invoking the past then is not about recreating the past itself, but about recreating the possibilities, or at least the sense of possibility, which we can now realise we had. It helps to open up the 'horizon of possibilities' (Joas, 1992, p. 133), which in turn creates space for creative action by allowing more possible visions to be imagined as they are made more plausible by examples from a nostalgic remembering of the past.. It is this sense of possibility which links nostalgia to hope, as the possibilities are illuminated, action becomes possible, and therefore we can be hopeful as agency is enabled and action is inspired.

Nostalgia and hope come together to show us the possibilities for the future. Rather than triggering a longing to live in the past, they can be used to create possibility, encourage critique and enable action, such as engaging in alternative food activities, and to encourage individuals to live meaningfully (Bradbury, 2012). Davis (1977) sums up the ways in which nostalgia can have a hopeful effect on the future;

> It (nostalgia) reassures us of past happiness and accomplishment; and, since these still remain on deposit, as it were, in the bank of our memory, it simultaneously bestows upon us a certain worth, irrespective of how present circumstances may seem to question or obscure this. And current worth, as our friendly bank loan officer assures us, is titled to at least some claim on the future as well (Davis, 1977, pp. 420).

Nostalgia is present, if not always explicitly, throughout many of the conversations with participants, and through the work undertaken by the group and by Incredible Edible more broadly. Their narratives are not, however, backward facing. They are very much oriented towards the future and convey a sense of possibility as well as an awareness of the future. Nostalgia seems to play an important part in creating a sense of welcome in the group which helps to maintain people's commitment to it, as well as reassuring people that their actions *can* have impact as the actions of other did (at least may have) in the past. It is a way in which the group maintains and fosters hope. Nostalgia, and 'getting back', is, in this case, about moving forwards and looking ahead toward the future.

8 Community

What is most striking about the group, and about all the groups actually, is the sense of

'togetherness' and community that they have. They seem to share a bond which is more than just

friendship or shared interest. It is more like shared endeavour, in which they also share successes

*and failures, they have a vested interest in each other and in each other's work. … It's **so** sociable*

here! It's all about chatting and just being together – we laugh all day every time I come here… It

was great to see the group in action at the honey fair. They were so full of energy and having such

a good time doing the memory game with people and giving away seeds and plants. They did talk

about the group's work of course, and there was a sign-up sheet etc, but the main point seemed

to be just having a good time, and people seemed to really engage with that. There was no 'hard

sell', no 'virtue signalling' (for want of a better phrase), it all had a sort of village fete feeling really,

which was hard to resist! It was targeted activity, but it really seemed to get the message out

there somehow. It was really good to see a group of friends doing something that made them,

and other people, happy like that…

(From my fieldnotes)

Caroline, one of the founding members of the Abermor IE group, was very candid about her initial

scepticism about the way that IE works. She has come to embrace the ethos of IE and of the group

though and is now a passionate advocate of the work that her group, and IE overall, do. People,

and bringing people together, are at the heart of why she is so passionate about the cause.

> There is an ethos with IE, they say 'if you eat, you're in', so it's inclusive to everyone. And
>
> the other thing they want to do is build kind, connected, confident communities. I think
>
> that doing IE shows that there is a bit of kindness in the world you know, that people are
>
> willing to share and shows that there are a lot of communities out there which are very

disjointed, but doing IE can really bring people together and build strong, kind, connected communities … I'd heard of IE when they started in Todmorden, and my immediate thoughts were… I didn't get it, and didn't think it would catch on … [after leaving my job with the council] I wanted to work in the community again, and started a garden share scheme, but it was hard to manage, and then Rebecca got in touch with me, and we started this IE group. We got on well, and enjoyed it so much … I started to understand then, it's not just about growing, this is about making the connections in the community, bringing people together to do something good and everybody finding a bit of sense of place in their own local environment, and you know things like this [the barbecue we are currently at] can happen can't they. That's why I've stuck at it, it's such a brilliant way of getting people together (Caroline)

A significant and recurring theme to emerge from my fieldwork is that of community. The participants frequently refer to 'community' around them, as well as to their own community within the group. Community is also one of the core principles of Incredible Edible as a movement, and therefore deserves attention here. This chapter will explore the different types of community invoked by the participants, as well as the nature of the community which they share as a group. I will begin with a consideration of community gardening and move on to discuss social capital within this context. Then the importance of sharing as a basis for the participants' community is an important aspect which will be discussed. Participants also frequently referred to the enjoyment and pleasure which they share as a community, and this will be considered in relation to sustainability, as well as to hope more broadly. Finally, the nature of the group's community activism, and the central importance of food to the group and movement will be explored.

8.1   Gardening in the Community

It would seem strange to discuss the community within a gardening project without first considering 'community gardening'. That said, Incredible Edible (IE) does not entirely fit with definitions of community gardening in a wider sense. It does not confine itself to a particular space, as you might normally expect with a community garden. Rather than using a garden, plot or allotments, IE uses public spaces; planters outside public buildings, flowerbeds beside public walkways, and other land which would otherwise go unused, such as grass verges for example. They plant in public spaces so that everyone, and anyone, can help themselves to produce as they pass. Typically, a group comes together as a small community of growers and spends time planting and tending the 'plots', with the expectation that the public and wider local community will benefit from picking the produce as well as from the aesthetic benefits of well-tended and planted plots. The lack of boundaries means that the edges of the growing community and the wider community are blurred somewhat. Nevertheless, there is significant value to be found in the literature on more traditional forms of community gardening when considering IE as a movement.

Like many community gardening projects, IE is a grassroots movement. It involves activity which is undertaken by a network[17], and which seeks to respond to local needs, situations, and interests through bottom-up, sustainable, solutions. They try wherever possible to include the values of the communities and individuals involved (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; White and Stirling, 2013). Most notably, they emphasise the importance of small actions by local groups and are very much 'bottom-up' in their approach to sustainability and social change.

> Community is at the very heart of Incredible Edible's work and our growing patches are
>
> edible attractions to get people talking. From its inception, Incredible Edible sought to

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[17] In fact, IE is now global in its reach, though the most important aspects of its network remain within countries.

show how ordinary people can transform their own landscapes and turned disused plots into abundant sources of healthy food. Working with whoever is willing, we create powerful connections through food, which lead people to believe that when we act together each of us is stronger for it

(Incredible Edible, 2020b)

They believe passionately that,

The future is in our hands. We have the right as citizens to take action. The structures in a democratic society are there to serve the will of the citizens, not the other way around [we should not wait for] permission or funding – just do something today, however small and the result will grow

(Incredible Edible, 2020a).

There are several innovations which are particularly attributed to community gardens and community supported agriculture, and which are reflected in Incredible Edible as a movement. Most notably, these types of projects involve local and communal land stewardship through the joint growing of food, investment in, and management of, space, and the sharing of risk between growers and consumers, all of which are key aspects of IE. This necessarily involves collective decision making, group work and cooperation, and responds to the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainability (in terms of the normative definition of the word defined by the WCED (1987, p.43). Organic methods are often employed, helping their impact in terms of sustainability, and the act of growing is recognised generally as having therapeutic benefits (both physical and mental) for those involved (Twiss *et al.*, 2003; England, 2009; Matters, 2011). Community growing can enable access to fresh, healthy produce, relatively cheaply (in terms of money if not time), which is certainly one of the core aims of Incredible Edible. There are also benefits in terms of social skills and social cohesion, as people learn to work together and collectively (Stocker and Barnett, 1998; White and Stirling, 2013).

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Community gardens typically try to provide a source of fresh and safe foods, which are often organic (Stocker and Barnett, 1998). Although IE does produce organic food which it makes available to the wider community, they do not pretend to try to feed the population. The scale of production is small, and the goals expressed by participants do not tend to refer to provisioning for the community. Nevertheless, the production of food and community access to it in this way is important and as such there remain parallels with community gardening projects more broadly.

IE certainly provides the social space which is key to much community gardening, offering the opportunity for social and cultural connections (Stocker and Barnett, 1998). Many people join community gardening projects looking for a sense of companionship among kindred spirits (Francis and Hester, 1990), which is certainly true of the members of the Abermor IE group. Many participants tell stories of moving to the area and looking to 'join in' to build social networks for themselves and to integrate into the local area. The processes of encounter, negotiation, embodied engagement with the land and other group members as well as the broader community form the basis of sociocultural sustainability (Stocker and Barnett, 1998) which is such an important part of community gardening.

Community is at the heart of Incredible Edible as a movement, and is evidently also important to the participants, who referred frequently to community throughout their narratives. The local community, the community of participants, and the community of Incredible Edible groups are all important in the stories that participants tell about the work that they do. In what follows the concept of community as used by participants, and indeed as used in social science, will be unpacked. It should be remembered that community is not a necessarily straightforward term. It can mean a sense of direct common concern, or any number of forms of common organisation. At the same time, it can mean a set of existing relationships or a set of alternative relationships (Williams, 1983). As well as being broad and difficult to define, it is also emotive, signalling an almost universally positive notion of a group (based on location, interest, or goods), at the same time as being something quaint and old-fashioned which, although not bad, isn't necessarily for

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taking seriously (Eagleton, 1998). The concept will, therefore, be examined and its usage here defined, before the particular type of community which the participants are a part of, one based on shared goals, food, and comradeship, will be explored. Community will be considered in terms of its relationship to hope, to the agency of participants and of the group, and to sustainability more broadly.

8.2   A sense of loss

Participants frequently referred to community as something which has been lost, at least in wider society. Caroline in particular talked about a sense of belonging which is "missing in a lot of communities isn't it" (Caroline), and Jackie also often gave a sense of how values, togetherness, and a responsibility towards each other that we "used to have" (Jackie) are something that the group is 'getting back to', implying that it had previously been lost.

The participants are clear that their work is as much about rebuilding community and connection as it is about sustainability and vegetable growing. In today's society, where we are arguably much more disconnected; "I think groups like this are part of fixing that" (Jackie). "There are a lot of communities out there which are very disjointed but doing IE can really bring people together and build strong kind connected communities" (Caroline).

Even Incredible Edible as an organisation gives a sense that they are 'bringing back' community and creating connections which would not otherwise have been there, simply through their emphasis on the ways in which they can bring people together and "*create* powerful connections" (Incredible Edible, 2020b, emphasis added), implying that those connections were not there to start with.

This notion of lost community is not limited to the participants. A loss of community is often associated with our hyper-mobile, modern, lifestyles, and is also linked to ideas of unsustainable societies and ways of life. For Marsden and Hines (2008), shifting political and social relations

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have resulted in people being disconnected from their environments, and subsequently from sustainability. Developing more sustainable futures, therefore, is dependent on rebuilding social cohesion and social capital and reconnecting people with their environments. Ehrenfeld (2008) also specifically argues that a lack of connection between the self and action leads to inadequate, even piecemeal, responses to sustainability issues. A restoration of hope, and with it its belief in individual and community action, could therefore lead to more sustainable communities and lifestyles. The belief in action and confidence in agency which is a part of hope is important not just for the mobilisation of individuals, but the mobilisation of groups.

The group here talk often about how they are creating a sense of community, and about how their work in the group leads them to undertake other actions and activities related to sustainability. They are a clear example of how a focus on smaller-scale, community-based action can link with wider sustainability issues, actions, and goals (Holland, 2004). They have the potential to generate sustainable communities through the ways in which they build agency and knowledge within the group (Holland, 2004). They are one example of a creative response to sustainability issues, working to build more engaging and open communities in the present. In this way they can be viewed as an example of a prefigurative, and so utopian, project. Their goal of building more open and engaged communities is made possible through the agency and action of the group and individuals within it, meaning that their hopeful action is what helps to bring about their possible future in the present day.

8.3   The meaning of 'community'

It would be more friendly if people were all growing their own, and less stuck in their own houses. Let's have a community garden rather than a Lidl! (Katherine)

The stories from participants are stories of transformation, healing, growth, and discovery, with a common theme of community running through them. The social side of the project, the friendships and relationships which develop through it, and the links to people around the project are as important as any green motivations or food concerns. Incredible Edible has as their strapline "our vision is to create kind, confident and connected *communities* through the power of food" (Incredible Edible, 2020b, emphasis added), as well as "if you eat, you're in", promoting a notion of community as *inclusive*. This spirit of connectedness permeates the narratives of participants as they repeatedly invoke different notions of community. For instance, at various points they use 'community' to mean people in the local area, connections between different IE groups, and then connectedness within the group itself as well.

These different notions of community demonstrate how notoriously difficult a concept it is to define. In Keywords (1983), Raymond Williams offers several different interpretations of the term; as meaning the commons or common people, being distinguished from those of social rank; to mean a state or organised society; to mean the people of a particular district or locality; meaning the quality of having something in common, such as a community of interests or of goods for example; and to mean a sense of common identity and characteristics. He also points out that it can be used to mean alternative kinds of group living (such as communes and intentional communities), and to mean more direct and personal relationships than those implied by state or, indeed, by politics, though 'community politics' has a meaning of its own, suggesting various kinds of direct action (Williams, 1983).

The term 'community' tends to be used in a vague way to describe social groups, generally with a positive implication and often in a politically loaded way (Stocker and Barnett, 1998). As a term, it is often idealised, and is associated with notions of tradition, loyalty, commitment, common actions and stories, and common conceptions of the 'good' (Cochran, 1989). This concept of community emphasises similarity and commonality above all else, which means there is a risk of repressing social differences and diversity through it. Basing understandings of community on

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affinity, rather than identity, can help to avoid this (Young, 1990), and effectively incorporate difference and diversity (Stocker and Barnett, 1998). Indeed it is affinity rather than a shared identity which forms part of the basis of the group studied here (Young, 1990) and many of the participants use the term community to refer to a sense of personal connectedness as much as anything else.

The vast majority of literature on Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), which includes community gardens and community supported agriculture as well as other alternatives to mainstream food systems, tends to refer to place-based communities, rather than identity-based ones, when they use the term 'community' (Firth, Maye and Pearson, 2011). The idea of community as meaning the people in a particular locality is another which often crops up in conversation with participants and is one which reflects a more traditional notion of the 'local'.

Jonathan Kingsley and Mardi Townsend (2006) suggest that this is indicative of a shift in the way we define community, moving from place-based to personal connections. Community in this sense cannot simply be used to refer to a group of people who happen to live near to one another. Rather, it refers to a socially constructed group of people who come together over shared interests and common purpose. This implies that there is a difference, perhaps irreconcilable, between territorial communities and interest communities (Firth, Maye and Pearson, 2011). This is not borne out by the interview data though, as participants place emphasis on the 'localness' of their community and the work that they do, but also on the fact that they are very much a group who came together through a shared purpose and common interests.

8.3.1 The importance of place

[We all joined for] different reasons, Margaret [another group member], she was part of Friends of the Earth, but they weren't doing enough you know, for her liking, but we were a group about actual action and I think she, because they'd done a lot of talking with

Friends of the Earth but they hadn't done enough action, so that was one of her motivations perhaps to come and join us. Sarah is very interested in gardening, Peter had been picking and eating and wanted to come and join us, and Colin and Jill, and Matt and Kellie, and Katherine as well, they were all new to the area. Matt and Kellie were itching to do some growing too! And Tom, he wanted to learn more about gardening really. And Katherine had been picking the produce too, actually I think some of the beds were part of the reason she moved here in the first place! (Caroline)

Location links the participants first, not because they are all from the area, but because they are all living there now. It is not just living in the area which links participants though, but also the much smaller locality of the garden share which they work in which links them. As well as the public vegetable beds which they tend, the group has a garden share where they bring on seedlings and work year-round.

the um the ones in the town only run sort of during the growing season, so spring, summer, and autumn, and then the ones, well, here [gestures to the garden around us at Lily's house] we have all year round so it keeps us going, and keep momentum really, because otherwise if you stopped in October and then didn't come back until February you've got to build it again haven't you and get it going again but this this really helps (Caroline)

And without it we'd really miss our weekly meetings! (Jill)

Yeah! Yeah, we would, it's helped to, it's kind of bonded us as a group and it's strengthened the group having this here you know, coffee mornings and everybody having a chat and you know it's really built the bonds between us (Caroline)

Having a physical space, in this case the garden, which links them helps to reinforce their bonds and to strengthen their sense of community. It has not just been important for those who have moved to the area though. Rebecca is one of the few members who is from the area originally,

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and agreed that the social side of the project, and the importance of making connections, is a large part of why the group works. "It's such a lovely way to meet people, if you're vaguely interested in gardening, although some of our members weren't even that!"

Colin and Jill are enthusiastic members of the group and were new to the area when they joined, made clear when they describe the reasons that they joined the group: "The community aspect was key for us, because it was a shock really, moving to a new area and not knowing anyone, so we joined the ramblers and joined this."

Another couple who are a part of the group also joined when they moved to the town and were looking to meet people.

> We moved into the area three and a half years ago, and we had an allotment which we really enjoyed it, but it was basically a full-time job. We couldn't really take on another allotment here, we just didn't have the time. We had seen people planting outside the Tourist Information Centre here, and ... got on like a house on fire with the people we met here, and being new to the area wanted to meet new people and make contacts etc. We're both retired now, and this interests us and is social too. All the people are really nice, and the concept behind it is very appealing. I think on balance people are involved more for the social side of things than the gardening side. We feel very at home and relaxed here (Matt).

Incredible Edible as an organisation frequently draws on notions of community as well. They tend to do so by referring to a more place-based community, meaning the local community. There is an assumption that the local community will have a shared and vested interest in sharing in activity and in food, and that a strong local community will have more impact on the way we live, and eat, than individuals with weaker connections.

Place is important, but place-based community is not without issue. Place-based community has the potential to create elitist and exclusionary spaces, and to give rise to a type of unreflexive and

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defensive localism which ultimately runs counter to any notion of social justice, or indeed of environmental justice. In the end, localism for its own sake results simply in nativism (Born and Purcell, 2006), and can simply exacerbate existing issues. For example, if local is championed above all within a more well-off area, it continues to contain wealth within that area, rather than spreading any benefits of the initiative. That said, place-based community, particularly that which is found in the IE group which physically links group members through the land as they work with it and on it, links participants in a very real, even visceral, way. It is therefore powerful, and therefore should not be dismissed simply because there is the potential for issues with it.

8.3.2   A community of affinity

The concept behind the group, and the ethos of IE more generally, is something that also often came up when we discussed people's reasons for joining the group. Colin and Jill, for example, primarily joined through a desire to meet other people, but also said that "we enjoy the group thing, and we feel we're putting something back into the community".

Jackie, too, stressed that although she had initially joined to meet people and to enjoy the social aspects of the group, she was also keen to learn and to get involved with the work that the group does, "meeting people was important, that was a big part of joining this. And learning too, from other people who know more about growing and things, and the physical activity, and the fresh organic produce too".

Although the participants are linked by the locality they live in, suggesting a territorial community, their interests, and their shared ideals, are also an important and bonding part of the community which they have formed.

> That's what it's all about for me, enabling people to do something and yeah, be proud of where they live, and feel, and when you've done something like that in your community

you feel like you belong don't you, I think that's missing in a lot of communities isn't it (Caroline)

it's nice to be part of something sharing, um, sharing of energies and I like, you know, I like the idea of providing food for the community especially. The fact that you're giving something away, that's a nice concept for people you know, you can do that, it doesn't have to be about striving for yourself in a completely selfish way which is how it's been sold to us for so many years (Jackie)

The ideals of doing something to enhance the local community bring people together with a common aim and doing something that people, not all but a lot, enjoy doing, and chatting and learning at the same time (Matt).

Perhaps most clearly, Caroline talked about the way that the members of the group have a shared affinity, as well as a shared locality. She particularly pointed out the way that they share a vision of the future, a goal, which they all want to work towards. In this way, she makes room for the idea that this is a community, not just of locality *and* affinity, but also of hope.

The group feels very relaxed and comfortable, we just take people as we find them, it's the common interest that links us, they want to do what I want to do, and they want to see the change that I want to see (Caroline)

The participants broadly discuss two types of community; a local, place-based community, and a smaller interest-based community of which the participants specifically are a part. Interestingly, gardening is not the main interest for all the participants. Some of them came to the project through a desire to garden and to grow vegetables, others came because they were interested in 'giving back to the local community', some had health reasons for wanting to participate, while others chose the project out of 'green' motivations and a desire to make a difference in terms of sustainability and the environment. Although the interest-based community which they have formed does seem to have roots in many different interests, the shared activity which they

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undertake is the defining characteristic of their small community. The activity which they undertake, whether that is growing produce, distributing produce, sharing meals, taking part in events, or any other aspect of their group actions, is what bonds them as a group. Their many shared interests and goals brought them together, it is their actions which *hold* them together.

Community remains a fuzzy and indistinct term, meaning many things to many people (Williams, 1983; Eagleton, 1998). The repeated reference to 'community' by the participants, and indeed in the literature on food activism and community gardening, means that a working definition cannot really be avoided. To that end, in this thesis community is defined as relationships and connections between people, and indeed between people and things. These relationships, as discussed above, may be place based, or interest based (Williams, 1983; Young, 1990; Firth, Maye and Pearson, 2011), but ultimately are derived from a shared goal, desire or need. Reciprocity, and perhaps dependence, bonds people, as well as non-humans, into communities. The sense of personal connectedness as a group is what is meant when 'community' is referred to throughout the rest of this chapter.

8.4   Social capital and hope

Social capital is a concept which draws attention to the importance of social relationships and of values in shaping broader attitudes and behaviours and is therefore relevant here. Social capital refers, broadly speaking, to social networks, the reciprocities arising from them, and their value for achieving mutual and shared goals (Baron, Field and Schuller, 2000). Like other types of community garden, Incredible Edible is collective in nature. The collective character of community gardens means that much of the literature views them through a social capital framework, exploring the social cohesion, social support, and social networks within them (Hanna and Oh, 2000; Glover, 2004; Foster, 2006; Yotti Kingsley and Townsend, 2006; Alaimo, Reischl and Allen, 2010; Firth, Maye and Pearson, 2011). The social capital derived from the group comes from

multiple sources and helps to strengthen the group as a community. The group here are linked through location, both that of the local area and more specifically of the garden itself, a shared interest in gardening and growing edibles, and through a shared desire to contribute to the community around them.

To use John Field's (2003) definition, at its heart, social capital simply means that relationships matter. As people make connections with each other and maintain them over time, they are able to achieve things that they would not otherwise have been able to (Field, 2003). These connections occur through a series of networks and tend to be based on common values. As these connections and networks enable action and are empowering, they constitute a resource and are therefore a kind of 'capital' (Field, 2003). As discussed above, the overall emphasis of the group is on getting people together, making groups and building connections, especially for those who were new to the area when they joined. Social capital is an inherent part of IE Abermor, and a particular outcome of the relationships which form within the group. The participants inspire, encourage, and enable one-another, and at a higher level the group does the same for other IE groups in the area, as I saw at the IE Gathering in Abercwm. The connections between individuals, and between the groups which make up the IE network, are what enables action here.

Shiela Foster (2006) defines social capital as "the ways in which individuals and communities create trust, maintain social networks and establish norms that enable participants to act cooperatively toward the pursuit of shared goals" (p.529). The echoes of hope in this definition are substantial. This adds to our understanding of how hope operates and how it in turn generates social capital. The inclusion of trust, and of social norms, means that this is slightly different from Field's definition above, which focuses more on connections themselves and is, arguably, quite broad. That said, Field stresses the importance of the quality of relationships between individuals, in that connections must be made and then maintained over time. The personal relationships – the friendships – between participants are important here, as are the ways in which the group creates certain norms which encourage and maintain cooperation. For instance, although no-one

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is expected to do more than they can, they are expected to participate and contribute in some way. There is a visible ethic of 'mucking in' which encourages everyone to get involved and to stay involved.

Chris Firth et al (2011) add another layer to these existing definitions of social capital, identifying three forms of social capital: bonding (strong ties between similarly placed individuals such as neighbours, friends and kin), bridging (distant ties between like people) and linking (ties between people in dissimilar situations) (Firth, Maye and Pearson, 2011; Gray *et al.*, 2014). Their notion of 'bonding' neatly describes the type of close personal relationships – friendships – which are so important in IE Abermor, while bridging and linking seem to describe different levels of social capital throughout a network. So, social capital is understood here as meaning the important relationships based on common values (Field, 2003), and the ways in which they enable bonding between individuals and groups (Firth, Maye and Pearson, 2011), and establish norms which maintain cooperation (Foster, 2006). The pursuit of shared goals, and the sense that the group, the community, enables this to happen, means that social capital is a necessary consideration when exploring hope in this collective setting. Within the IE group, there is a sense that strong community is one of the shared goals which they are in pursuit of. "Strong communities are … built by community members who are engaged, participate and feel capable of working through problems, supported by strong social networks" (Firth, Maye and Pearson, 2011, p. 557). Strong communities are, therefore, hopeful ones. They enable action on the part of their members, a sense of capability, of possibility, and are engaged and active.

For example, the group were all keen to tell me about the edible hedgerow which they had started in the area near to the garden share:

> Matt and Kellie … decided on a hedgerow, er, an edible hedgerow on the edge of their property so they identified a site, and they acquired the trees and the bushes, and we

had a pop-up event um where we put up the gazebo and had local people coming to see what we were doing and to hopefully join us and volunteer (Colin)

[Yes], we drove the hedgerow project … we really enjoyed it and we're really proud of how it's turned out (Matt).

We always thought we'd like to do one, but it wasn't until Matt and Kellie came and they'd seen a site where they wanted to do it and it all suddenly became very doable, and now it's this amazing resource in the community, when you've got people together you know you feel you can tackle things, you know, when you're on your own you go oh that piece of land that'd make a nice vegetable bed, but you wouldn't do anything about it on your own but if you've got six people who are all thinking the same thing you suddenly go well, we can actually do this. (Caroline)

Activities like creating the edible hedgerow became possible because the participants were part of a group, made up of people with different skills and connections, which provided support and enabled action on the part of the members of the group. The positive aspects of social capital are clear here as the participants encouraged each other, helping to motivate and give momentum to something which might otherwise not have happened. They were able to draw on the social capital of the group to achieve something which they might not have been able to on their own.

As mentioned earlier, there are different levels of social capital: bonding, bridging, and linking. Firth et al (2011) describe these different aspects in their study of community gardens in Nottinghamshire. They suggest that community gardens generate social capital because they bring together like-minded people in like-minded activities in a particular space. All three levels of social capital are very much visible at IE Abermor; the participants are bonded as neighbours and friends, they share bridging social capital with people in the area who are interested in what they do (for example, those who stop to chat when they are working on the public beds) as well as with members of other IE groups around the country, and they are linked both to each other

and to people in the area who may not be involved in their project, as well as to people who are involved in growing but not in IE, perhaps not even in the country. Katherine highlights this linking social capital when she says,

> It makes you feel at one with people all over the world, you know who have to grow their own food, the fact that sometimes my crops fail you know I've still got the supermarket to go to of course but it just makes you feel as though you're doing your bit, it's about empathising with people, and being in tune with subsistence farming (Katherine)

Somehow the act of growing food creates a sense of community with those who grow food in general, wherever they may be, suggesting a community of affinity that spreads far beyond locality. The participants also talk frequently about membership of other groups, which might also be considered a type of linking social capital. The participants share experiences of their work with other groups often, organising an evening walk after a group barbecue on the Wildlife Trust land nearby to see glow flies for example, and encouraging links with other groups where they can.

> We joined the wildlife trust too, and we volunteer there too, and one thing leads to another really, and you find new paths and new friends (Colin)

> I'm involved in Friends of the Earth, Fair Trade, and this … and I went on the climate emergency walk with extinction rebellion (Katherine)

> A lot of people here are also members of other groups, like the RSPB or Friends of the Earth, and you get introduced to new things that way as well. Maybe they're not directly related, but they're linked. We've started volunteering at RSPB for example (Matt)

There are also links with other Incredible Edible groups, creating a network which is an important part of Incredible Edible as a movement. The Welsh Incredible Edible gathering was organised by Caroline.

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We're a beacon, or regional lead, now too. We've had other groups coming to look at what we're doing, it's quite an honour really for us to have got that, out of over 100 in the country. We get together with five different regions pretty regularly, and we skype call too.

The gathering in Abercwm was what I'd organised for the Welsh groups, Abercwm was the most central to Wales really. So, we got all the groups together and I think they got a lot out of it.

At the gathering, established groups and new members all got together to share ideas and experiences. Despite some appalling weather, which lead to some people having to leave early as landslides were beginning to block roads out of the town and into the hills, everyone had a good time. There was a lovely, lively, convivial atmosphere, in which the sense of shared purpose was tangible. Gatherings like these are important for the development of shared ties as well as a sense of shared identity, all the attendees were addressed as 'incredible people', members of the Incredible Edible movement rather than simply individuals alone. This space for sharing experiences, knowledge, and passions, creating a community of practice and of learning (Nettle, 2014) is an important part of how social capital is both created and maintained in the network.

Community, and social capital, is important for hope as it provides the ways in which it may be bolstered and facilitates and encourages action in ways that would be absent in isolation, and so community and hope contribute to one another, as hope helps to enable community action, and community helps to reinforce hope. The support of social networks, as well as the ability to participate and to work through problems creates the conditions for hope to continue and indeed to thrive. The social capital generated through the networks and social cohesion within the group, and through the group's links with civic organisations such as the council and with the wider community, help to sustain and encourage hope in the group. If hope is understood as, in part, a

shared goal and the will to move towards it, then the social capital within the group is an important part of supporting and furthering that hope.

8.5   Share and share alike

A key part of life in IE Abermor is sharing. The participants share plants and seeds, with people outside of the group as well as with each other. They share food at group meals, tea-breaks, and other gatherings. They also share knowledge and expertise, teaching each other as they go. Many of the participants talked about how they had little or no gardening experience before they joined the group, or that they joined hoping to learn more about gardening and growing in general. They share in each other's successes and failures, as well as in those of the broader movement. It is these shared experiences, as well as the everyday routines which become a part of garden life, which enable participants to make shifts in their thinking and in their practices (Lorimer, 2005; Donati, Cleary and Pike, 2010).

> [I think this is about] growing for fun, growing for the community, and sharing ideas, that's what I think this is all about really (Colin)

> [That's true] I've found the people, and knowledge too... this is about sharing, it's not about 'information is power' or anything, it's about sharing and helping each other (Tom).

> It's definitely about sharing and helping each other, we were keen gardeners before, and it also feels good to share knowledge that we've picked up along the way... We share experiences here, with people setting up other groups for example, it's nice to be part of a network (Matt)

Beyond ideas, there is a sharing of skills, abilities, and workloads, which is important in the group.

> Everybody's mucking in and you know there are stronger people doing the digging and hard workmanship so I think that on that level that's why it can really work, because you

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can do what you're able to do and everybody contributes in some way it's very kind of

shared and accepted that you know people do different things, and are willing to do

different things, and it's nice to be part of something sharing, um, sharing of energies and

I like, you know, I like the idea of providing food for the community especially. The fact

that you're giving something away, that's a nice concept for people you know, you can

do that, it doesn't have to be about striving for yourself (Jackie)

The sharing of ideals, as well as sharing in and of itself, also features heavily in a lot of the narratives, "I think a lot of people like to see local residents taking pride in their local area, in a generous way rather than being self-interested. It's an altruistic idea which is appealing" (Matt).

The work that the participants do for the group in public is a type of advocacy, demonstrating ideals and ways of working and living which they hope will be taken up by people who see them.

The Incredible Edible community, as mentioned earlier, is a broad one; one unit is the local group, another is the wider IE 'movement'. Less obviously, but no less important, is the more-than-human community that exists around the local group, created by their connection to the land. The plants, soil, and weather play an important role in the ways in which the group works and comes together. There is a sense of nurturing, and of working with the natural world around them. As with other forms of community garden, the Incredible Edible group (and movement) promote environmental justice by reconciling people, land and sustainability (Holland, 2004).

The sharing of knowledge and ideas, and the sharing of experience, through the community which the IE group has established leads to a broadening of horizons. Seemingly minor acts, such as growing food in the way that the IE group does, sharing skills in the garden, and indeed sharing food with people in the community, may open the door to larger shifts in thinking, allowing participants to imagine more sustainable futures (Donati, Cleary and Pike, 2010). This is important for hope as it allows a for a degree of utopian thinking. The community is an important mechanism for enabling the future-thinking which hope entails, and perhaps stepping beyond

that to utopian visioning of a sustainable future. The meaningful connections between people, as well as between the human and non-human, present opportunities to see the world in a different light (Donati, Cleary and Pike, 2010), which are the pre-requisites for living differently, for living more sustainably.

8.5.1   A more-than-human community

As Kelly Donati et al (2010) also found, the gardeners frequently discuss political questions of how to live and eat more sustainably, and so they share ideals with each other as well as with the wider community and public. The garden is not just a site of civic engagement (in a social capital sense) because it is an 'organised' response, but because the act of growing food brings about a sense of connectedness with the land, and with the Earth's natural rhythms. The nature of the group's work, that they physically grow and produce food, is an important part of the way in which they relate to issues of sustainability and broader 'green' questions. They have a physical connection with the land, which creates another dimension of community.

There is a sense of working *with* the land around them, rather than of the gardeners having any sort of dominion over it, which shows that, as well as sharing with each other, there is a degree of sharing and reciprocity between the participants and the land which they work on. There are, as Hayden Lorimer (2005) describes "passionate, intimate and material relationships with the soil, and the grass, plants and trees which take root there" (p.85). They tend to the land and to the plants, and the land and plants give back in terms of produce as well as enjoyment and satisfaction. There is a respect for the environment around them which is fundamental to the way in which they work. They keep to organic methods and leave some areas of the garden to grow wild. Grassy areas are left to become 'meadows' rather than manicured lawns, and any grass that is cut is not mown before the dandelions have had a chance to flower and be visited by the bees as they attempt to conserve and support the environment around them as well as utilising it for growing produce

One marked way in which the participants talk about being more connected with the land is the way in which being involved in the growing project has made them think about eating more seasonally.

> Since growing my own I'm much more aware of seasonal food, I just don't buy out of season now. You look forward to things when you wait for them, more variety, it's just nice. Growing has changed the way I cook and eat (Katherine)

> [For us too] it's not actually something I would have thought about before doing this, I think about food and where it comes from a lot more, we need to get back a bit to eating more seasonally, I think that's, I've realised how seasonal things are, I mean, I've never thought about it before, so yes, it has changed my, my attitude to food. Which is what I suppose [the project is] a lot about (Jill)

> [It is] I think it's about sharing, and community and organic vegetables you know, in contrast to, well… you know as a child everything was seasonal so you only got strawberries in summer and you just got dates at Christmas, and for me it's wrong the way it is now you know you just have everything *now* and it's all packaged up in plastic and it's all clean and you know I'd rather have a bunch of dirty carrots with greenery still on them (Jackie)

Growing edibles has helped to connect participants to their food in a more seasonal way, and to connect with the land as part of this seasonality, necessarily becoming more aware of nature's rhythms. Indeed, they are not just aware of its rhythms, they are respectful of them, working to maintain rather than overcome them.

Indeed, their connection with the land is key to the way in which they respond to and engage with broader notions of sustainability. John Bruhn (2011) states that "a sense of place is important in sustainability" because when people become attached to a place they are more likely to nurture it, including in an ecological context, in turn "by practicing ecological stewardship people

affirm a sense of community". This leads to an ethic of sustainability among the community which finds itself attached to the place and is evident in participant stories.

> I love gardening, I really do, I sort of discovered it over the last ten years, and I've got back to the soil ... (Jackie)

> Being here and working in the garden is making me more aware of climate change, this has been a funny year for veg, if my crops are affected, probably other peoples are, and the farmers, so where is all our food going to come from? I'm much more aware of where things come from now, where they're being shipped from (Katherine)

> Certainly all the people here are very on the green side of things, and you know we try to do everything without chemicals and growing organically um you know and promote wildlife at the same time you know put up bird boxes and bug boxes and mulch and stuff and you know, all the green type things, I think it's important to us, it is to us anyway, and I think it's important to demonstrate that you can do these things in a sustainable way, and encourage wildlife wherever possible (Matt)

> Being 'green' has always been a part of what we do here, but now we've got this core group we can be more green too. We've always been organic, not wanting to use pesticides, and using peat-free compost and stuff, we're all quite keen on the environment I think, um, but more things like bug hotels and things are starting to come as people get more confident, and start to think oh, I can do this... We use water butts and things, and conserve water through mulching and things. Because gardeners are the big recyclers of the world anyway, they don't think about having to buy everything because it's just too expensive you know, to do veg, otherwise it just becomes a really costly carrot doesn't it, so yeah, recycling is definitely up there (Caroline)

Although participants frequently refer to a sense of pride in the local area, and of giving people in the area something they can be proud of too, the place-based aspect of their community is also

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derived from the more direct relationship with the land itself. One can understand a place-based community as meaning a local area, referring to a community of local inhabitants, linked by virtue of their addresses. Another way of understanding place-based community would be on a much smaller scale, referring perhaps to the garden itself. Participants are attached to the land which they grow their produce on, and which they spend time together on, and which they also have a degree of a relationship with. Their concepts of sharing and of working together also extend to the land on which they work.

Schlosberg (2016) argues that movements based on sustainable materialism include a recognition that we are immersed in a non-human realm and, while our relationship with it is deeply co-constitutive, we have also become alienated from it to a greater or lesser degree. Sustainable materialist movements acknowledge our immersion in the non-human realm and seek to reconfigure and rebalance our relationship with it to mitigate the damage that our previous alienation has wrought. IE Abermor, and Incredible Edible more broadly, are part of a shift in thinking, like many other food production groups, which attempts "to reconfigure flows that currently undermine the capacities of ecosystems, bodies, and human communities, into ones that enliven, support, or minimize the negative impacts on them… with specific attention to the relationship between the provision of human needs and the environment in which those needs are met" (Schlosberg and Coles, 2016, p. 172), evident in the ways that the group engages in recycling for example, and plant for pollinators as well as for food.

Bruno Latour's (2005) Actor-Networks (ANT) also acknowledge the importance of non-human actors as it rejects humanism and human-centred agency and instead focuses on effects of association, including those between non-human entities and humans (Latour, 2005; Munro, 2009). It is clear to see the effects of non-human elements on IE Abermor. For example, the weather impacts the way they work, the success of events, and ultimately the success of their crops. Insects, birds, and animals have effects on their work and crops, as do the plants themselves. The group is clearly immersed in a relationship of exchange with the natural world,

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one in which both sides must get what they need in order to flourish and for the relationship, or material flow as Schlosberg (2016) refers to it, to be successful. However, in rejecting the notion of agency in favour of effects, ANT separates intentions and effects (Munro, 2009) which brings into question the notion of hope. If hope is goal and future-oriented, then it is necessary for actors to be taking intentional steps towards their goals through their actions. Therefore, although the members of IE Abermor clearly see the natural world with which they work as important, and they respond to its effects, one cannot abandon the notion of human agency entirely when considering this.

That said, the land, the plants, and the environment around the group is important, and more specifically, their *relationship* with these things is important. Physically working with the land is what creates the relationship with it, in much the same way as the activity shared between participants is what bonds them together. The relationship with the land and with the produce taken from it is what makes this community, and indeed this movement, one about sustainability. The sharing of food may make a community, as is seen in food hubs perhaps, but it does not necessarily bond people, consumers, with the land from which the produce has come. Working on the land necessitates an awareness of how to care for that land, and what affects it, and how to preserve it longer term. Therefore, growing food, on however small a scale, is significant for sustainability efforts in this context. Sharing is also important for hope. Shared interests and goals lead, or stem from, shared hopes. The shared actions of the group are important for both sustaining and generating hope, in that they give a sense of possibility, of strength in numbers, and enable action and open up possibilities.

8.6   The importance of pleasure and perseverance

The group are connected not just through their activity and interest, but through a shared enjoyment and pleasure which is fundamental to the community which they have formed. They

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are an organised community group, but in a less formal way they are a group of people coming together for the enjoyment of gardening, of sharing each other's company, and of food, and as such, pleasure and enjoyment are a large part of the community dynamic in the group. They enjoy each other's company, they enjoy the gardening, they enjoy the food. They take satisfaction from the engagement with the wider community. There is a sense of positivity which comes from all these pleasurable encounters, which seems to help to sustain hope. Against a backdrop of enjoyments, it is possible to continue pushing towards difficult goals, even when there are obstacles or discouragements, such as lower community engagement, issues with the weather, or broader systemic issues.

> That's another thing, I like gardening and keeping the garden and growing plants and now I've taken a lot of bushes out of my garden at home and planted veg and fruit bushes, it just enhances your life (Colin).

> Jackie agrees, "It was the gardening that brought me to IE first [too], I like that things grow... It's a lovely thing, a grounding thing, to share as well. With my grandson too, children find delight and magic in the natural world, it's nice to be reminded of that. It's nice to work here and then go home tired and dirty, it's rewarding, comfortable".

Katherine also talks about the satisfaction of working with the land, saying that "growing was the appeal for me, the idea of community growing is just really nice, getting your hands dirty you know?"

Matt echoes the same sentiment in his narrative, when he says that,

> I think doing something for yourself is satisfying, and I think it's good to show pride in your local area and coming together to achieve something you can be proud of. Originally when allotments started it was all about, you know, you can grow food much more cheaply than you can buy it. Well, that's just not the case anymore, if you add up the costs of time, seeds, equipment, and stuff, it's not a cheap option, but it's about satisfaction,

and knowing chemicals haven't been used and things you know, maybe it tastes better, maybe it doesn't, but if it's just based on costs then you'd think well why do it? [Maybe for the community and the social life],

I got an allotment 12 years ago, I didn't really like gardening and was actually thinking of joining a gym at the time, but my friend convinced me to get an allotment instead it transformed my life I like that it's in a community, it's not the same just growing at home, you get to meet other people, swapping produce and stuff, and you get out of the house! (Katherine).

I mean I was so excited, saying that about growing food, the first time actually things that I put into the ground well, started off from seeds, actually grew because I'd never ever done anything like that before and it's lovely you know, not just to see it but to grow things was amazing really and to actually eat the produce that you've started out, it feels good, but you know herbs, and we've dug potatoes, and it's incredible really (Jill)

The simple pleasure of gardening is also important for Rebecca, who has suffered with depression in the past, "a lot due to stress, running that arts organisation and also teaching part time. Gardening has been my therapy really, yes, gardening is my therapy, I would say that."

The enjoyment of their activities is not inconsequential, as Donati et al (2010) also found "gardening for pleasure [is] both powerful and transformative with broader political and ethical implications for thinking about urban sustainability" (p.211). Although often overlooked, leisure activities can have a powerful political context as a way of fostering social change (Sharpe, 2008), and certainly do in the context of the Incredible Edible movement. Leisure activities, such as gardening in this case, may give individuals and groups the opportunity to resist and alter the dominant cultural narratives in their lives (Glover, 2003; Sharpe, 2008), which may mean ways in which we engage with food systems and consumerism. They also create a space in which

individuals might meet and organise, and discuss, identify with, and otherwise engage in a civic and political sphere (Sharpe, 2008).

Participants frequently talked about how they had come to learn more about environmental issues or have become more aware of what they eat and where it comes from, or even how they have become aware of other 'green' groups working in their area. Some of the group originally joined for reasons of leisure rather than politics, and these members are some of the most vocal about the ways in which involvement in the group has changed their outlook and behaviour. Colin and Jill in particular originally joined simply to meet new people and to get involved with an activity that would be physically beneficial and healthy. They are now two of the most candid about how they have come to rethink food and their impact on the environment, from eating seasonally to recycling. As with practices of sharing and reciprocity discussed above, so pleasure and leisure are also important for developing social capital, for maintaining hope, and for opening up spaces in which to work towards sustainable living.

Despite its pleasures, gardening is often a frustrating past-time. Failed crops, pests and the weather can all wreak havoc and cause disappointment. This affects both the practicalities of gardening, and the ability of the group to undertake the activist side of their work. Participants often referred to community engagement days which had been effectively cancelled by the weather, and to the difficulties of tending to raised beds during a long, hot summer without access to outside taps in the town. One example referred to often was the 'Big Dig Day'.

> Oh, and we had the big dig as well! (Caroline)

> Yes we had a big dig day, but it was a wash out, which was such a shame... (Katherine)

> We arranged this whole thing, lots of posters and yeah lots of um publicity on Facebook and then yeah it was like the 16th of March and the heavens opened and it was freezing and well we thought well we'll just go ahead, and we got really cold and wet. But yeah what we did, what we did was really good and we were all motivated to do it because

> we'd been preparing for it and it was all arranged, we couldn't just say oh we're not going
>
> to do it, so we did and um… the big dig's a national event, there's all sorts of groups doing
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> it around the country, it's to get volunteers involved in community gardening but (laughs)
>
> we didn't have anyone turn up! Not surprisingly! We didn't have anybody apart from us,
>
> but we got loads of work done and it looked really good afterwards… (Caroline)

Yet gardeners persevere. Rising to the challenges presented requires reflection, and drawing on embodied as well as formalised knowledge which may be gained from the group (Donati, Cleary and Pike, 2010). Gardens effectively become a space of nurturing, of the plants and land as well as of each other (Donati, Cleary and Pike, 2010) and, importantly, of hope. The will to carry on in the face of obstacles demonstrates the hope that permeates the group. The hope that plants will grow, the hope that the local community will engage with them, the hope that the work that they are undertaking will make a difference. The backdrop of pleasures in the garden sustains the gardeners, and sustains hope, throughout the frustrations.

Pleasures, as well as other seemingly intangible aspects of gardening and growing food, contribute as much, if not more, to setting conditions for new political and ethical thinking as do the institutionalised or formalised goals, or documentable benefits (such as community gardening's effects on health for example) (Donati, Cleary and Pike, 2010). It doesn't matter how much the IE group produces, their impact cannot be measured in how many carrots they give away, or how many of their raspberries are picked by passers-by, the benefits of gardening to the gardeners, and the impact of their presence at all is valuable in and of itself, as well as invaluable to the maintenance of hope.

8.7 Community food activism

IE Abermor sits comfortably within the umbrella of food activism. Using Aimee Shreck's (2005) typology of food activism, the group engages in acts of resistance by explicitly challenging the

hegemonic food system in that they grow their own food in public spaces and give it away for free. This means that they also engage in redistributive acts which are aimed at a more equal distribution of resources, in this case fresh, organic vegetables and fruit. And finally, they are ultimately engaged in social action which aims to transform the food system into something qualitatively different, in this instance into something based on kindness and sharing, rather than on profit. That said, most participants at IE Abermor did not use, and in some instances were not comfortable with, the term 'activism' or 'activist'. I was careful to avoid the language of activism or social movements in interviews, to avoid pre-judging the understandings that the participants had of their experiences and their involvement. Instead, I used open-ended questions and wider conversation to allow participants room to describe their activities in their own words.

Rebecca was perhaps the exception to the rule when she made explicit reference to the need to "take back control of our food system" (Rebecca). She was very comfortable with the idea that the work IE is doing is focussed on creating change and disrupting existing systems and patterns. When discussing other activist groups, including Extinction Rebellion (whose actions were in the news at the time of fieldwork), Matt, who also felt that the group's work was at least related to environmental movements in a wider sense, was nevertheless reticent to include the group in the same notion of activism as that found in Extinction Rebellion.

> Do you think IE is a part of broader climate movements then? (Me)

> I think it's a little bit separate, I think that the er, work that IE do is um, has the same ideals obviously environmental ideals, um, I don't know a great deal about Extinction Rebellion but I have the image that it's a little bit more sort of, active, um, making a nuisance of themselves type of image, which is different to how we do things. I can understand their thinking, but it doesn't feel the same as IE (Matt)

Matt has clearly understood activism as involving direct action and confrontation, rather than the prefigurative advocacy which is found in IE. Although many of the participants seem to feel the

same way about the actual term 'activism', they do frequently invoke a sense of 'being the change you want to see', which is undeniably a form of activism.

Community projects are significant in terms of the impact they have, whether participants are consciously aware of this or not. First, they exist as living exemplars of the praxis of sustainability. They contribute to a sustainable world, not through their physical inputs and outputs, but by demonstrating what is possible (Stocker and Barnett, 1998). This is evident throughout the narratives of the participants, as well as across the IE materials included in this study.

> The public beds we do are a way of educating people really in the local community, we met a little boy in the town who didn't know that you could plant beans!... we're not really growing big enough quantities for people to have a full meal, some veg just takes up too much space in the beds, and some are impractical for people passing through town to harvest, you can't dig up potatoes without a spade! But it gives people the idea 'oh here's something growing, maybe I could do that' (Katherine).

The participants are generally realistic that this is not about sustainably feeding a population, at least not solely from the produce of the group. They all emphasise that, although sharing the produce is nice and certainly a goal, it is more about demonstrating possibilities. Rebecca talks about how the vegetable beds they have in public spaces have an educational and advocacy role.

> I also really love the idea of growing food, edibles, in public spaces, you know not so that you can feed the population, you can't possibly do that, but it's an education thing, people can see oh yeah they've got a little bit of ground there and some pots with herbs in and I could do that at home, it might just trigger just some awareness that it's not that difficult really, so it's a combination of sort of, um, people are more aware, and they do pick [the produce] , it's funny though, they say 'oh I don't like to really', it's very British somehow. There was a woman who said, 'oh it's wonderful what you're doing but I can't pick them', and I said, 'well we've got signs there saying, you know, please pick' and she

said, 'no no I can't do that' and I said, 'well, why not? It's there for you to pick and eat and there's lovely courgettes and beans' and she just said, 'no I couldn't possibly pick it in a public space'. So, it's like, well, some people are like that....

We go along to events [as well as working on the public vegetable plots], some to do with the [Town's Royal Charter], to try to let people know about what we do and to get people to volunteer... It's not only the locals who do see it and they talk and everything, but it's people who are coming visiting as well and they're thinking about things and they take it home with them, and they say oh we haven't got anything like this where we live, and we tell them about it you know, and there's no reason why it can't be in other places and I do think when everybody's *so* busy… you haven't got time to think about things like this, all you're doing is existing really (Jill)

And People always stop when we're working on the hedgerow, which is another opportunity to spread the word (Matt).

Some people have joined just from stopping and chatting to us when we're working in the town which is lovely. It's about being the change isn't, doing what we need to do and helping other people join in. it would be nice to have more people, and maybe people who might not have the confidence to come along and join in. I'm involved in Friends of the Earth, Fair Trade, and this, and we've all got about 40 people each on our mailing lists but only about less than 10 ever really do anything, now why is that? I don't know (Katherine)

There can be a lot of resistance to the word volunteering! We don't really ask for a commitment though, but I think people can be put off by 'volunteering' (Matt).

I hope that more groups are going to start, and it is happening, we'd like an IE group in every town along the coast here, which would be great. Lots of people ask about it but

then nothing happens, because it is quite an undertaking, but people only have to start small (Caroline).

And so we keep going, we should try, we are so you know young people they don't know where things come from or how they grow and well you know the fact is I think big multinational agribusiness and chemicals, we're so reliant on them, and the supermarkets and it's like well you can grow a few bits and bobs yourself, especially in the summer, and they're organic too, which I'm really big on, because it's good for the environment, and because you don't really know what you're eating anymore and I think that's important, and to take back a bit of control of our food system (Rebecca)

There is a sense that, although their output is not high, and their numbers are not high either, their presence contributes somehow. The participants frequently talk about how members of the public will stop to ask they what they are doing when they are working on the beds. They often have a busy stall at the honey fair, seed fair and annual Feast (the local food festival), where they derive as much satisfaction from conversations with people about what IE does as they do from people actively joining the group. The satisfaction drawn from these minor successes is an example of the way that the group celebrates its 'small wins' (Weick, 1984), helping to nurture and develop hope by noticing and appreciating the achievement of smaller goals along the way to larger ones.

As well as demonstrating possibility to the local community and wider public, they also play an important role in terms of relationships with local government. They demonstrate to local government where community groups are 'coming from'; what they want in their lives, how they understand sustainability, what skills may be present in the community, and how they wish to relate to their environment (Stocker and Barnett, 1998). They are often involved in building relationships with local government as well. For this group in particular, effort has been put into building relationships with the local council, who are very supportive, "We've got a good

relationship with the council, I think we tick a lot of boxes for them!" (Caroline). The maintenance of public beds by IE makes them helpful, and therefore attractive to local councils. This helps to build relationships and to engage local government in long term initiatives which they would otherwise have overlooked. Ultimately, they help to create a more communicative participatory democracy (Stocker and Barnett, 1998)

The participants regularly lament that recruitment is an issue. Although the community do engage with them, they struggle to turn interest into regular volunteers. They suggest several reasons for this, one is a public perception of volunteering, another is a lack of confidence in terms of gardening, and yet another is the overwhelming scale of environmental issues which may leave people feeling helpless rather than spurred to action. The primary reason participants give for their own involvement is not activism. Instead, they have come together for the social nature of the group, and for the community, as discussed earlier. The sense of community and friendship, created in part through sharing experiences of working together through good times and bad, and through establishing and growing the project together (Nettle, 2014), is an extremely important part of why this group came together and stays together. This is not to say that sustainability goals do not feature in their narratives, or that there is not an aspect of activism to what they do, but the social nature of the group was the catalyst for their joining it would seem. Many of the group are not from the local area originally, but have, through the group, formed an attachment to place and to the local area which you might expect from long term residents. This is in no small part due to the nature of their work and their involvement in the land (see above).

If activism is understood as something which strives for change, and which does so by engaging others, then there is certainly activism in the IE group studied. There is a desire to 'spread the word' through community engagement, presence at events, and comment on social media. There is also a desire to help other groups in other areas to start up, which is part of the advocacy and activism which they engage in. Before the Honey Fair, the group were discussing how to make their stall more attractive to the public, and how best to engage them. They had a 'memory game'

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and free seeds as well as produce and plants to give away as well. This was all done to help begin conversations and to attract people to the group, in some cases very successfully.

There is a concern though that interest does not translate to commitment. Those that do commit tend to be those who engage most with the group, who integrate most with the community which they have established and who share most in group activity. Community then becomes an important part of the activist aspect of the group, in that it is what supports and encourages the commitment needed to pursue the cause and to maintain hope. This is because community, in terms of the personal sense of connectedness in the group, generates a shared sense of identity, they are 'incredible people', which leads them to become invested in a way which they would not be without such a sense of community.

8.8   The importance of food

> I think it's, it is about the food, and it isn't, it's quite difficult isn't it, I've never had to put it into words before, I, I like the idea of the connected communities, and the kindness, that, that is... because it would make me, you know, if somebody was struggling for food and then they found some in Abermor because they'd found their way to Abermor however but they were able to eat something and it helped them then it would just make me really happy... (Caroline)

> I think people feel happier seeing the beds being looked after, and the veg are a novelty, and it makes a difference that it's vegetables and they're edible. I prefer growing veg over flowers too, they're more practical, you get more return for your effort (Katherine).

> I've always hated manicured parks, with false looking plants and blousy flowers that just don't really attract pollinators, wild and rambling just looks much better to me, and I also really love the idea of growing food, edibles, in public spaces... (Rebecca)

Food is central to this group, and to the community which it has formed. First, it is at the heart of the project itself, in that food is grown and shared. Second, the sense of community established amongst the group is in no small part linked to the sharing of tea, coffee, and biscuits during breaks, and of the shared meals, such as group barbecues in the summer and Christmas meals. People come together over food; it is a great leveller. It is also an expression of care, and of culture, and in this setting is at the heart of the sense of community created.

At the Incredible Welsh Gathering, the most fruitful discussions of the day took place over lunch, as people pulled furniture together so that they could sit together, and shared a homemade, locally produced, vegan meal. Discussion was about the meal, and about where it was produced, sharing of recipes, and compliments. They talked about events that they had in their local area, whether this was something they could replicate, and then more general discussion about their individual projects. The growing of food, as discussed above, creates a visceral attachment to place which bolsters this group's sense of community. There is a sense of ownership, and pride, in consuming home-grown produce which reinforces the new sense of place which contributes to the new environmental ethic which this group displays, and which they try to spread.

It matters that this group is growing food and not flowers. Participants often pointed out that there is more return for your effort in growing vegetables, and that the edible nature of their crops is what attracts people and inspires conversation in a way which flowers would not. The growing of food also provides a more visceral connection with the land and with the seasons, as discussed earlier, for the simple reason that the produce is handled and tasted as well as seen. There is a bodily satisfaction in eating which cannot be derived from looking at a well-tended flower bed.

8.9   Conclusion: Narratives of hope and agency

The stories of community which participants tell are also stories of hope. They highlight possibility and action. They have at their heart the ways in which people may pull together to achieve goals. They are also stories of how they 'keep on keeping on', even when recruitment is a problem, or community engagement is difficult, they keep trying, and keep moving forward. There is a sense of hope in this not giving up. Hope is in part a sustaining factor in the group, in that they keep moving forward despite obstacles which they may face. It is also sustained in turn by the community fostered within the group. Sharing hopes and goals helps to reinforce them, and to provide the energy to keep going when it would otherwise seem impossible to do so.

As much as anything else, community is the also basis of a sense of collective agency which permeates the group. The participants repeatedly talk about how they would not feel able to do the things they are doing individually, but as a group there is so much more they can achieve. Failures are celebrated as much as successes, as the example of the Big Dig Day shows, in part because they are shared and learned from. The weight of a failure is never borne by one individual, and as such it is less of an issue. Being together as a group in social relations allows them to achieve more, and opens up possibilities, demonstrating relational agency.

As well as this, the different types of community within the group are also important in terms of sustainability. Although not all the participants had an interest in sustainability, or even in growing food, before they joined the group, they all express these interests in their narratives subsequent to joining. It is, ultimately, the sense of community which brings the participants together, and which keeps them together, and which, therefore, enables their interest and concern for issues of sustainability.

The stories which participants tell about how and why they came to be a part of the group and of their experiences within it highlight the importance of community and of enjoyment. They take pleasure in each other's company, and in the connections they make, which are as important and

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significant as the support and empowerment which they get from those same connections. It is through these pleasurable connections with each other, with the wider community (both geographically and in terms of IE), and with the land and seasons that participants can imagine and enact different ways of doing food and engaging with the environment. Seemingly trivial or minor acts of enjoyment, such as working together on the edible hedgerow or planting herbs together in a public space, lead to shifts in thinking, both for the participants and for others who see or experience their work, which ultimately will enable change to happen.

The practice of growing food together is important and can play a fundamental and transformative role in achieving change in our food system and in its impact on the world around us. Laura Delind (2006) calls for activists, as well as academics, to make the case for rethinking the role which food plays in our lives, moving beyond the rationalities of the marketplace which we currently live with. She argues that if we are to get to healthier and more engaged communities which foster alternative ways of living and thinking, which the IE group is a good example of, we may not rely on policy, but should instead pay greater attention to the pleasures and the sensuality of the world we live in. That said, the aim of this thesis is not to assess the impact of either IE Abermor or IE more widely, nor is it to consider the scalability of the project. Rather, it is to consider how they nurture and develop hope as part of a wider response to sustainability issues and environmental crises. In this instance, the way in which they create and nurture hope is through the ways that they develop and maintain community.

> If we are to do the work of building healthy bodies, landscapes, soils, and cuisines, then we need spaces within which to regularly and freely come together, to talk, to complain, to sweat, to laugh, to oppose and debate, to reflect and to be awed…. To this end, we will need to reintegrate agriculture, its rhythms, sensibilities, and trappings back into our daily lives. Not only do we need to make such activity visible and accessible, we also need to make it convivial and sensual. (Delind, 2006, pp.141- 142)

With this in mind, it is possible to see this IE group, and those like it, as spaces in which the arguably mundane and everyday practices of gardening and friendships produce meaningful connections and networks with both other people and with the more-than-human world around us. They create that convivial and sensual space in which people may reconnect with the seasons and rhythms of our food and the environment around us, and they do so in a way which is very public and accessible, welcoming even. Although they are not what we might at first picture when we think of activists and activism, they have the potential to be a powerful force for change.

9 Empowerment

There's just this sense of lifting each other up somehow. Everyone is encouraging, and proud of each other's achievements. [Matt] was obviously really proud of his work on the hedgerow, but the rest of the group are really proud of the hedgerow too, and were all really quick to say that it was [Matt]'s project really. There was something really nice about how they pushed him forward like that and made him feel like it was something he could achieve…. [Jill] is really sweet, and really seems to have grown through the group, she talks a lot about doing things now which she didn't think were possible before. The group seem to really pull together to make the most of each other's talents…. There is a real feeling that, in coming together, they can achieve more and take on more – whether that's taking on more space for growing, more members etc, or being more vocal about bigger issues. They really see themselves as part of a bigger picture – you don't just feel you've been at IE [Abermor], you feel like you've been at 'Incredible Edible', and there's a real strength to be drawn from feeling like you're part of something so much bigger, strength in numbers maybe…

(From my fieldnotes)

In analysing my fieldnotes one of the themes which stood out was a sense of empowerment amongst the participants. This is echoed by many of the participants as they often talked about the ways in which they had grown in confidence since joining the group, and about the ability to undertake things as a group which would be impossible as individuals. As hope is active, and concerned with moving toward goals and acting, this sense of empowerment is central to understanding the role of hope in this example of local food activism.

From a relational perspective, agency is always necessarily affected by interpersonal interdependencies with others, and as such the capabilities and capacities of others will have as

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much bearing on our agency, our ability to act, as will our own (Burkitt, 2018). Similarly, our goals and desires are formed and re-formed through our relationships and communications with others (Joas, 1992; Burkitt, 2018). To a degree, then, it seems like common sense that working as a group will affect and perhaps increase one's agency. It is not a simple case of the group developing new goals and desires though, rather, the agency of group members, at least in relation to issues of food and environment, is increased and expanded in ways which are not just cumulative. There is a 'horizon of possibilities' (Joas, 1992) which changes and expands as the group work together, and this is empowering.

It is perhaps obvious to suggest that empowering activity creates a greater ability to address issues and to achieve goals. In this chapter I instead consider the relationship between empowerment and hope. Agency and empowerment are central components of hope, and it is the ability to act, or at least the belief in the ability to act, which enables hope. At the same time, it is hope, or rather a hopeful belief that goals are attainable and that work is worth undertaking, which helps to engender agency and to empower. It is therefore important to explore the apparently symbiotic relationship between the two concepts, which is what I do throughout this section. What aspects of the group's activity are empowering, and how do they contribute to hope overall? There is strength in numbers, as the group finds empowerment in the simple act of coming together which will be considered here. There is also an emphasis on confidence building, as individuals gain support from others and skills from the project more broadly. The emphasis on *small* actions will also be explored in this section, as participants seem to feel empowered by more manageable action. Finally, there is something inherently empowering about this project as a community gardening project, which will be explored, especially in the sense that it influences how participants see themselves, which has a direct impact on their actions.

9.1   Empowerment and community gardening

Empowerment is not a simple term to define (Drydyk, 2013). It is obviously related to agency, but is not, and should not be considered to be, the same thing. One may encounter the term 'empowerment' frequently, and it may mean various things in various contexts. It is often taken as a synonym for 'enable', or perhaps for ' enable and motivate', though this would be an impoverished conception of the term (Drydyk, 2013). Empowerment is not an outcome (i.e., more agency), but rather a process. Empowerment is "the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives" (Rappaport, 1981, p. 3). Agency, on the other hand, is a state of affairs. It refers to the scope of actions which a person may be involved in bringing about, or to their degree of involvement in a given course of action (Drydyk, 2013).

For people to be empowered, they must be better able to exert their agency, yet empowerment is not simply reducible to this ability. Dave Adamson (2010) gives the illustrative example of the captain of the Titanic. He could have said, when the ship hit the iceberg, that the passengers were now allowed to arrange the deckchairs however they wished. This would have increased the actions which the passengers could take, and therefore their agency, but would not have been especially empowering. So, it is not a simple case of acting or indeed of being able to act, most important is the *impact and influence* which those actions have (Adamson, 2010). Communities and individuals who can act, can choose how they act, *and* exert influence, over policy perhaps or within the wider community, are empowered. Empowerment is therefore an expansion of *meaningful* power; it is an ability to reach for and to achieve goals which are *meaningful* to the individual or group.

Regarding hope, empowerment, or at least an ongoing process of being empowered, is a prerequisite. Individuals must feel able to exert their agency to reach their goals if they are to take steps to reach those goals (in a hopeful manner). This relationship between hope and empowerment goes both ways though, and hope is also a mechanism of empowerment. When

individuals act hopefully and achieve their goals (in whole or in part) it serves to empower them to carry on in their hopeful manner.

Incredible Edible, and therefore IE Abermor, represents a blend of work and leisure, social values, and practice, and of political practice mixed with both individual and collective empowerment. Michael Fielding (1996) defines empowerment as "a useful steppingstone from dependency and domination to a social and political circumstance in which interdependence and the importance of human agency are paramount" (p.412). In IE Abermor, we can see how the project is a steppingstone away from the constraints of the dominant food system and individualised nature of limited consumer choices towards a different way of living, consuming, and engaging with the environment. The group are part of a broader community of Incredible Edible groups and of community gardeners, as well as building a community of their own based on resistance, agency, and the 'goods' of unadulterated organic food, sustainable local community, fairness, and sharing. They resist the individualised nature of consumption, and transcend it, by working to create a sense of belonging and through creating alternatives to the dominant food system.

Incredible Edible is not the only example of this, and community gardening more generally often involves many empowerment processes including, but not limited to, connecting with others, decision-making, addressing local issues, and resisting processes such as globalisation (Okvat and Zautra, 2011). The creation of community gardens and similar initiatives often "straddles grassroots community activism, urban agriculture, environmental activism, and a more individualized search for meaning, spirituality, and community" (von Hassell, 2005, p. 92), with successful gardens frequently taking problem-solving beyond the gardens themselves by bringing together people who tend to take on other community issues (Schrieber, 1998). This is certainly true of the participant group here, who frequently refer to work they do with other community groups and other initiatives both locally and more widely.

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Unlike some community gardening initiatives, Incredible Edible does explicitly mention empowerment as a particular goal, although they do mention confidence and confident communities throughout their literature, and so invoke a sense of empowerment though they may not use the term itself. They also talk about communities taking ownership of their incredible edible groups, and about the power of small actions, which contribute to an overall narrative of empowerment. The work that they do empowers individuals and communities and helps to contribute to activism and resistance in the movement.

9.2   Strength in numbers

It's not the same, just growing at home (Katherine)

As discussed elsewhere, collective agency is an important component of hope. Collective agency means a group of individuals acting as agents together, not only to improve their own situation, but also to bring about changes in the communities and societies around them, which therefore transcends concerns for their own wellbeing (Pelenc *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, collective capabilities, such as those discussed by participants, emerge from the social interactions of the group, and are influenced by a sense of shared responsibility to each other and to the world around them (Pelenc *et al.*, 2013). As discussed in Chapter 3, it is the participants' shared belief in their collective power as a group which enables them to achieve their goals. It helps to strengthen the group's commitment to their goals, influences the futures which they seek through collective action, how much effort they will put into achieving those goals, and their resilience in the face of adversity, challenges and discouragement (Bandura, 2000). This allows the members of the group to carry out actions and to achieve things which would not be possible when acting as individuals.

Several of the participants explicitly talk about the importance of working together as a group. Frequently (though not always), they conflate the idea of a group with the term community. This

is most clear when they describe community-building as important because they would not be able to achieve the goals which they are working towards as individuals alone. They believe in the power, the perceived efficacy (Bandura, 2000), of the group.

> when you've got people together you know you feel you can tackle things, you know, when you're on your own you go, 'oh that piece of land that'd make a nice vegetable bed', but you wouldn't do anything about it on your own but if you've got six people who are all thinking the same thing you suddenly go well, we can actually do this… The hedgerow too, we thought we'd like to do one, but it wasn't until [Matt] and [Kim] came and they'd seen a site where they wanted to do it and it all suddenly became very doable, and now it's this amazing resource in the community. That's what it's [this project] all about for me, enabling people to do something. (Caroline)

This belief in their ability to undertake new actions and growth in confidence is often seen by the participants as an 'add on' or natural consequence to the work of community building. The ways in which it inspires action; taking on new vegetable beds, learning new skills, taking on new projects etc, are seen as consequences of that coming together. Coming together is what makes them stronger.

Seeing other people with similar views and goals, and skills which complement our own reassures us that there is support available to reach our goals, therefore we can undertake action confidently, knowing that we have all the support we need. Jackie said this very clearly when she said that:

> Because there's a group of people and everybody's mucking in and you know there are stronger people doing the digging and hard workmanship so I think that on that level that's why it can really work, because you can do what you're able to do and everybody contributes in some way it's very kind of shared and accepted that you know people do

different things, and are willing to do different things… Because there's a group of people

… it's nice to be part of something sharing, um, sharing of energies (Jackie).

Jackie suggests that the power of the group is, to a large extent, *because* it is a group. One person may not have certain skills, while another person does, and knowing that there are these other resources, strengths, and expertise, within the group is comforting and encouraging. The act of coming together, and of sharing goals and interests, is in and of itself empowering.

There is a sense of 'strength in numbers' conveyed by the participants, as they discuss the ways in which they can act as a group which they would not have been able to do as individuals. As Caroline says in the excerpt above, you might see a piece of land which would make a good vegetable plot but do nothing about it on your own. As a group, however, they take steps to find out who owns it, how they might be allowed to work on it, and then to actually transform that piece of land into a productive community vegetable patch. Tasks and goals which seemed impossible as an individual are more achievable as a group. This is often necessarily about practical tasks, such as clearing a disused space for vegetable growing, or maintaining public vegetable beds, or simply championing local organic food. But that is not to say that this does not translate to the loftier goals of tackling climate change or the wider food system. Participants refer to both these issues, as well as others, when they talk about confidence and themes of empowerment, and through engagement with these issues we can see the expansion of their meaningful power (Adamson, 2010). As participants engage in action which they feel is more meaningful to them, and which has a larger impact on the world around them than they would be able to achieve alone, we find empowerment.

When we were talking about why people had chosen to join the group, Caroline said, for example, that "We're all quite keen on the environment I think" suggesting that being 'keen on the environment' meant staying at home and working alone wasn't really an option. There was an element of seeking out that strength in numbers and wider impact for those who were interested

in the environment. Some people, as discussed elsewhere, had recently moved to the area, and wanted to be a part of a group, while others were keen to grow their own and to learn more about how to do that, and still others had been using the produce and found their way into the group that way. They all, though, have a common interest in the environment and green issues and, specifically, in trying to tackle those issues in some way. As a result, the group's activities are expanding beyond just planting and maintaining edible beds. "More things like bug hotels and [other 'green' garden projects] are starting to come as people get more confident, and start to think 'oh, I can do this'..." (Caroline).

Jackie points to issues with the food system as well as environmental ones, specifically talking about the damaging effects of the current food system in terms of consumer attitudes to seasonality and packaging.

> [It's] that supermarkets are full of food from all over the world all year round and that's not right, to me that's not right … you know you just have everything *now* and it's all packaged up in plastic … I think groups like this *are part of fixing that, and I think it's growing* (Jackie, emphasis added).

Katherine also explicitly links the work that the group do, and the need for it, to wider environmental issues when she says, "I think with the climate crisis you know …, we need lots of people growing food in their gardens".

The idea that groups like this incredible edible group can be a part of changing wider consumer attitudes, and of affecting the food system more broadly, is an important one. As individuals, they are aware of issues but feel that tackling them is difficult, and that the impact of their actions would be small, and because of this they have sought out a group to work with. As a group, even small actions feel significant, and a part of broader efforts and issues.

They also allude to thinking differently as part of a group. They identify goals and ideas, not just actions, which they would not otherwise have conceived of. Jill in particular talks about how being

a member of the group has changed the way she thinks about food and about things like recycling. This is in part because of the simple act of getting involved in a new project and learning a new skill (gardening), but also because of the way in which being a part of a group makes new things more possible. Where she had been too busy to think about food or to do much in the way of recycling when she was on her own, now as part of a group those tasks and issues seem more manageable and accessible. Coming together as a group enables more empowered thinking, as group members begin to rethink their own goals and desires, and to discover new ones through the group.

This is important when thinking about broader notions of sustainability. The joint action involved in local food growing and community gardening, as opposed to individualised actions such as ethical consumption, enable different ways of thinking about the environment and about the food system. These ways of thinking open up new possibilities for action which in turn enable a creative and innovative response to climate change and other environmental issues. Notably, this rethinking of goals, and discovery of new ones, suggests that participants' agency is not simply expanding in a cumulative way as it is added to the agency of other members of the group. It *is* growing, in that goals become larger and loftier, and scale and impact is increased, but it is also changing and being altered in qualitative ways by the group. As discussed earlier, empowerment is, therefore, a process of increasing meaningful power, not simply of increasing agency.

9.3   Confidence and tangibility

> You can see the benefits that people are getting from this, confidence mainly, you can see
> people coming out of themselves and growing in self-confidence (Matt)

Confidence came up often in discussion with participants. They mentioned frequently how working with the group had increased their own confidence and how the confidence of the group as a whole was growing. They also often cited a lack of confidence as a reason that people may

not get involved with the group, or indeed choose not to undertake other activities such as growing their own, picking their own, or cooking from scratch. Katherine especially talked about how people "wouldn't even know how" to start growing their own in many cases, and that convenience food and other ready-prepared foods mean that "people have lost confidence" in terms of cooking and preparing their own food, alongside financial barriers, and the rest of the group seem to agree. There is a sense that people simply don't know where to start and don't feel able to take on certain challenges, that they lack in confidence as well as certain knowledge. A lack of confidence is a barrier to agency, in that it prevents individuals from working towards and achieving their goals (Drydyk, 2013). So, increasing confidence is an important aspect of empowerment.

Like agency and empowerment, empowerment and confidence are linked very closely, though they are distinct. Confidence, according to the Oxford Dictionary (2004), is the feeling or belief that one can rely on something or someone, including one's own abilities . Confidence is, in this sense, self-assurance and, like agency, is a state of affairs. Empowerment, as discussed earlier, means meaningful authority or power given to someone or something. It is a process of becoming stronger and more self-assured, of becoming more *confident*. Confidence is, therefore, a building block of empowerment. It is therefore impossible to talk about how empowering the work that IE Abermor do is without also acknowledging how it builds and inspires confidence.

Community gardening is often cited as an activity which both increases well-being and boosts the confidence of individuals (see, for example, Okvat and Zautra, 2011; York and Wiseman, 2012; Hellermann, 2017; Sonti and Svendsen, 2018; Koay and Dillon, 2020; Suto *et al.*, 2021). In a study of college students in America for example, Mark Hellerman (2017) found that students who "made something out of nothing" (p.659) gained confidence in their gardening project. IE Abermor is very similar. The very act of planting and growing, the magic of getting something out of 'nothing' (the 'nothing' in this case being a seed and a little gardening work) boosts the confidence of the growers.

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Jill was a particularly good example of this feeling. Before coming to the group, and the area, she had lived in the city, working long hours, feeling quite separate from the natural environment. Gardening, then, was an entirely new undertaking for her:

> I mean I was so excited … about growing food, the first time actually things that I put into the ground well, started off from seeds, actually grew, because I'd never ever done anything like that before, and it's lovely you know, not just to see it but to grow things. It was amazing really, and to actually eat the produce that you've started out, it feels good … and it's incredible really (Jill).

It is inherently satisfying to watch a seed that you have planted turn into a plant, and then bear fruit (or vegetables) (Cumbers *et al.*, 2018). It therefore matters that this project is a *growing* project.

The visible impact of growing gives a sense of achievement and pride which is valuable to participants and is an important source of confidence. Developing new relationships with food and nature, as well as simply carrying out productive work, gives a sense of ownership, self-worth, and empowerment (Cumbers *et al.*, 2018) through directly impacting, in a very physical way, the world around them. There is something awe-inspiring about growing, and about building connections and connectedness with nature, as Jill alludes to above, which is important for the success of projects like this one (Cumbers *et al.*, 2018).It is also important that this project involves growing edibles, rather than just flowers. This creates a more immediate and visceral sense of empowerment as they can experience the impact of what they have grown in more ways. Participants can see the impact which they are having on the world around them, they can feel it, and they can taste it.

In a similar way, it matters that this is a community project as well. The tangible results available to participants are not limited to the plants which they grow, but also involve seeing people in the local community picking their produce, stopping to ask questions, and otherwise engaging

with their work. Rebecca captured exactly the value of this engagement by simply saying "it's lovely to see people foraging, it lifts the spirit" (Rebecca). Of course, the impact they are having in the community is not always easy to see or to measure, as Katherine clearly put,

> The benefit is impossible to quantify… even though we do get some public money [which we have to demonstrate some impact for!]. I often see people stopping to read the signs on the veg beds, it would be nice if people went on Facebook to let us know what they were doing! Then we'd have an idea of how popular it is… Veg does go though …But [I think] it gives people the idea 'oh here's something growing, maybe I could do that' (Katherine)

The easiest way to see engagement from the local community is, perhaps obviously, by looking at how much produce gets picked, although this also isn't easily quantifiable. But,

> people are definitely picking! Sometimes too soon, which is why we've got the signs [saying what plants are and when it's best to pick them] now. We get lots of local people, and tourists too, using the beds we plant (Caroline).

> Local people *and* tourists seem to pick, and they always stop to talk when we're working too (Colin).

The participants all value the ways in which people stop to chat and ask questions, both while they are working on the plots in the town, and when they are at events. This is because these interactions give them a sense of the impact which they are having in their community and on people around them. They try to share their confidence by showing others what is possible, encouraging them to get involved or to start their own groups if they aren't local.

> One of the big things [is being] at the Seed Fair and the Feast [the town's annual food festival], and the Big Dig Day… as I say I think just doing the gardening in town [isn't the only important activity]. It's not only the locals who do see it and they talk and everything, but it's people who are coming visiting as well and they're thinking about things, and they

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take it home with them, and they say, 'oh we haven't got anything like this where we live', and we tell them about it, you know, and say there's no reason why it can't be in other places (Jill)

Confidence is what underlines hope. It is the belief that actions are possible, without which we would not attempt to undertake actions to reach our goals. The group itself is an important source of confidence both for its members and for people around them.

9.4   Believe in the Power of Small Actions

Incredible Edible as a movement emphasises "the power of small actions" (Incredible Edible, no date), and this is a phrase repeated often throughout all the literature produced by the movement. It is also an idea which is echoed by the participants. The work that they do as individuals, and as IE Abermor within Incredible Edible, is relatively small in scale, and this is something which participants are aware of. "I really love the idea of growing food, edibles, in public spaces, you know not so that you can feed the population, you can't possibly do that, but it's an education thing" (Rebecca).

Caroline agrees, in fact, the small-scale nature of production was one of the reasons she was sceptical of joining at the beginning. "[I thought] why do they want to do that? It's not like you can get a decent meal from it" (Caroline). "We're not really growing big enough quantities for people to have a full meal" (Katherine),

And certainly, the project is not, cannot really be, about food security, although it does have links to this kind of self-sufficiency thinking. As well as their relatively small-scale production, participants are also aware that their 'presence', or how well-known they are, is also relatively small-scale. "Awareness of what we do could be higher, we've had some coverage in the media which helps, but still." (Matt)

But although their work is small-scale, they persist, and they enjoy it. Their belief in the impact of their work is also not diminished, understanding that there is value in connecting with people and spreading their message as much as providing food. Small actions are empowering precisely because they are small, and manageable. That they are more manageable is important for hope. If a goal is too lofty, large, or improbable, action is unlikely and hope is, therefore, prevented. Participants seem actively aware of this fact. For example, when Caroline talked about how someone on their own might not do anything with a disused plot of land, but a group might, she is not just talking about strength in numbers, but also of the way that large and daunting tasks can prevent action before it even begins.

Small actions can also represent small steps towards a larger goal. Some members have discussed how the small actions involved in gardening have led to other 'green' activities they can do and to awareness of other environmental issues. Others talk about why the small actions of the gardening group might be more attractive to the wider public than other sustainability narratives, while still situating their work within the broader discourse of sustainability and climate change. They do this while acknowledging that the overarching issues of climate change and food security are often too large and too overwhelming for people to take on, and so small goals and actions are more appealing to people. The participants see their IE group as a 'gentle' way in to addressing some small part of wider environmental issues.

> I think, to the general public, the activities of Incredible Edible are more palatable and welcome [than those of other groups], I think things like Extinction Rebellion [for example] can often give a negative image to the public, because maybe they seem a bit extreme? Incredible Edible probably don't have the same influence on decision makers as more active groups though. Incredible Edible is more gentle (Matt)

> Incredible Edible could be more overtly about climate change, but you don't want to put people off, that's the trouble. A lot of people can't cope with thinking about climate

change because, you know, if you talk about society as we know it ending by 2050 it's, like, well, people just can't take that on board (Katherine)

When small goals are achieved, they open up the possibility of larger goals, like a set of stepping-stones. The realistic nature of smaller, or lower-level, goals, means that they are more likely to be attained and therefore to yield results. These results help to build the confidence of the actors, which is ultimately empowering, and reinforces hope. There is a sense of this throughout the group, as they talk about simple or small actions that they have undertaken with pride and go on to link those actions with broader notions of sustainability and community.

9.5   Empowered to take (social) action

The following extract is from the Incredible Edible blog and talks about the ways in which the work of Incredible Edible as an organisation, and therefore of the groups and individuals within it, constitutes activism. It shows how the organisation sees itself, and how its members see it and their own work as something with wider social and environmental impact.

> *We often refer to Incredible Edible groups being brave and courageous and thought it would be ideal to look at what that means as we spread across the country and the world; supporting more connected communities to find their own local solutions to the big issues of the day, such as climate breakdown and biodiversity loss.*

> *Every person who is involved in Incredible Edible is a local activist… we believe people should be proud to be activists, because all it really means is someone who is active around a particular issue… anyone who stands up for any issue and asks for change is an activist and we should take that word back and start being proud of it as a term to describe those of us creating positive change in the world and looking for a kinder future.*

Activism in itself is always about bravery. Whether you're on a march or creating an edible landscape, the message is exactly the same, and that is that we think we need whole system change socially, politically and worldwide, to look to the future in a completely different way. By creating gardens and growing spaces, giving away our harvests, participating in surplus food supply use and supporting local production, Incredible Edible groups across the country are gently showing, through positive action and change, that a different, more positive and people focused future could be a reality .

Incredible Edible blog post, "Bravery and being Incredible" (Venn, 2019)

Community Gardening in its various forms (allotments for example, as well as more traditional community gardens and guerrilla gardening activities) has a history of politicised action, and this garden project is no different. Incredible Edible as an organisation sees itself very much as an activist organisation, campaigning for broader systemic change, disrupting existing systems, and bringing people together to campaign for change themselves. Most of the participants are somewhat reluctant to see themselves as activists per se, but aside from the label which they find discomfiting, they seem to have very much taken on IEs values and aims as their own. Individuals involved in community gardening projects are inspired and empowered to act, which is social rather than individual, and political rather than apolitical. Even those members who joined the group purely for the purpose of meeting others, or for gardening experience, become involved in the wider social aims of the movement. They are empowered to take social action, and to get involved in activism.

Simply being active in the garden, as discussed above, has been shown to give individuals a sense of accomplishment, and a belief that they are making a difference in the world (Adelman and Sandiford, 2007; Hellermann, 2017) which is a belief which is clearly present at IE Abermor. This can introduce individuals to wider attempts to 'make a difference', and so community gardening can therefore be positioned as an introduction to activism. Indeed, in school gardening projects,

it is often regarded as a political incubator (Ralston, 2012; Moore *et al.*, 2015; Hellermann, 2017). Groups like IE Abermor promote an increased awareness of, and support for, local food systems which comes from being immersed in a culture of gardening (Harmon and Maretzki, 2006).

The capacity for community gardening projects to create activists comes from the ways in which they impact individuals' subjectivities. Subjectivity refers to "conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1987, p.32). Participating in the Incredible Edible project, or in community gardening projects like it, allows participants to see themselves differently, and to understand their relationship with the world and with things like wider environmental issues differently as well. As such, this project, and projects like it, can be understood as the foundation for all sorts of other forms of political empowerment. Our subjectivities, as our sense of self, give us a particular view of and emotional commitment to the categories of person that we see ourselves belonging to. They give us not just a sense of who we are, but also of what is and is not possible, appropriate and right for us to do (Burr, 1995).

Our subjectivities can therefore be empowering or disempowering, by giving us a sense of what it is "possible and not possible for us to do" (Burr, 1995, p. 145), they shape our sense of the possible and attainable, which establishes empowering subjectivities as a key component of how hope operates in practice in relation to agency and utopia. That participants' subjectivities are influenced by the community gardening projects which they are a part of demonstrates how they are relational in that they are influenced and developed through interactions and conversations within the group. Jennifer Barron (2017) suggests that community gardens help to create multiple subjectivities in their participants, which can in turn make certain actions more possible and are therefore empowering.

> Projects like this are part of that changing thinking [about food and the environment], they're very welcoming here, a lot of effort goes into trying to engage people. (Janet)

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As previously said, participants chose to join IE Abermor for a variety of reasons, but all have found themselves united in a particular cause. They have all become at least more interested, and most are more active as well, in social and environmental issues in their local area and more broadly. Jill in particular talks about how working with the group has changed the way she thinks about food and the environment, realising how seasonal things are and changing her attitude to recycling for example, and Katherine is also clear about the impact the group has had on her thinking and on local people who see their work.

> Being here and working in the garden is making me more aware of climate change… The public beds we do are a way of educating people really in the local community, we met a little boy in the town how didn't know that you could plant beans! (Katherine)

Participating in this project has helped to shape the way they see themselves and their work, which in turn has made certain activities, actions, and pathways both more possible and more appealing.

At its most basic level, engaging in gardening projects helps to bring about a shift in subjectivity from consumer, and the dependencies that involves, to producer. During the Second World War and the dig for victory campaigns, as discussed in Chapter 7, gardeners saw themselves as providers and as important contributors to the war effort (Kurtz, 2001; Lawson, 2005), and in more modern times the shift to feeling like a producer can be linked to a sense of greater food sovereignty (Alkon and Mares, 2012; Heynen, 2012). Rather than only having power over their food choices, gardeners – producers – have influence over the kind of food system which they want to see and be a part of.

Going one step further than a producer subjectivity, some gardeners take on a food citizen subjectivity (Barron, 2017), which suggests participation in all levels of the food system (Welsh and MacRae, 1998; Hassanein, 2003; Werkerle, 2004). There are several practices which constitute food citizenship, one of which is participation in community projects, especially those

which are grounded in democratic practices (Welsh and MacRae, 1998; Baker, 2004; Levkoe, 2006) of which Incredible Edible is a clear example. Another is working with the social in a practical way, getting your hands (literally) dirty, and a reverence for nature (DeLind, 2002), as well as learning about food ,where, how, and by whom it is grown, and the food system more widely (Levkoe, 2006; Travaline and Hunold, 2010) which is an unavoidable consequence of acting as a producer, and a clear aim of Incredible Edible. Caring for both the community and for the environment around the gardens (Baker, 2004) is another important part of food citizenship, as is a recognition of community gardens as commons[18] (DeLind, 2002).

As food citizens, community gardeners, and indeed the members of IE Abermor, gain a variety of social and political skills, as well as critical perspectives, which enable them to participate in promoting food democracy, and may also motivate and enable democratic engagement for social justice more broadly (Baker, 2004; Levkoe, 2006; Travaline and Hunold, 2010). Participants at IE Abermor see themselves as members of the group, but also part of a movement, and as such they take on the food citizen subjectivity found in Incredible Edible. For example, they take part in events, including those aimed at educating the community, which they may not have felt able to before joining the movement and which go beyond their role as gardeners and growers, positioning them instead as advocates.

Rebecca seems especially aware of the opportunity to advocate for change through the work that the group does. We were talking about the value of the edible beds, beyond their value as a food source, which we both agreed was relatively limited, and she said.

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[18] Barron (2017) does not include guerrilla gardening in her conception of community gardens. Community gardens may be seen as 'owned' by those who participate in growing, and it is those participants who have the rights to the harvest, and they are therefore, not considered commons. In incredible Edible, food is grown on common land, and is accessible to anyone, whether they participate in growing or not. It is, therefore, very much considered a commons. I have applied Barron's notion of subjectivities because Incredible Edible straddles community gardening and guerrilla gardening in that they grow on common land, but they do so legally and with permission.

it's an education thing, people can see, 'oh yeah they've got a little bit of ground there and some pots with herbs in and I could do that at home', it might just trigger just some awareness that it's not that difficult really, so it's a combination of sort of, um… I'd like to do more training sessions with people, courses, and workshops, we always have a presence at the food festival… I think it's really important to be passing on knowledge, and getting young people involved too. Some places are more interested in flowers, but not edibles, not even pollinators really, it's all about aesthetics rather than about the environment, and again that's about education and awareness (Rebecca)

Incredible Edible as an organisation also stresses the importance of education and advocacy in their work.

talking about a different way to do things, looking at how to make a landscape edible and nature friendly is a huge challenge. Explaining to people why there is such an urgent need for change and how to create a different food system that supports shorter distribution chains, local growers, farmers, and small producers, all takes courage and a deep-seated belief in the need for change in the first place. It also requires people to share the belief that food is a key element in supporting full systems change (Venn, 2019)

Many authors have noted the connections between urban agriculture and community gardening and community organising for democracy, and social justice (Staeheli, Mitchell and Gibson, 2002; Levkoe, 2006; Gottleib and Joshi, 2010; Heynen, 2012; Purcell and Tyman, 2015), which leads to an activist subjectivity (Barron, 2017). For some, though perhaps not all, members of the group, their participation in IE Abermor has cultivated this specifically activist subjectivity (Barron, 2017). Some members of the group, such as Rebecca and Katherine, had at least some elements of an activist subjectivity before joining. But others have developed it because of direct experience and social learning in and around the garden. For some, this has manifested as in interest in and awareness of wider issues. Members of the group like Jill, who had little interest in green activities

before joining the project but now talks with enthusiasm about recycling, organic methods, and about getting more people involved in living a different way of life. Even Caroline, who is the leader of the group, began her involvement as a something of a sceptic, interested in gardening but unconvinced about the wider social or environmental benefits of the movement. She now talks about the ways in which the project has grown and how it might continue to do so, involving more people from different walks of life (such as residents of the local bail hostel) and expanding to other local towns to create a 'green corridor' along the coast.

For many, it manifests in the way that their experience at the group connects them to more activist-oriented elements and NGOs in the wider food security and environmental movements (Welsh and MacRae, 1998; Baker, 2004). For example, many members have become involved in local wildlife trusts, Friends of the Earth (FoE), the RSPB, and Fair Trade, as well as participating in climate marches, as a direct result of their involvement in the gardening project.

> [It's more than just thinking differently too] I'm involved in Friends of the Earth, Fair Trade, and this... and I went on the climate emergency walk with extinction rebellion too (Katherine)

> We joined the wildlife trust too, and we volunteer there too, and one thing leads to another really, and you find new paths and new friends (Colin).

> Yes people [in IE Abermor] are also members of other groups, like the RSPB or FoE, and you get introduced to new things that way as well. Maybe they're not directly related, but they're linked. We've started volunteering at RSPB for example... We've always been keen growers and interested in the environment anyway, but I think there are members of the group who are more interested and aware of these things now that they were before they were a part of the group. (Matt)

Although Katherine laments the lack of coordination between groups, saying that "[all the local groups] have about 40 people on their mailing lists, and I bet people are on more than one, but

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they don't come together, now why is that? I don't know," that members are introduced to other groups with environmental concerns is significant. Their membership of IE Abermor does not preclude other types of action or action in other areas. It is part of a wider food citizen and activist subjectivity which is being cultivated in the group's members.

It is argued that gardeners' increased active participation in their communities often leads to them becoming more aware of the complexities of power, culture, and the economy, as well as of the intersections between food and various other social, economic, and environmental issues (Baker, 2004; Levkoe, 2006; Heynen, 2012). This is a theme which is often mentioned by participants, particularly Katherine, when they talk about less advantaged groups, people who may have limited access to resources involved in growing your own, or who may be limited in time and confidence. Katherine talks about how she

> would love to do more growing with young mums, and people stuck at home, maybe in social housing, but then lack of equipment is an issue I think, maybe we could have a tool library? That's a good idea… We do work with school kids, the local school has one of the beds near here which is lovely.

She shows an awareness of wider social issues and barriers to participation, situating IE and particularly the Abermor IE group in a broader context. She is thinking about the way that the issues which they want to address, environmental issues and community building for example, intersect with other social and economic issues.

This ability to function as sites of mobilisation has been cited as the "genius of the gardens" (Staeheli, Mitchell and Gibson, 2002, p.204). It is this genius which empowers participants. Engaging in community gardening activity means that participants do not live their lives as isolates; rather, they work together to produce the outcomes they desire, but cannot accomplish on their own, and in turn, they see themselves, and their capabilities, differently. In viewing themselves as activists (though they may not use the term themselves), they are able to set goals

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and take actions which would otherwise be closed to them. Importantly, participants do not just come to understand the world around them differently, with increased awareness of issues of sustainability and justice, but they also begin to understand themselves differently, as their subjectivities alter. They understand their own agency and power differently, changing the possibilities for action and fundamentally altering the way they see themselves in the world and understand their "horizons of possibility" (Joas, 1992, p. 133).

9.6   Empowered to do… what?

That the participants in IE Abermor have been empowered to act is evident, but there are critics who would question how impactful the action which they have been empowered to take can really be. As discussed in Chapter 5, everyday actions and prefigurative activism is not universally accepted as having transformative potential in society. While one perspective idealises small-scale movements like IE Abermor, focusing on signs of political resistance and renewal, others see these small-scale movements as coping strategies which have no real radical potential and are vulnerable to co-optation (MacGregor, 2021a). Even participants at IE Abermor question the impact of their work to a degree, particularly when commenting on its limited scale as discussed earlier (see section 9.4).

Criticism of these local-level and small-scale movements though tends to be based on a reading for dominance (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, 2006a) which keeps neoliberal understandings at its centre, evaluating the extent to which consumer capitalism is threatened by such practices (MacGregor, 2021a). It also tends to look for an idea of activism as being based on confrontation (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014). This reading for dominance means that initiatives like IE Abermor and IE more broadly may be dismissed as having the potential for fostering gentrification, selling out, and of transferring unpaid work which should be the responsibility of

the state onto citizens (Tonkiss, 2013). If, instead, we read for difference, it is possible to see signs of transformative potential.

Fran Tonkiss (2013) uses the word 'interstitial' to describe movements like IE Abermor, which "work both under and against current economic and political constraints; which take chances when they can be made to present themselves" (p.323). These interstitial groups work in gaps both physically (at urban edges or other informal sites) and conceptually, in that they bridge the public and private, and disrupt standard assumptions and flows (Tonkiss, 2013). As such, they can be 'seedbeds' of transformation (Tonkiss, 2013; MacGregor, 2021a). Certainly, IE Abermor bridges the public and the private in its use of garden shares alongside public beds, and in operating outside of the mainstream food system and typically on disused common land and spaces for planting. The ways that food-citizen and activist subjectivities are cultivated in the group also points to transformative potential for the group members and for the issues they subsequently work to address.

The participants at IE Abermor do not resemble 'hipsters' engaging in new urban practices (Schlosberg and Coles, 2016; Deflorian, 2021), nor is the area especially urban, though it is a town. They are not, generally, involved because they are self-consciously trying to change their relationship to 'stuff' and to the world around them. They are not really involved in lifestyle politics, although their involvement in the project certainly has wider effects on the ways they choose to live, nor are they engaging in green-consumerism and consuming their way to a more sustainable existence. It is easy then to argue that they have been empowered to take part in a gardening club which is nice for the community but has limited impact beyond that. They do, however, raise important questions about the mainstream food system and about the ways in which society works around them. They seek community and connectedness and a fairer and more equitable relationship with the natural world.

Wright (2009) suggests that, although movements like IE Abermor may be criticised as simply not being counter-hegemonic enough to lead to any real or lasting change, they can still create meaningful social change in the longer term. They improve quality of life for people and create social connections which make imagining other worlds, utopias, possible. IE Abermor creates connections between its members and other IE groups as well as with others in the local community. It also cultivates subjectivities which raise awareness of issues and contribute to the members' ability to imagine to possibilities as well as to take action to move towards them. The scale of IE Abermor may be small, and, for some, their work may not go far enough, but its impact is nevertheless meaningful, particularly in its cultivation of hope and the illumination and cultivation of possibilities.

9.7   Conclusion: The relationship between hope and empowerment

At the beginning of this section, I suggested that empowerment is both a result of and a precursor for hope. For an individual, or group, to undertake action, they must feel able to do so. In other words, they must feel empowered to do so. The members of IE Abermor first felt confident enough to join the group and to participate in its activities. They learned new skills, became aware of new issues, and then grew confident enough to spread their message through events and advocacy activities. Indeed, members of the group who joined for the sole purpose of socialising in a new area, or who simply wanted to learn more about gardening, discovered that even they had a message to spread, and a desire to do so. As they begin to situate their work within wider sustainability discourses, it is possible to see how they have been empowered to act.

I also suggested that empowerment is qualitatively different to a simple expansion of individual agency or a cumulative effect of individuals coming together. Although there is certainly a sense of having a bigger impact because of numbers, participants can conceive of desires, actions, and pathways which they could not before joining the group. The value of the group is not simply that

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they encourage people to grow their own, or that they enable them to do so, but that they encourage people to grow their own *together*. Through the group, and the relationships within it, individuals discover their own capabilities as well as creative approaches to environmental and social issues.

In coming together, the individuals reinforce each other's' abilities and purpose, they are empowered to hope and to pursue hopeful goals. The shared belief in the work which they are undertaking, the shared goals and the shared effort help to make hope more resilient (Bandura, 2000). Individuals are not only more likely to pursue their hopeful goals as a collective, but they are also more likely to maintain their activities. They gain confidence from the group, and from seeing the impacts of their actions on the world around them (Okvat and Zautra, 2011).

As hope is active, it is necessary for the hopeful to feel empowered, at least enough to undertake action and exercise their agency. Once action has been taken and completed, there is arguably an end to hope as the goal is reached already. One need not hope for a goal which has already been achieved. But, if the action taken creates an impact, or exerts influence, then it may inspire further action. This is clear in this group, as they value the interaction of the community around them, as well as appreciating the physical value of what they do in terms of delicious vegetables. The plants which they grow, the soil which they dig, and the meals which they make, eat and share, all give a very immediate and sensual sense of impact and of influence on the world around them (Cumbers *et al.*, 2018). It is this impact and influence which empowers the hopeful, inspiring more action and thus maintaining hope.

The hope which is inspired and maintained through a demonstration of impact and influence does not only influence action, but also fundamentally affects how people see themselves, in that it influences their subjectivities. How people perceive themselves directly influences how they understand their power, as individuals and as a group, and affects what goals they believe are possible and plausible, and indeed affects what goals they can conceive of to begin with. This

means that empowerment, particularly the type which is found in grassroots projects such as IE

Abermor, is in direct relationship with how hopeful individuals, and communities, will feel.

Food, and its connection to the natural world, connect these participants to 'green' issues in a way which other things may not. For example, the impacts on the environment of an individual diligently recycling, or perhaps of cycling to work (beyond financial and health gains of course) is perhaps not as evident as seeing plants growing every day and consuming the results. There is 'genius' in gardening as a community (Staeheli, Mitchell and Gibson, 2002) as participants connect with the world around them, and with each other, to understand themselves and their agency differently. Hope is, therefore, an important part of the narrative when considering environmental and green activism. Individuals need to feel that practical action is possible to act; they need to feel empowered. And they need to see the success of their actions, however small, to continue forward.

10 Conclusion

The current climate crisis is inescapable, even amidst other political and economic turmoil. It is easy to find hopelessness and despair in the current sustainability situation and narrative. Global temperature *is* rising, with most of this warming occurring in the last 40 years, and several of the hottest years on record occurring in the last decade. The ocean *is* getting warmer, and with ice sheets shrinking, sea ice declining and glaciers retreating, sea levels are also rising. Extreme weather events *are* increasing (NASA, no date). South Sudan is facing its worst famine in history, in no small part due to climate shocks (United Nations, 2022b), even the UK is feeling the impact of its hottest year on record (2022) in terms of food security as crops were lost and yields reduced (Scott, 2022). The reality is that without radical changes to the ways we live, it could really be too late (Grossman, 2022).

And yet, groups like IE Abermor still exist. Indeed, there are IE groups all over the UK and the rest of the world. There are examples of grassroots environmental activism, alongside much bigger movements of course, everywhere. Although the situation is quite obviously dire, in the face of the "very horror of the world"(Holloway, 2005, p. 8) people are still making the changes that they can and encouraging others to do the same. They are imagining better futures and building and developing them in the present. Somehow, they are not paralysed by fear, and have not decided that it is easier to simply carry on as they always have. These people have hope, and their hope is important.

The overarching aim of this thesis was to highlight and explore this hopefulness, and to examine the relationship between hope and local food growing projects within a sustainability context. Through an ethnographic case study of IE Abermor, a local food growing project in North Wales, I have come to understand how involvement in a local food growing project inspires hope in individual members, how that influences their wider sensibilities regarding sustainability, and

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indeed, how it influences their understandings of themselves. By using an example of everyday activism, understood as sustainable materialism, to explore hope, I contribute knowledge about how we can understand hope as politics and understand its value in terms of inspiring and maintaining action. This closing section will begin with an overview of findings and themes drawn from them. I will focus on the relationship between hope and local food growing projects, considering possibilities for further research as I go.

10.1 Understanding hope

As discussed in the opening chapters of this thesis, hope has not always received much academic attention, and in popular discourse it is often equated with wishful thinking. Moreover, where hope has received attention, it has been used without much clarification or with one of several definitions or conceptions of hope. Hope, as it is discussed in the literature, is also conceptual as opposed to empirically observable. This means that where hope is invoked or referred to, it has little empirical value. Where it has been measured (such as by Ojala (2012) or Bryant and Ellard (2015) for example), it has been without consensus on a definition. Throughout this thesis I have sought to synthesise the various definitions and conceptions of hope found across the literature, and to create an operational framework for analysis of hope, particularly within a setting of environmental activism. By synthesising the literature into a single definition, one which is empirically observable, I create a methodological approach with allows hope to be observed as it manifests in practice.

I have argued that hope is not linked, as a paralysing emotion which encourages us to defer happiness, and the pursuit of change, until tomorrow, to maintaining the status quo (Fromm, 1968; Zournazi, 2002; Hage, 2003). Rather, it is something which motivates and maintains action in the face of obstacles, and indeed which sustains us through the bad times, and indeed our daily lives (Zigon, 2009). It is, as defined in Chapter 2, "the desire for an achievable yet demanding goal,

and the determination to take action to reach it in the face of obstacles". It may be individual or collective. Importantly, hope may be transformative and based on change rather than accumulation, and where it is so, it can have a powerful impact on goals such as those linked to sustainability or to societal change.

Fear can prevent action and hold us back from reaching our potential (Nussbaum, 2011), and hope should therefore be encouraged as a central human capacity rather than dismissed. Understanding goals as possible (although perhaps unlikely) helps to create possibility and action. A little bit of hope and some reassurance that our objectives are within reach can act as a powerful incentive, while hopelessness puts enormous pressure on both the will to take action, and on the resources available to do so (Dufflo, 2012). There are many barriers to hope and hopeful action, some of them structural or practical, such as a lack of resources or, in the case of IE Abermor, even poor weather, but it is important not to overlook cultural barriers, coming from the narratives and rhetoric we see and hear around us.

The key aspect of hope is that it is active and goal-oriented, and as such has agency, both individual and collective, at its core. Whether we hope for something which engages our own agency, increases it, or limits it, or indeed transfers it to another is an important part of understanding hope and how it works. To go further, I have argued that hope, at least transformative hope, is not just linked to agency, but can be understood as a *type* of agency, oriented toward the future, and concerned with bringing about change. Importantly, all hope may be (a type of) agency, but not all agency is hope. Simple future-oriented agency (or projective agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) can be pre-reflective in that it is not aimed at a clearly defined goal. Hopeful goals, as argued in Chapters 2 and 3, have a very specific character. They are possible, and plausible, but they are not certainties. Even if the hoper undertakes the necessary action, there is still an element of uncertainty about a hoped-for goal.

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Hopes emerges from our past and present interactions with others and with the world around us and so is relational. The participants at IE Abermor came to the project with certain individual hopes and desires for the future and for what they wanted to achieve through the project. Many of them found that their goals became larger as their interactions with the group and with Incredible Edible more widely influenced their sense of what was possible. In terms of sustainability, existing narratives of climate change and possible actions have a significant impact on what individuals deem possible and plausible. Likewise, in local food activism, the existing system, dominant narratives, and past experience, inform people of what is possible and within reach. As the participants found, and find often, when local people around them feel that they are unable to grow their-own or aren't 'allowed' to pick edibles from public spaces, there are cultural barriers to a sense of the possible, and it is through hopeful interactions on a local level that we might begin to address this.

10.2 Exploring hope in local food activism

I asked at the beginning of this thesis how best we could explore hope, and specifically, how we could consider it in local food growing projects. My answer is that hope is clearly present in prefigurative projects and, indeed, in utopian projects, and they therefore represent an appropriate and effective space in which to explore hope and its possibilities. These utopian projects effectively "*depend upon hope*" (Levitas, 1990b, p. 231, emphasis added). Utopias anticipate the possibilities for the future by enacting them in the present, as found in the prefigurative projects of sustainable materialism and diverse economies, and in doing so help to decide which possible future will be made in the present (Levitas, 1990a).Utopian projects and hope exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship, where hope can enable both vision and action, and the practice of utopias develops and helps to evolve that vision and action. At IE Abermor, participants have decided to act in a way which they would like to see in the future. They choose

to work collaboratively, as a community, sharing produce for free rather than engaging in the existing food system and selling food for a profit. Although small in scale, they trouble the dominant system by questioning its logic and making clear that there are alternatives if people choose to engage with them.

In the face of crisis, in this case the climate crisis and a broken food system which disadvantages many, or as Holloway (2005) describes it, "the very horror of the world" (p.8), as well as less-than-hopeful popular narratives, it is utopian visions of alternatives that inspire hope, based on the hopeful belief that *something* can be done. Those utopias that can be striven for, such as the alternative food systems which participants at IE Abermor are working to implement, are the ones that we believe we have agential power to reach, albeit with obstacles to overcome.

Hope is, by its nature, difficult to observe, and as one of my guiding research questions was how best we can explore and understand hope in a local food growing context, this was a problem which required a solution. To observe hope, we look for hopeful actions, which must involve somehow moving towards the hoper's goal if we are to understand them as transformative. Prefigurative projects, as examples of sustainable materialism and diverse economies, offer ways for us to observe hopeful action. These involved in-depth, qualitative, and broadly ethnographic methods which allowed for the exploration of participants' motivations and feelings about the project as well as wider issues. At IE Abermor, through observing participants at the project and through discussion with them, it was possible to uncover not only their goals, but their sense of possibility and plausibility, as well as seeing the practical steps which they took towards those goals.

This means that the everyday activism found in diverse economies and sustainable materialism, and especially within the local food movement in examples such as IE Abermor, give us an insight into the ways in which hope works in a practical sense. They enact their goals in the present, demonstrating the agency and empowerment which is at the centre of hope as a concept. Their

goal is "*not to create something in the future but to build it in the present*" (Jordan, quoted in Solnit, 2016, p. 93, emphasis added). Local food activism like this demonstrates how individuals and groups may come together to take practical steps towards large or lofty goals (changing the existing food system, or wider sustainability goals such as limiting climate impact to 1.5 degrees for example) which might otherwise be seen as improbable or even unlikely.

Participants at IE Abermor demonstrated a 'Politics of the Possible' as they tried out new ways of producing, consuming, and distributing food. They demonstrated possibilities, and in doing so they made other actions, other economies, and other material flows possible. New groups were encouraged to start up around them in neighbouring areas, tourists took home new ideas of what could be done in their areas, and the participants of IE Abermor themselves took on increasingly ambitious projects, engaged in more advocacy, and found new ways to engage in other sustainability-oriented projects and goals. Their goals and the paths they choose to reach them are constantly developing. It is important to say that, although many possibilities are created, they are not always brought into being. For some, this opens up groups like IE Abermor to criticism, in that they do not go far enough to have any real impact. I argue that the creation of possibility might not always mean that those possibilities become realities, but they do serve to inspire hope, and therefore hopeful action, in those around them, even where this might mean moving on from the group.

Reading for difference offers another important way in which to explore hope and hopeful action. Rather than approaching local food activity as a project of ethical consumption, which foregrounds the neoliberal frameworks which these projects purport to disrupt, exploring them as everyday examples of utopian practice allows us to see new possibilities. Reading for difference allows for the inclusion of those activities which might not fit in to a narrower way of understanding local food and, as such, give a greater understanding of hopeful action and possibility. IE Abermor, as an example of sustainable materialism, does not work within the existing system, but instead works to build a new one alongside it – a prefiguration of a possible

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alternative system. In this instance, this means growing their own produce to give away, operating systems of sharing and exchange, and moving production into the public sphere and planting on common land.

10.3 Transformative hope and transformative practice

In this thesis I use the term 'hope for transformation', to mean hope for goals which are genuinely transformative, involving change rather than accumulation for example, and which may be individual or for society, such as those for social change. Importantly, this is not a separate *type* of hope, but hope with a different type of desire (a transformative one) and hope itself is not transformative. One may hope to maintain the status quo for example, which may require effort and action on the part of the hoper but would not be transformative.

IE Abermor, and, indeed, Incredible Edible more widely, are an activist group who work to do things differently from the status quo and to bring about change. The hope that they manifest is, therefore, inherently transformative because their goals are transformative. That they have an impact on their local environment both in the form of physical changes (the 'help-yourself' plots and planters are very visible all around the town) and less visible impacts on conversation and thinking amongst locals, passers-by, visitors, and institutions like the council, is obvious. I have recorded these changes as they are expressed by participants, but a proper measurement of them would require a larger scale study, perhaps including a more quantitative approach measuring impacts on the local food economy for example.

While it is difficult to make these broader claims of transformation, the qualitative methods employed in this thesis lend themselves more to exploring the affective changes experienced by participants as they describe them. Beyond the changes in their local environment and community which they report, they also describe a very personal transformation, as they 'become the change they wish to see'. For instance, participants reported developing new interests and awareness, for example becoming more in touch with the seasons and practicing more seasonal eating, taking up more 'green' behaviours such as recycling, and taking part in climate marches

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and joining other 'green' groups.   What participants describe is a shift in subjectivities, as, through a process of empowerment, they become more aware of their impacts on the world around them and the potential for creating change, both as individuals and as a group. This shift is an example of transformation, and though personal, is no less important than the transformative effect they have on the local community and environment.

10.4 Food matters

As well as the prefigurative nature of local food projects, the fact that they deal with food and food growing is in and of itself important. Food, and its connection to the natural world, connects the members of IE Abermor to 'green' issues in a way which other things may not. Seeing plants growing every day and consuming the results is a visceral and sensual connection which is difficult to dismiss, and which is also accessible to all. It allows participants to connect to the world around them, and with each other through community, and to view themselves and their agency differently.

Although gardening looks radically different from more recognisable formal protest, there are political potentialities and orientations to be found in these spaces, which can again be found by reading them differently. Everyday food cultivation, preparation, and exchange all have political sensibilities and are an important a part of how we create the world in which we want to live (Hall, 2011; Smith and Jehlička, 2013; Wilbur, 2013; Pottinger, 2017).

At IE Abermor, there was a belief that growing food offers more return for your gardening efforts than growing flowers might do, and this is part of what sustained their action. Their interaction with each other could spill over from the garden into shared cooking and eating, extending the reach of the project beyond one small aspect of their lives. This is important, because it is part of what gives these projects the ability to encourage wider change in sensibilities, as seen when participants went from engaging with IE Abermor, to joining other sustainability-related groups,

changing eating practices, and developing a wider political awareness of environmental, and food justice, related issues.

10.5 Inspiring and maintaining hope through nostalgia

I began this thesis by asking how local food growing projects nurture and develop hope as part of a wider response to sustainability issues and environmental crises. One answer at IE Abermor, and other local food growing projects, is through nostalgia. Nostalgia, as argued in Chapter 7, is as much about the future as it is about the past. It does represent a desire to reconnect with the past and to hold onto something from it, but also signals a desire to reconnect with something, and to reassess what has apparently been gained. This dynamic relationship between the past and present enables critique through identifying aspects of the past which we wish to regain and restore and comparing them to the present.

The participants at IE Abermor often invoke an image of the past, sometimes accurate and sometimes imagined, which is implicitly compared to the present, and to the future. For many, the sense of loss is most often tied to an idea of community, as well as a more sustainable and seasonal way of living. They also comment on wildlife, which is now missing, offering up things from the past which they wish to regain, at the same time identifying the aspects of the present and future which they wish to improve. Their nostalgia is not a desire to return to the past, but rather is an exercise in choosing the aspects of the past which they wish to keep or regain (Pickering and Keightley, 2006).

Importantly, an appeal to the past gives a sense of possibility, as those aspects of the past are demonstrably possible even if they have now been lost, which makes not only the goal achievable, but also action and hope (Stock, Carolan and Rosin, 2015). For hope to be sustained, goals must of course be both possible and plausible. Plausibility is gained through examples of successful change (Courville and Piper, 2004) which may just as easily come from the past (nostalgia) as from

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elsewhere. The tone amongst participants is not melancholic, rather it is forward-facing and hopeful, even when appealing to the past in a nostalgic way (Boym, 2001; Pickering and Keightley, 2006).

Invoking the past then is not about recreating the past itself, but about recreating the possibilities of the past (Lowenthal, 1989), helping to open up the 'horizon of possibilities' (Joas, 1992, p. 133). This leads to the creative action seen at IE Abermor, which is so often informed by a nostalgic remembering of the past. Nostalgia and hope therefore come together to show us the possibilities for the future, and so there is value in exploring nostalgic rhetoric regarding its orientation to the future.

10.6 The importance of community for hope

Another way in which local food growing projects nurture and develop hope is through a sense of community. Community is not just something for the participants to be nostalgic about. Community enables the sharing of hopes and goals, reinforcing them and providing the energy to maintain action in the face of difficulties. In this way, it is also the basis of a sense of collective agency which is relational, in that it emerges from interactions within and outside of the group, demonstrated when the participants talk about how they feel able to undertake things as a group which they would not be able to do alone.

Interests are also shared. For example, those group members who were not interested in issues of sustainability, or even in gardening particularly, before joining, develop an interest in these things through the group. Ultimately, there is a desire for community which brings the participants together, keeps them together, and which also enables their interest and concern for issues of sustainability. It matters then that there are different 'ways in' to the group. Community and sociability are important human needs, along with food, and so the social nature of the group

means that people with differing interests may join and go on to be exposed to and become interested in broader sustainability issues.

The work that IE Abermor undertakes is ultimately enjoyable. The participants take pleasure in each other's company, and in the connections, they make, and this pleasure is as important as the sense of support and empowerment derived from those connections. Through these pleasurable connections with each other, with the wider community (both geographically and in terms of IE), and with the land and seasons, participants can imagine and enact different ways of doing food and engaging with the environment. Seemingly trivial acts of enjoyment, such as when the participants worked together on their edible hedgerow, or coming together over tea and biscuits, lead to shifts in thinking which ultimately will enable change to happen.

Moving beyond the rationalities of the markets which we live with will ultimately enable healthier and more engaged communities by enabling new ways of thinking. IE Abermor is a good example of the possibilities for change which come not from relying on policy but by paying greater attention to the pleasures of the world we live in (Delind, 2006). While the scalability of IE Abermor or Incredible Edible is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to consider how they nurture and develop hope in relation to the sustainability crisis. In this instance, creating pleasurable community is an important way that they do so. IE Abermor represents a space in which the mundane and everyday practices of gardening and friendships produce meaningful connections and networks with both other people and with the more-than-human world around us. It allows its members to reconnect with the seasons and rhythms of our food and the environment around us, and they do so in a public, accessible, and welcoming way.

The community created at IE Abermor is also empowering, and this enables the agency at the core of hope. Put simply, as hope is active, it is necessary for the hopeful to feel empowered. It is important to note that there are critics which question the impact of groups like IE Abermor, and who argue that everyday actions and prefigurative activism do not necessarily have a

transformative impact in society. This thesis finds signs of political resistance and renewal, and transformative potential, in IE Abermor, but there are others who would suggest that small-scale movements like this group represent coping strategies which have no real radical potential and are vulnerable to co-optation (MacGregor, 2021a). Even participants at IE Abermor question the impact of their work to a degree, particularly when commenting on its limited scale.

Reading for difference (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, 2006a) again allows us to see signs of transformative potential instead of focusing on these limitations. Groups like IE Abermor can be conceptualised as 'seedbeds' of transformation (Tonkiss, 2013; MacGregor, 2021a). It is, perhaps, easy to argue that the participants have simply been empowered to join a local gardening club, and the impact they may have is therefore limited to that club. Reading for difference means that we can instead see that they raise important questions about the mainstream food system and about society around them as they seek community, connectedness, and a fairer and more equitable relationship with the natural world. As such, they improve the quality of life for their members and local community, and create the social connections which makes imagining other worlds, utopias, possible (Wright, 2009), thus creating and maintaining hope. The scale of IE Abermor may be small, but its impact is nevertheless meaningful.

10.7 Scale and scalability

One of Incredible Abermors strengths is in its size. It is small and local, and as such its members all have close relationships and ties not only with each other but also with the local area. They have a vested interest in its success and take no small amount of pride in the work they do with their local community, working to benefit it and to improve it. Although there are wider notions of sustainability, and the global issues which go along with those, which inform the groups work, that the group is local in scale is integral to how the group works and succeeds.

That said, the group's local scale is also a limiting factor. It suggests that it is an isolated phenomenon, and hope of this type might not necessarily be found elsewhere. It could also mean that the hope found in this group would not survive in a larger group or bigger organisation. If hope cannot be replicated or grown, 'scaled-up', then it's impact, particularly on the bigger issues of sustainability, is ultimately limited.

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Incredible Edible Abermor is not an isolated phenomenon though, it is part of Incredible Edible, which is a network. My fieldwork began in Froifanc, travelled to Abercwm, and ended up in Abermor and Trefeil. Abermor even has 'Beacon' status, welcoming other members of Incredible Edible groups to come and learn from them and exchange ideas. Indeed, the Welsh Gathering was an example of how the groups come together and are linked. There is., therefore, scope to explore hope within each group, considering how it manifests in each group, and how it may impact interactions between groups, as well as how it may spread across wider geographies and impact bigger issues beyond the local.

As with considerations of transformation, the methods employed in this thesis lend themselves to a small-scale, in-depth study, necessarily limiting claims to those made about the local. That said, the networked nature of the group suggests at least the potential for hope and hopeful action on a greater geographic scale.

10.8 Hope as empowerment

The final theme explored in this thesis, and a third way in which local food growing projects nurture and develop hope, is empowerment. Empowerment, I have argued, is both a result of, and a precursor for, hope. For an individual, or group, to undertake action, they must feel able to do so. In other words, they must feel *empowered* to do so. The members of IE Abermor felt confident enough to join the group and to participate in it. In doing so, they gained new skills and

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awareness of issues, and subsequently grew confident enough to engage in advocacy. This is not a simple expansion of their own individual agency, as participants were often able to conceive of desires, actions, and pathways which they could not before joining the group. The collective nature of the group brings a qualitative difference to their desires and hopes. Individual group members are not only more likely to pursue their hopeful goals as a collective, but they are also more likely to maintain their activities, gaining confidence from the group and from seeing the impact of their actions (Bandura, 2000; Okvat and Zautra, 2011). The value of the group is not simply that they encourage people to grow their own, or that they enable them to do so, but that they encourage people to grow their own *together*.

In much the same way that nostalgic remembering of possibilities makes action more plausible, so the visible efficacy of their actions is also reinforcing in the sense that it represents 'small wins' (Weick, 1984) which may be celebrated, and also gives proof of the possibility of having an impact. As discussed above, it is important to note here that it matters that this is a food growing project. The plants which the participants grow, the soil which they dig, and the meals which they make, eat and share, all give an immediate and visceral sense of impact and influence on the world around them (Cumbers *et al.*, 2018) which is specific to *food* growing. It is this impact and influence which empowers the hopeful, inspiring more action and thus maintaining hope by altering people's individual subjectivities and, in turn, opening up completely new horizons of possibility, empowerment, and agency.

10.9 New understandings of hope

In beginning this thesis, I sought to understand the relationship between hope and local food growing projects within a sustainability context. Existing understandings of hope in the literature tended towards a granular understanding of the concept, finding different types of hope in different contexts which was ultimately not helpful. I have argued that hope should, instead, be thought of in more simple terms as one concept. It is the desire for an achievable yet demanding

goal, and the determination to take action to reach it in the face of obstacles. Where we find people talking about hopeful goals, but not acting, perhaps waiting for someone else to act on their behalf, we might describe them as 'hope-like' rather than 'hopeful', because, without action, they are not truly expressing hope.

Hope is, ultimately, a type of agency, one which operates on a set of much more complex levels than might appear at first glance. Hope has three defining features; the first is that it is future oriented; the second is that its goal is possible and plausible, but not certain; the third is that it is dependent on the action of the hoper, or rather on their agency, to achieve that goal. Identifying these three defining features is not enough, however, to understand hope. For example, although hope's orientation toward the future is important, it can also feed off apparently backward-facing emotions such as nostalgia, and therefore can simultaneously be oriented toward the future, and in touch with and influenced by the past, while remaining active in the present.

Within a sustainability context, hope's power lies in the way that hopeful agency and empowerment exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship, which may in turn be amplified by community settings, particularly the type which is found in grassroots projects of sustainable materialism or diverse economies. Within such settings, aspects of community, such as strength in numbers, a sense of sharing, and collective action work alongside and in relationship with emotions such as nostalgia to reinforce a sense of empowerment and of hope. Importantly, hopeful action within such a community setting, even if apparently quite small and every day in nature, can change something so fundamental in people as to alter their subjectivities towards an overall more empowered understanding of themselves as individuals and as a group. As such, hope goes far beyond the immediate and perhaps small-scale impacts which might first be apparent. Individuals and groups are empowered, not just to maintain and develop their action within their existing projects, but also choose to get involved with new groups and projects, alter their behaviour in their private lives, and engage with issues on sustainability in new and creative ways. Through this case-study of IE Abermor, I have shown that even a small-scale community

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project can play the role which Levitas (1990b) describes as being fulfilled by hope: that hope, and particularly the agency and empowerment which it fosters in individuals and communities, is what utopian thinking depends upon. Hope is therefore important in a sustainability context, even in seemingly small-scale projetcts.

10.10 Paths from here

One of the reasons I felt compelled to do research with IE Abermor is that they are not the 'usual suspects' in this kind of research and in dominant narratives of environmental activism. The members of IE Abermor are not the 'hipsters' who we have come to expect to be involved in urban gardening (Schlosberg and Coles, 2016; Deflorian, 2021), and for many of them, their initial involvement at least was not a self-conscious attempt to change their relationship with 'stuff' in the world. Nor are they really engaged in lifestyle politics in that they act outside of the existing capitalist system rather than consuming within it, indeed, they are not engaging in the political consumption which so often characterises considerations of the local food movement. But what they *are* seeking is a better quality of life, for themselves and their communities, and a way to tread more lightly upon the world as they do so. To judge IE Abermor, and groups like them, through existing approaches to the local food movement risks overlooking their value and the impacts which they might have. This is particularly so in terms of hope, which is another overlooked concept. So often dismissed as optimism and wishful thinking, there is value and impact in hope which can easily be overlooked.

IE Abermor is part of a political project of imagining that another world is possible. Understanding them, and groups like them, is, therefore, a way of exploring and understanding how hopeful grassroots food growing projects might have an impact in terms of sustainability, and how they might influence the wider sensibilities of participants. This understanding involves paying attention to what "small facts say about big issues" (Gibson-Graham, 2014). This suggests that there is room to explore the 'small facts' in greater depth, paying attention to these 'interstitial'

(MacGregor, 2021a) groups who work outside of existing systems, prefiguring alternative worlds and systems in small ways. Reading for difference is a way in which to do this, requiring us to step back from more dominant frameworks and to reassess our understanding and approach to these issues and practices, and there is scope to do more of this in the future.

Although this admittedly small-scale study does not give definite answers about the groups' future potential, it does show that the activities of IE Abermor are significant to its members and the local community and does demonstrate the creation of possibilities. It also points to opportunities to explore the impact of such groups in more depth, across wider geographies, and in terms of scalability. This is particularly so where the groups' impact, and that of groups like them, is otherwise questioned or dismissed, as criticism of these local-level and small-scale movements tends to be based on a reading for dominance (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, 2006a) and an evaluation of the extent to which consumer capitalism is threatened by such practices (MacGregor, 2021a). Rather than conceptualising initiatives like IE Abermor and IE more broadly as having the potential for fostering gentrification, selling out, and of transferring unpaid work which should be the responsibility of the state onto citizens (Tonkiss, 2013), as researchers we can instead find signs of transformative potential.

As suggested earlier, there is also scope to explore Incredible Edible, as organisations like them, as networks of hope, and to explore hope in different and wider settings. A larger and wider exploration would also make it possible to consider the transformative potential of hope beyond the individual and the local.

Movements like IE Abermor may be criticised as not being counter-hegemonic enough to lead to any real or lasting change (Wright, 2009), but they can still create meaningful social change in the longer term. They do this by improving the quality of life for people involved and creating the social connections which make imagining other worlds, and therefore hope, possible. The scale of IE Abermor may be small, and, for some, their work may not go far enough, but its impact is

nevertheless meaningful, particularly in its ability to nurture and develop hope. In offering 'small wins' (Weick, 1984), IE Abermor, and IE more broadly, helps to overcome the sheer scale of the climate emergency, and the urgency of it (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh, 2007), enabling hope and action. The celebration of small wins, as well as visible results, attracts members and helps to drive social change (Weick, 1984; Navne and Skovdal, 2021), and as such are an important consideration for those wishing to address issues of sustainability in the future. Although, of course, the local food activism demonstrated at IE Abermor is one example among many, and one of admittedly small scale, it is nevertheless valuable and warrants further attention.

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Annex 1: Ethics Approval

Keele University HumSS Faculty Research Ethics Committee
humss.ethics@keele.ac.uk

20 December 2018

Dear Rosemary West

Project Title:	An Exploration of hope and local food activism (working title)
REC Project Reference:	HU-180003
Type of Application	Main application

Keele University's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee reviewed the above application.

Favourable Ethical opinion
The members of the Committee gave a favourable ethical opinion of the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation, subject to the conditions specified below.

Conditions of the favourable opinion
The favourable opinion is subject to the following conditions being met prior to the start of the Study.

1.	Start date for study must be specified. The location for the research needs to be anonymised. Participants must know the final date by which they can withdraw consent.
2.	There were a variety of comments about the methodology of the study. However there was no unanimity with respect to these comments.

Reporting requirements
The University's standard operating procedures give detailed guidance on reporting requirements for studies with a favourable opinion including:
- Notifying substantial amendments
- Notifying issues which may have an impact upon ethical opinion of the study
- Progress reports

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- Notifying the end of the study

Approved documents

The documents reviewed and approved are:

Document	Version	Date
Info sheet and consent 031218 - Rosie West		20/12/2018
Research Protocol - Rosie West		20/12/2018
Rosie W Ethics form v2 - Rosie West		20/12/2018

Yours sincerely,

Professor Anthony Bradney
Committee Chair