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Citizen policy entrepreneurship in UK local government climate emergency declarations

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Abstract

Policy entrepreneurship theory seeks to explain how actors, institutions, actions and interactions influence policy makers and policy outcomes; however, the role of citizens in this process remains largely unarticulated. Adopting a conception of policy entrepreneurship as a (distributed) pattern of agency rather than the actions of an individual, we analyse the development of local government climate emergency declarations (CEDs) (many of which visibly involved citizen advocacy). This analysis expands on the role of citizens in policy change and provides evidence of how citizen entrepreneurs interact collaboratively with more traditional forms of policy elites, in this case local elected representatives. Since 2018 hundreds of local governments in the United Kingdom (UK) have issued CEDs in a surge of expressions of local climate ambition. Whilst CEDs have attracted attention from scholars, the underlying dynamics and politics which drove the adoption of these policies, including the role played by citizens, remain unexplored in the literature. Interviews with councillors, council officers, and citizens reveal that citizens carry out a range of activities related to policy entrepreneurship, including problem framing, identifying solutions, networking and building coalitions, and

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seeking attention and opportunities. We find that they carry out these activities collectively with other citizens and collaboratively with elected representatives; whilst precise coalition-internal dynamics vary, citizens frequently exploit opportunities to demonstrate the strength and breadth of public support for their cause.

KEYWORDS

citizens, climate emergency, climate policy, governance, local government, policy entrepreneurship

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly research into policy change has developed a detailed empirical and theoretical understanding of the nature of policy entrepreneurship and the mechanisms involved in promoting innovation in public policy. Policy entrepreneurship is understood as a pattern of agency through which individuals and groups seek to influence public policy (Capano & Galanti, 2021), as described in detail later in the paper. While citizens may engage in policy entrepreneurship, studies of policy entrepreneurship by citizens are rare, and their role(s) remain imprecisely characterised. Policy entrepreneurship scholarship has focused on political advocacy by organisations, such as NGOs (Carter & Childs, 2018), or professional individuals (Beeson & Stone, 2013), and few studies explicitly seek to understand how citizens contribute towards policy innovation. This article therefore aims to elucidate how citizens contribute to policy entrepreneurship and their relationship with formal modes of governance via local elected representatives (Mintrom, 2019). We analyse empirical data from UK local government climate emergency declarations (CEDs) and illustrate the capable and nuanced role citizens can play in promoting policy innovation in local government.

UK LOCAL GOVERNMENT CLIMATE EMERGENCY DECLARATIONS

Since the autumn of 2018, hundreds of local governments across the UK have passed motions declaring a 'climate emergency', often vocally supported by civil society and considered to be among the strongest statements any government can make on the issue (Davidson et al., 2020; Gudde et al., 2021). The idea of calling on governments to declare a climate emergency has involved citizen advocacy from its inception, beginning in April 2016 with citizen petitions (unheeded at the time of writing) calling for the Australia national parliament to declare a 'climate emergency' (CEDAMIA, 2021; Davidson et al., 2020). In the UK, following an unusually hot UK summer (Met Office, 2018) and the release of the IPCC 'Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C' (IPCC, 2018), in November 2018 Bristol City Council was the first UK local government to declare a climate emergency based on a motion raised by a councillor in the minority Green Party (Green World, 2019). This was shortly after the initial launch of Extinction Rebellion (late October). It was followed by more than five hundred UK local governments (from town and parish councils to devolved nations) making similar declarations, as a result of action by local councillors and residents, including existing environmental activists, such as Green Party and environmental

NGO members, and new groups, such as local Extinction Rebellion chapters (Extinction Rebellion UK, 2018; Howarth et al., 2021). Research into these declarations has focused so far on the journeys and purposes of the local authorities making declarations (Howarth et al., 2021), the content of the declarations themselves (Gudde et al., 2021; Harvey-Scholes, 2019; Ruiz-Campillo et al., 2021), and the development of follow-up climate plans (Climate Emergency UK, 2022; Dyson & Harvey-Scholes, 2022). There is, to the authors' knowledge, no literature exploring the actors, influences and processes underlying the emergence of CEDs. Howarth et al.'s (2021) investigation into the emergence of climate emergency declarations in London noted that the role of civil society and local community activism was the most frequently reported motivator for the declaration of climate emergencies in their sample. This civil society role is described as involving close ties with local political groups, but was not the focus of their study and remains largely undefined. Also emphasised in their study is the importance of less 'professionalised' organisations and networks, such as Extinction Rebellion and youth strikers, in the CEDs. These civil society actors are distinct from the NGOs reported in the literature in their local embeddedness, their voluntary nature, and their non-professional background (Carter & Childs, 2018; Gemmill & Bamidele-Izu, 2002).

A prominent feature of the CEDs is the 'emergency' frame for the climate problem, which identifies the issue as exceptional and emphasises the need for action that goes beyond 'business as usual' (Patterson et al., 2021). The term 'climate emergency' did not emerge directly from the IPCC's work, but their reports, and climate science in general, have formed the epistemic basis for calls to catalyse an emergency response (Buzogány & Scherhauser, 2022; Howarth et al., 2021). This emergency frame has been cultivated and popularised by civil society actors, such as Extinction Rebellion among others (Davidson et al., 2020; Howarth et al., 2021; Rode, 2019; Salamon, 2019). In addition, Extinction Rebellion has identified local agency as an important dimension in addressing the climate problem, advocating for local councils and cultural institutions to declare a climate emergency (Gunningham, 2019). These declarations vary in scope and in many, but by no means all, cases have prompted the development of concrete action plans and renewed strategies as well as ambitious targets, most often for net zero emissions by 2030 (Climate Emergency UK, 2022; Dyson & Harvey-Scholes, 2022; Gudde et al., 2021).

This article explores the attributes and strategies of civil society actors in the development of CEDs, as well as their interaction with other actors, in order to address two research questions:

1. How do civil society actors contribute to policy entrepreneurship and influencing policy-makers?
2. How do civil society actors interact and collaborate with other actors, such as elected or government officials, to pursue policy change?

The following section reviews the literature and identifies the paper's theoretical and empirical contribution. The next section describes the methodology. The "Results" section presents the empirical results. The "Discussion" analyses the findings and addresses the research questions, before the "Conclusion" brings the paper to a close.

POLICY ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Policy entrepreneurship is an established theoretical concept developed to describe agency in theories of policy change. Specifically, it describes how actors promote new ideas and policy

innovation through strategic activities that include framing problems and ideas, developing policy solutions, networking and building coalitions, and pursuing opportunities for attention (Capano & Galanti, 2021; Mintrom, 2019). Conventional conceptions of policy entrepreneurs have two characteristics, (1) there is a tendency to focus on “heroic, lonely individuals”, be they individual experts, organisations and other members of policy elites, and (2) they are characterised as ‘solution owners in search of a problem’, that is to say that they have a favoured policy in mind and they seek venues and opportunities (sometimes termed ‘policy windows’) to present it as a solution (Petridou, 2014). However, it has been argued that policy entrepreneurs are best identified not by who they are—the positions they hold—but by the actions they take—the strategies they use (Gunn, 2017). Whilst there are undoubtedly cases where specific individuals can be discerned as having a singular influence on policy change, this is not always the case. It is sometimes not possible to attribute agency to one single actor or organisation, with policy innovation resulting from distributed agency that is realised through the complementary actions of a collection of actors (Capano & Galanti, 2018; Petridou, 2014). On this basis, Capano and Galanti (2021) have advanced a characterisation of policy entrepreneurship as a ‘pattern of agency’ to promote innovation which is not necessarily carried out by a single individual or organisation. This de-personalisation of entrepreneurship better accounts for collaborative agency in which multiple actors carry out policy entrepreneurship activities towards a common goal. Indeed, research has suggested that entrepreneurship is more successful when coalitions have a greater number of members (Arnold et al., 2017), highlighting the value of building a broad coalition. Policy entrepreneurship, then, is a pattern of collective agency with the intention of bringing about policy change—crucially, it is identified by the activities and the goal, rather than the actor(s) involved.

Policy entrepreneurship is documented as being carried out by a range of actors including experts, advisors, civil society groups, advocates, scientists, public officials, elected politicians, and political leaders. The literature is replete with examples of experts, politically connected individuals or organisations, and elected representatives taking action to influence policy change; whereas accounts of civil society actors carrying out policy entrepreneurship activities are limited. This is acutely true of grassroots actors, such as citizens, who are treated by an extremely restricted literature, limiting our understanding of their role in, and impact on, policy processes. The work of Deserai Crow (2010a, 2010b) has provided some evidence of successful citizen policy entrepreneurship, in relation to water policy innovation. Notably, she identified collective organising and collaboration between citizens and elected city council members in successful citizen advocacy (Crow, 2010a). However, across the cases documented policy elites and ‘experts’ occupied the most influential positions in policy entrepreneurship and were the source of most innovation (Crow, 2010a, 2010b). With regard to elected policy entrepreneurs, Crow (2010a) highlights their access to decision-makers, policy expertise and political knowledge as useful characteristics which may not be available to citizens.

The rich literature exploring civil society political activism and social movements also offers insight to citizen policy influence, and has long identified the powerful influence of citizen-based environmental activism on policy change (e.g., Keohane et al., 1993). This literature has rarely directly engaged with the concept of policy entrepreneurship *per se*, but citizens and protesters have been associated with a range of strategies and abilities for influencing policy change (Gillion, 2013). Exploring protest movements, Gillion (2013) suggests that effective problem framing and the perceived convergence of ideology between advocates and policy-makers are characteristic of successful protests and can facilitate policy change. Both protest and policy entrepreneurship literatures emphasise how problem framing is an important tool in developing

policy-makers' receptiveness to new ideas through alignment with existing values and ideology (Gunn, 2017). Gillion (2013) also highlights that civilian protestors are more influential in effecting policy change when they are often perceived as representing majoritarian public opinion.

Based on this literature, we can surmise some expectations. For members of a 'policy elite', such as professional lobbyists or technical experts, a lone actor explanation may apply, but this fails to account for collective forms of policy entrepreneurship, which are more likely to characterise citizens' agency. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore how citizen-led policy entrepreneurship has taken place, following Capano and Galanti (2021), by focusing on patterns of agency rather than individuals. We therefore specifically conceptualise policy entrepreneurship as a collection of actions and strategies applied by actors such as citizens and elected representatives, possibly collaboratively, with the objective of policy innovation and change (Capano & Galanti, 2021; Gunn, 2017). A range of policy entrepreneurship strategies may be pursued: problem framing, building supportive coalitions, devising policy solutions, and seizing opportunities to promote them strategically.

METHODS

Whilst there is no complete database of UK local government CEDs at present; a grey literature and web-based review carried out in August 2019 indicated that the 'CED And Mobilisation In Action' (CEDAMIA) platform was the largest database of CEDs. A database of declarations and their contents, supplemented by grey literature and news reports, was therefore compiled based on the CEDAMIA platform (CEDAMIA, 2021). The dataset used in this study comprises 538 UK local government declarations including 504 declarations from CEDAMIA (updated on the 26th May 2021) and a supplementary database of 34 town and parish council declarations in Cornwall (see Appendix—Data gathering).

The local governments making CEDs were categorised based on their jurisdiction and rurality. From this large database, an interview sample of twenty-one declarations was identified based on ensuring representation of rural and urban councils and a variety of levels of government (Appendix—Table A1). The sample includes five town councils, four city councils, three district councils, two counties, one London borough council and five unitary authorities. Seven rural governments, three rural hub towns, and eleven urban governments were interviewed. In each case, the councillor proposing the motion, and a local campaign group (if identifiable) were contacted for interview by email or social media. In total, 30 interviews were carried out with councillors, council officers, and local citizens advocating for CEDs across the 21 local authority areas. These interviews took place online or face-to-face, lasting 45–90 minutes, between August and October 2019. In addition to those interviewed, three councillors (14%) and fifteen citizens (65%) did not respond to requests for interview; the high non-response rate among citizens is likely due to less direct communications channels (e.g., group Facebook pages) and the fact that these individuals are volunteers for whom this climate activism is just a part of what they do. In-depth interviews allowed for the exploration of complex discursive dynamics including actor perceptions, problem framing, and coalition forming (Denscombe, 2014), using a semi-structured interview guide ensured consistency whilst providing freedom to explore any specific areas which arose in more detail. Interview questions were piloted in four interviews (interviewees #1–4) and, following consideration, remained unchanged for the rest. Interviews were recorded, with consent, and transcribed (for summary see Table 1; see Appendix—Tables A2 and A3 for interview questions and an interviewee list). The interview data were coded based on key themes

TABLE 1 Interviewees

Interviewee	Number
Councillor	18
Council officer	4
Citizen	8

TABLE 2 Three patterns of agency of local government declaration

PATTERN 1 Citizens as central agents in policy entrepreneurship activities	Cornwall West Dunbartonshire Falmouth Town Oxford City Council Norwich Dorset Kendal
PATTERN 2 Councillors as central agents in policy entrepreneurship activities. Citizens as active collaborators	Enfield Forest of Dean Woodbridge Bideford Bath and North East Somerset Bruton
PATTERN 3 Councillors as central actors in policy entrepreneurship activities. Citizens as indirect supporters	Frome South Lakes Chichester district Brighton & Hove Chichester city Thanet North Lanarkshire Gloucestershire

from the policy entrepreneurship literature, specifically the four activities of framing, solution development, coalition building, and seeking opportunities for attention. Given the focus in this study on advocacy by citizens and councillors, the transcripts were also coded specifically in relation to discussion of the role of each of these types of actor. All interview data are anonymised and referenced with a number, e.g., (#1).

RESULTS

Citizen involvement in CEDs

In presenting the results, the 21 cases were first categorised based on the key organisations advocating for CEDs in each locality, as set out in Table 2. The categorisation draws on Capano and Galanti's conception of policy entrepreneurship as a pattern of action involving different actor types, and, following Gunn's (2017) assertion that analysis should foreground actors' agency (rather than their position). We also note that councillors were important in every case due to their ability to lay a motion before the council, with regard to these actors our emphasis here is on the relative role of councillors in relation to citizens.

Drawing on the interviews and a review of grey literature and news reports of CED development in each of the 21 locations, we outline three patterns of agency by which the CED emerged and was supported before becoming policy. In pattern 1 CED advocacy was led by citizens as central agents carrying out the bulk of the policy entrepreneurship activities, at some point supported by a councillor either advocating for it or in proposing the motion to the council. In pattern 2, elected officials played the central role and they were actively supported by citizens. In pattern 3, elected officials were again the central agents and citizen support was indirect but discernible. Note that council officers are not represented in these patterns as the evidence provided by the four council officer interviewees related overwhelmingly to the advocacy roles of citizens and councillors, and they portrayed their own role as functional rather than advocational.

Citizen policy entrepreneurship: Activities and dynamics

This sub-section discusses the findings in relation to the four policy entrepreneurship activities outlined, namely: problem framing, solution identification, coalition building, and strategies to influence policy. We explore the contribution of citizens and elected actors and their collaborative dynamics within each of these patterns in detail; these are illustrated by quotations which were selected for their clear expression of key themes in the data. Where possible we have quantified the evidence by reporting the full set of interviewees to which a statement applies.

Problem framing

A new framing of the climate issue as an emergency was foundational to the movement for CEDs. The term ‘climate emergency’ is not brand new, but its use by Extinction Rebellion contributed to its popularisation and, in invoking a narrative of disaster, is aligned with the apocalyptic imaginaries used by Extinction Rebellion and youth strikers (Buzogány & Scherhauser, 2022). The term is evident in the labeling of ‘climate emergency declarations’ and many citizens calling for CEDs substantiated their calls with climate science from the IPCC to illustrate the severity and urgency of the situation. In addition, this emergency framing emphasised the need for immediate action at all levels of society, as well as the agency and leadership qualities of local politicians in making change:

They got more speakers from those kinds of groups making similar kind of impassioned but very well argued [speeches], these people were clearly well informed and they were referring to the IPCC and all of that stuff and talking about how it affects everything the council does. (Council official, interviewee #1, Pattern 2)

The science was not necessarily familiar to all local politicians, suggesting that for some the new frame was not merely a new problem articulation but also new information:

I think I realised partway through speaking that almost everyone in that room, they didn't even know what the IPCC report was. (Local citizen, #5, Pattern 2)

[I said to fellow councillors,] I know that some of you don't believe in climate change, but it is important if we do nothing and we're wrong and the [IPCC] report is right, then we've lost. (Councillor, #7, Pattern 2)

Nonetheless, the strength of the science was one factor which attracted support from policy-makers:

Also really frankly, the two extra things that affected us were[, first,] the report by the IPCC with the top scientists which the lead scientist was based in Oxford and is in contact with my Council a lot. (Councillor, #2, Pattern 1)

To summarize, climate change was framed by citizens and elected officials as an emergency requiring action at all levels and grounded in science. This frame aligned with that visible nationally from prominent school strikes and extinction rebellion campaigns and served to inform policy makers as well as motivate action.

Devising solutions

As discussed above, the idea of a CED predates this wave of widespread adoption and therefore the policy solution was not original but transferred. Nonetheless, local residents and/or politicians identified a CED as an appropriate and feasible solution and raised it with the council. Our interviews demonstrated that councillors from across the political spectrum, as well as individual residents and members of a range of (often highly localised) civil society groups were advocating for CED adoption:

A group of us in the local Extinction Rebellion group sat down together in a pub in Falmouth and penned a question to submit to the full council session that month requesting that Cornwall council declare a climate emergency. (Local citizen, #9, Pattern 1)

Immediately after the Bristol motion, so, in October, November, around then, someone from a pressure group called Climate Hope Action in Norfolk, asked a question at full council, asking them to declare a climate emergency. (Councillor, #18, Pattern 1)

Formulating the declaration as a motion took advantage of a tool familiar to councillors and which could be deployed at most ordinary council meetings, the content could be tailored in each case but generally struck a balance which was action-oriented but ensured commitments remained high-level and generally subject to further work and funding. The inclusion of ambitious target dates (most often 2030) was the most substantive novel content in most declarations, and at times a contentious element (#18).

An element of competition was evident among some local governments both in terms of agreeing an ambitious and innovative motion and being identified as an early adopter rather than a laggard:

Basically, we saw that other councils were doing similar things, saw what Bristol had done and said, “We need to get on board.” (Councillor, #18, Pattern 1)

This competitive pressure was apparent to some citizens too:

There had been quite a few local councils, kind of town and parish councils that had already declared climate emergency in Cornwall, so that helped to probably put pressure on Cornwall council. (Local citizen, #4, Pattern 1)

Citizens called for ambitious, substantive and novel features which appealed to local politicians who wanted to be, or be seen to be, at the cutting edge. For example, the proposal for a citizens' assembly (a core part of Extinction Rebellion's national demands) drew attention from councillors and was integrated by some into local CEDs, such as Oxford:

I was really struck by their call for a citizens' assembly. (Councillor, #2, Pattern 1)

Bristol had already declared [...] I don't think that Oxford wanted to be behind that. I think it was seen as being a good thing to do prestigious and not to be missed out on, and I think this has been behind the race to be the first to have a citizens' assembly. (Local citizen, #8, Pattern 1)

In other cases, broadening the scope of the declaration to include the 'biodiversity emergency' enabled councils to go beyond their peers:

I think we were the first council to do both climate and biodiversity, for what it's worth. (Councillor, #14, Pattern 2)

In sum, both citizens and politicians capably identified and promoted the policy solution, formulating it in a way that was familiar and practical for policy-makers. In some cases they innovated, modifying the declaration to enhance its appeal to local policy-makers.

Building coalitions

And 13 of the 21 cases demonstrated evidence of coalition forming and collective action to achieve CEDs. This consisted of 7 cases of citizen led CED entrepreneurship (pattern 1) and 6 cases of Cllr led CED entrepreneurship, with active citizen support (pattern 2). In the third group of eight cases (pattern 3) there was less evidence of organized coalitions from across political representatives and citizens. Although these cases were often influenced by a perceived shift in local voter opinion on the salience of climate change. In general there was evidence of broader, national civil society action influencing these councillors in the form of school climate strikes, Extinction Rebellion and media coverage of the IPCC and other climate science.

In Pattern 1 cases, citizens initiated the action, organised support and brought the proposal to the council. They carried out the bulk of the policy entrepreneurship activities. There was strong evidence of citizens proactively, and in a coordinated fashion, engaging the wider local community to build a coalition (#3, #4, #9, #10, #12, #18, #24, #26).

Lots and lots of us spent basically between the autumn to January, talking to parish councils, talking to town councils, pulling in resources for how we did that writ-

ing letters, talking to individual councillors, talking to community network panels.
(Local citizen, #3, Pattern 1)

Across patterns 1 and 2, many of the citizens involved were considered atypical activists in that they had not previously been political or environmental campaigners. As one citizen put it:

I would describe us all as people who were aware of environmental problems and worried about them but had never campaigned. (Local citizen, #5, Pattern 2)

This groundswell of concern for the environment was especially apparent in emerging and disruptive local civil society groups such as Extinction Rebellion:

When I first met XR, I came for a meeting in Falmouth and I was expecting to find six people I'd known from the Transition days or Plane Stupid days in a front room, and I met 120 people of whom I knew about three. It's like completely different.
(Local citizen, #4, Pattern 1)

The combination of nascent and populous local groups, including but not limited to the 'disruptive' Extinction Rebellion, alongside long-term local activists and established organisations with distributed local chapters, such as Friends of the Earth and the Green Party, demonstrated a breadth of support and a capacity for political action. Faith groups were also represented, as were groups of parents who had met through school (e.g., #1, #5, #18). In this way, these coalitions brought together different parts of the community, and included long-term political activists or volunteers, as well as those with less experience.

In a number of pattern 2 cases, elected officials appear to have played a coordination role, building the coalition as well as contacting and steering, sometimes disparate, groups' activities (#1, #5, #7, #22, #28, #30):

I was able to play a facilitation role, because we've got some quite forward-looking green business people and whereas a group of Extinction Rebellion demonstrators, actually, wouldn't get very far in persuading the town council to do anything, bringing the youth and the business people along actually made it very easy. (Councillor, #30, Pattern 2)

I teamed up with Extinction Rebellion and particularly with young people and so I filled the public gallery with young people and Extinction Rebellion. (Councillor, #7, Pattern 2)

In some pattern 2 cases, citizens played an active role in reaching out into the community using the networks at their disposal to garner support and prompt action:

We talked about the fact that we all have decent networks, particularly we were talking about parents at school. We started to think about a pyramid system where if we contacted five or ten people, could they contact five or ten people who all would then have the one action to contact their councillor. (Local citizen, #5, Pattern 2)

In the pattern 3 examples, there was limited evidence of organised coalitions pressing for a CED, but there was awareness among policy-makers of broadly felt climate concern and, in many cases, there was support for climate action expressed explicitly on the doorstep on ballot, or by local citizen demonstrations calling for other climate action.

For example, citizens had been vocal in calling for action on a waste incinerator and for the council to allocate more money to climate action in the lead up to the CED:

Certainly, we've had civil action and protests and whatever in the run up. [...] There was Extinction Rebellion they glued themselves to the council seats in [...] February when we set the budget. (Council officer, #11, Pattern 3)

For others there was a long-term public support for policy to protect the environment:

There's always lots of pressure on local elected representatives and decision makers to do the right thing with respect to climate change and biodiversity. (Councillor, #14, Pattern 3)

There was also an awareness of the raised profile of climate as a political issue at national and international levels. Publicity for wider civil society actions calling for climate action helped to convey a sense of the broad public support for climate action, creating political space for councillors to negotiate and support CEDs:

Reflecting more on what Nicola [Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland,] had said [...] around the climate and the need to address it as an emergency and to go further faster [...] and obviously, as well, I think the presence of the climate strikers [...] and the work of Greta Thunberg highlighting that on an international level, really just made me think about what we're doing locally. (Councillor, #25, Pattern 3)

Particularly because of the school strikes, and because of some of the local school kids [...] managed to get themselves into the local paper just with a photograph at the train station on their way up to one of the school strike rallies, or youth strike rallies in Bristol, so it was fairly easy then to, informally, win the argument with my fellow councillors that, "If the kids are making this effort we've got to be able to do something to support them." (Councillor, #30, Pattern 2)

The 2019 local elections in England created a dialogue between local political parties and the public, including those citizens who were not minded to proactively campaign or protest; it was a prominent issue in manifestos and doorstep conversations:

The environment was on the agenda by the residents directly during the election. But it was in our manifesto, it was in [Liberal Democrat] leaflets, it was in the Greens' leaflets and I think it was in the Labour leaflets as well. So, I think residents were talking about it, and that was partly because we were talking about it. (Councillor, #19, Pattern 3)

The elections also triggered administrative turnover in many local councils, electing more Green Party and 'green-minded' representatives:

The outcome was the Conservatives lost lots of seats and we ended up with a balanced council so we had 18 Conservatives and 18 on the opposition [...] with a new [coun-

cil] leader and some new Cabinet members who were much more environmentally sensitive. (Councillor, #19, Pattern 3)

There was definitely a huge swing towards the Greens. (Councillor, #21, Pattern 3)

Within this context of perceived public support for environmental policy change, the idea to declare a CED here appears to have emerged from a council executive either ideologically inclined to support climate action or one which is proactively seeking to appeal to the climate sentiment of their electorate. In one case, public support was understood but remained largely implicit:

We probably would have done it even if there hadn't been any public pressure, but you get that there is public support for it. [...] in this case it was me and the two councillors going "Right, we've got to do this." (Council official, #13, Pattern 3)

In others, the declaration resulted from a new administration seizing the initiative:

I proposed it to the Labour group after the May elections this year, when we got the numbers of councillors from five to 20. (Councillor, #21, Pattern 3)

At the first full cabinet meeting [...] the Conservatives declared a climate emergency and that was fine. We would have done it but they did it, they saw where the land lay and thought they would take the initiative. (Councillor, #19, Pattern 3)

In another case, changes in the balance of representation of different parties following the election meant the motion was finally debated and approved:

Then we had elections, and the same motions [...] were printed, word for word, a third time. It went to the full council [...] and it] did go through. By then we'd had a complete change and we only had two Conservatives left on the city council, so they accepted it. (Councillor, #16, Pattern 3)

To summarise, pattern 1 is characterized by a proactive collection of citizens building the coalition. Pattern 2 cases exhibit a politician as the central agent and sometimes a coordinator and citizens as active collaborators playing an important role in broadening the coalition through community networks. Pattern 3, councillors again took the central role in promoting and declaring a climate emergency, there was no direct, active citizen advocacy on this issue but there was an awareness of public support for climate action in general as a result of, for example, demonstrations or elections.

Strategies and opportunities for influencing policy

Within the coalitions identified in 13 of the cases (patterns 1 & 2), citizens and councillors sought to influence policy via a range of opportunities and strategies. Council meetings, in particular, were identified as key opportunities at which citizens applied both formal and informal strategies for influencing policy makers and the political process. For instance, citizens formally registered to ask questions at council meetings to appeal to councillors and demonstrate support for CED proposals (#1, #8, #9, #18, #26).

We had two very good presentations at the Council meeting. One of the youth strikers and one from a young mum in Extinction Rebellion. That mattered. (Local citizen, #8, Pattern 1)

And in one case, an individual was described as ‘touring’ local councils exhorting them to declare a climate emergency:

She’s been touring local councils basically speaking at council meetings to persuade people to declare climate emergencies. A lot of them have done that. (Local citizen, #10, Pattern 1)

Citizens and elected officials advocating for CEDs understood that demonstrating the depth and breadth of public support for the proposal would be compelling for councillors, encouraging them to adopt it. Citizens organised rallies outside key council meetings and large attendances inside:

[At the] February meeting, we all came with our families and kids with banners and we all protested outside the government building and made a lot of noise. [...] Then there was a second Council meeting in March where we again all protested and again, we had different people come and speak. (Local citizen, #5, Pattern 2)

There were about 30 people outside singing and then most of them came in. There wasn’t even standing room, it was so full. (Councillor, #7, Pattern 2)

Citizens strategically sought to present a diverse range of ages, backgrounds, and professions to policy makers. These included ‘respected’ members of the community, and children:

I spoke at that meeting and then I think there were five maybe other speakers. We got [Name redacted], who is the vicar in this area and also one of the governors at the primary school where our kids are at, [...] he offered to speak which was really powerful. (Local citizen, #5, Pattern 2)

I get the sense that for councillors and council officers, seeing young people out there saying, hold on, we certainly haven’t got a future, what the hell are you going to do about it? It’s really powerful in a way that adults protesting isn’t. (Council official, #1, Pattern 2)

One councillor described the power of the perception that local citizens were representing widely shared public opinion:

Nothing would be achieved if people didn’t believe there was a wide groundswell of support. (Councillor, #30, Pattern 2)

Elected representatives and council officials noticed this diversity—that those pushing for the CEDs as different from the ‘usual crowd’:

They were dressed normally, they didn’t look like hippies. (Council official, #1, Pattern 2)

What was rich about our area was that we had newer faces coming into a very crowded and existing campaigning infrastructure. (Councillor, #2, Pattern 1)

In pattern 2, elected representatives were the central policy entrepreneurship agents and in many cases they proactively sought the involvement of citizens. These examples demonstrate most clearly the complementary abilities of the two types of actor: collaborative coalitions emerged combining the political knowledge of elected actors and the community connections and ability to manifest public opinion of citizens. Strategically minded elected officials identified the tactics most likely to be effective and collaborated with citizens in carrying them out:

[A collaborative councillor] talked about how we can contact our local councillors. [...] She was talking about setting up a petition, which she did. Very quickly from that initial conversation, we came up with a number of actions. (Local citizen, #5, Pattern 2)

Citizen involvement was in some cases carefully managed by the elected representative to leverage the compelling effect of public support (#7, #22, #30)—here elected policy entrepreneurs deliberately recruited residents, and often young people in particular, to express their support for the CED proposal to policy makers through a public question:

I'll be quite honest, that was engineered to get people in asking, we had a young girl come in and ask if we would declare a climate emergency, it's very hard to say no to 15 year old girls, you know, especially when you know their dad or whoever. So that was that was all engineered. And it worked fine. (Councillor, #22, Pattern 2)

In sum, citizens sought to influence policy making by calling for a CED at public council meetings, both through informal demonstrations outside and formal public questions and high public attendance inside. Those attending the rallies and asking questions represented diverse sections of the community to communicate the strength and breadth of support. In the patterns 2 cases, we found evidence of elected representatives identifying key tactics (such as petitions and asking questions at council meetings) and also recruiting citizen representation at key council meetings.

DISCUSSION

Strategies of citizens

As detailed in the “Results”, in pattern of agency 1, groups of citizens carried out the full range of policy entrepreneurship activities: framing the problem as an emergency, identifying and tailoring the ‘solution’ (i.e. the CED), connecting with allies and building supportive community coalitions, and seizing opportunities for attention. In particular, citizens have sought opportunities to demonstrate the size and diversity of their support among the public. Therefore, to address the first research question, citizens demonstrated all the activities conventionally associated with policy entrepreneurship, including problem framing, developing policy solutions, networking and coalition building, and strategically seeking advocacy opportunities. Our findings demonstrate how citizens can be capable agents promoting policy innovation. This supports the previous limited scholarship on the subject (Crow, 2010a; Gunn, 2017) and provides valuable evidence of citizen agency within policy entrepreneurship. In addition, we add insight to the role of citi-

zens as policy entrepreneurs through identifying how they can play an important entrepreneurial role as both central agents of change (pattern 1 cases) and through collaborative engagement with formal governance actors such as local councillors (pattern 2 cases).

In line with the literature on citizen political activism cited at the beginning of this paper, this study has illustrated the influence that citizens who are perceived as representing majoritarian public opinion can wield over policy makers (Gillion, 2013). This perception is generated by citizens through active coalition building and the demonstration of support to decision makers at key moments. Wider national demonstrations, such as Extinction Rebellion occupations and the school strikes played a role in perceptions of public opinion; however, in the cases studied, citizens engaged with established local political processes (i.e., council meetings) and presented an achievable 'policy solution', rather than pursuing change purely extra-procedurally via social movements or protests.

The ability to represent public opinion appears to be the preserve of citizens, rather than elected officials; for this reason, some elected officials pursuing a CED deliberately recruited supportive citizens to vocally express their support to other policy makers. This is not to suggest that citizens were exploited or involuntarily co-opted, they were clearly supportive of the proposal, but their recruitment was a deliberate political act to achieve a policy outcome. Citizens can bring a powerful representation of public mood into policy entrepreneurship. Some theories of policy change (e.g., Kingdon's Multiple Streams Approach (2010)) invoke public mood as an influence separate from active policy entrepreneurship. We argue that this conception of public sentiment as a dispersed external force is insufficient; our study suggests that demonstrations of public opinion can also be deployed as a tool in policy entrepreneurship. It can be harnessed and directed through citizens to bolster the persuasiveness of advocacy efforts. Future work on policy entrepreneurship could document and classify the range of tools available to, and employed by, agents of policy entrepreneurship.

The roles of citizens and elected officials within policy entrepreneurship

This section draws on the evidence presented in the "Results" in order to elucidate the roles of citizens and elected officials within patterns of policy entrepreneurship. Collaboration between the citizen and elected policy entrepreneurs exhibits variable configurations but was largely characterised by two patterns of agency reflecting complementary capabilities, which in some cases were deliberately recruited.

Responding to the second research question, focused on how citizens interact and collaborate with other actors, our evidence suggests two patterns of agency in which citizens collaborate closely and heterogeneously with aligned elected officials. In the first category of cases (pattern 1), a group of citizens began the CED process, established the framing of the problem and the solution, started a coalition, and sought an opportunity (at least one) to advocate for this before policy-makers. Elected politicians' political resources were valuable, either being able to raise a motion or to engage fellow politicians; they had access to and knowledge of the political process, both of which citizens had need. In the second category (pattern 2), citizens supported an elected official who was pursuing a CED: in terms of policy entrepreneurship, the elected official had promoted an emergency frame for the problem, specified a policy solution, started building a coalition, and usually identified opportunities to draw political attention to the motion. In this context, it may seem difficult to identify what citizens can add; however, we found that citizens

were playing an important role in disseminating (and developing) the problem frame and broadening the supportive coalition. More specifically, citizens embellished the pattern of agency by providing resources that politicians lacked: citizen demonstrations and interventions, whether self-organised or recruited, were able to supply direct evidence of wide and strongly felt public support, citizens also had access to community networks which are less readily accessible to councillors. Across both of these patterns of agency (citizen-led with councillor support, and councillor-led with citizen support) it was the collaborative action of coalitions of actors with differentiated resources and abilities to affect policy change which were identified by actors as important. This demonstrates the importance of overall patterns of agency, rather than the individual action of one group, in processes of policy entrepreneurship.

Overall, the prominent involvement of (numerous and diverse) citizens in advocating for policy change can create political 'space' for local decision makers to take on a more assertive local role in climate action. Future work may investigate why these configurations emerge—for instance, whether it is due to the capabilities of different actors, or their positions, or other factors.

There were individuals in some cases who shouldered much of the responsibility for the CED, and who may as a result be classed by some as 'policy entrepreneurs' in the conventional conception of a "heroic, lonely individual". However, we contend that even these actors ultimately collaborated with various other civil society and government actors.

Following Capano and Galanti (2021), our findings support approaching policy entrepreneurship as a pattern of agency; we contend that this promotes analysis which begins with the assembly of empirical evidence of agency toward a specific goal, allowing the recognition of diverse, collaborative contributions and their collective effect, rather than a process geared *a priori* toward identifying and attributing agency to a particular individual. Considering citizen policy entrepreneurship specifically, this paper has presented evidence of citizens acting as a collection of individuals, and of groups, to bring about policy innovation (in the form of CEDs) which echoes Desiree Crow's (2010a) findings that citizens benefit from group association. A conception of policy entrepreneurship as a pattern of agency therefore appears to more readily capture citizen agency in policy innovation than a conception predicated on a singular pivotal individual. We also note that many of the interviewees held multiple roles, for example membership of both long-term environmental organisations such as Friends of the Earth, and newer activist organisations such as Extinction Rebellion. Similarly, there were a number of new Green Party Councillors who brought a history of climate activism and advocacy with them to their elected posts. Further research in to how these multiple roles are integrated and their relative impact on processes of policy entrepreneurship would be valuable.

CONCLUSION

The paper has argued that citizens have the ability to carry out a broad range of activities associated with policy entrepreneurship, including framing problems, advancing solutions, building networks and coalitions, and seeking attention and opportunities. Demonstrating strong and broad public support for their cause (the problem frame and solution) can be a powerful strategy for influencing decision makers. Citizens and elected representatives can collaborate closely in advocating for policy change, their abilities are complementary with citizens' community connections and ability to channel expressions of public sentiment matched by elected representatives' networking, political connections, and understanding of political processes.

From a theoretical perspective, the empirical evidence from the local CED cases illustrates policy entrepreneurship as a collective pattern of agency and shows that within coalitions citizens are capable and collaborative policy entrepreneurial actors. The collaboration between citizens and elected representatives is heterogeneous across cases, responsive to the local context. The evidence also suggests that citizens (and/with elected representatives) have an ability to ‘unlock’ local policy actors who, in this case, have restricted formal authority to act on climate (certainly to mandate emissions reduction across their locality) but were prompted to act more purposefully and ambitiously (the limited guaranteed commitments of many CEDs notwithstanding). From the pragmatic perspective of the need to accelerate decarbonisation at the local level, the findings presented regarding how citizens can influence local policy makers may be instructive to local residents seeking to accelerate action, as well as to researchers focused on accelerating decarbonisation. More broadly, the findings suggest that increasing the numbers of citizens advocating for government action can drive faster decarbonisation, emphasising the increasingly recognised need for greater citizen involvement in the transformative changes required to address the climate emergency (Howarth et al., 2020). Growing emphasis on behaviour change and the need for individual action, rather than a unidirectional top-down exercise, should be conceived as a complex, bi-/multi-directional challenge which also involves citizens urging action and change from (government) institutions from the bottom-up.

This study provides novel data and analysis of the role of citizens policy entrepreneurship and climate action; however, we recognise a number of limitations in our approach and propose avenues for further research. Firstly, the study only considered the development of CEDs in the UK and focused on the detailed dynamics in 21 local authority areas. Follow-up research could examine the development of CEDs in other political jurisdictions or expand our sample size. Additionally, further exploration of local policy actor coalitions could examine the durability of connections arising from CED advocacy and their capacity for ongoing monitoring of policy implementation (e.g., strategy development or project implementation). This could also examine the content of CEDs and the resulting actions to evaluate the effectiveness of this policy entrepreneurship in terms of carbon reduction or over a longer timescale. Future work could also evaluate the effect of a CED by comparing policy development and carbon reduction between jurisdictions, studying how CEDs correlate with subsequent action and outcomes. Indeed, the achievability of the CEDs due to the nature of their content may be considered a limitation of the solution if, in time, they come to be regarded as a tokenistic response to the climate emergency. Beyond exploration of CEDs, further research is needed to understand the extent to which the description of citizen policy entrepreneurship here can be generalised across other empirical cases and policy areas. How the precise dynamics between actors (citizens and elected representatives in this case) within coalitions emerge, and what determines these interactions requires further study, as do questions about whether different coalition configurations or distributions of activities (different patterns of agency) lead to different outcomes (or greater chances of success). In the case of the climate emergency, the ongoing influence of citizens on the implementation of CEDs and climate policy merits attention going forward.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The research undertaken to generate, manage, and analyse the data used in this paper was reviewed and approved by the University of Exeter CLES Penryn Ethics Committee.

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APPENDIX A: DATA GATHERING

For the desk study, the majority of all cases were sourced from the ‘CED And Mobilisation In Action’ (CEDAMIA) database. CEDAMIA is an Australia-based organisation that advocates for the adoption of CEDs at all levels of government. They set up an accessible online resource (cedamia.org) in late 2018 to record declarations around the world. The organisation monitors declarations and members of the public can submit their local declaration to be included in the database. It is not a scientific study, and so we cross-referenced the data with the UK-based database at Climate Emergency UK (climateemergency.uk). At the time of data collection, the CEDAMIA database was more extensive and the data more readily available (as a CSV) than that at Climate Emergency UK. In addition, a supplementary database of 34 town and parish council declarations in Cornwall was included in order to address the limited representation of such councils in the CEDAMIA database. Data collection occurred early in the study, and Cornwall data were incorporated as a high number of councils declared at an early stage. All declarations were verified with council websites or meeting minutes.

TABLE A1 List of councils interviewed

Local authority	Level	Rurality	Rural
Bath and North-East Somerset	UA	3	Urban
Bideford Town Council	Town	Town	Rural Hub Town
Brighton and Hove City Council	City	Urban	Urban
Bruton	Town Council	Town	Rural
Chichester City Council	City	City	Urban
Chichester District Council	District	2	Rural
Cornwall Council	UA	1	Rural
Dorset County Council	County	2	Rural
Enfield Borough Council	Borough	6	Urban
Falmouth Town Council	Town	Town	Urban
Forest of Dean	UA	1	Rural
Frome Council	Town	Town	Rural Hub Town
Gloucestershire County Council	County	3	Urban
Kendal Town Council	Town	Town	Rural Hub Town
North Lanarkshire	UA	3	Urban
Norwich City Council	City	4	Urban
Oxford City Council	City	4	Urban
South Lakes District Council	District	1	Rural

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Local authority	Level	Rurality	Rural
Thanet District Council	District	4	Urban
West Dunbartonshire	UA	3	Urban
Woodbridge Town Council	Town	Town	Rural

TABLE A2 Semi-structured interview questions

How did the declaration come about? What individuals and groups advocated for the declaration?

What was declared, and how was that decision made?

What impact has it had for the Local Authority?

Do you think the declarations will speed up decarbonisation in your local area?

TABLE A3 Interviewees

Interview schedule

1. Council Sustainability Officer, 02/08/2019
2. Councillor, 15/08/2019
3. Local campaigner, 15/08/2019
4. Local campaigner, 15/08/2019
5. Local campaigner, 21/08/2019
6. Councillor, 29/08/2019
7. Councillor, 27/08/2019
8. Local campaigner, 28/08/2019
9. Local campaigner, 03/09/2019
10. Local campaigner, 03/09/2019
11. Council Sustainability Officer, 04/09/2019
12. Councillor, 03/09/2019
13. Council Sustainability Officer, 28/08/2019
14. Ex-councillor (in office at time of CED), 06/09/2019
15. Councillor and Climate Emergency Portfolio Holder, 20/09/2019
16. Councillor, 30/09/2019
17. Ex-councillor (in office at time of CED), 25/09/2019
18. Councillor, 02/10/2019
19. Councillor, 02/10/2019
20. Council Clerk, 07/10/2019
21. Councillor, 09/10/2019
22. Councillor, 21/10/2019
23. Local campaigner, 10/10/2019
24. Councillor, 17/10/2019
25. Councillor, 21/10/2019

(Continues)

TABLE A3 (Continued)

Interview schedule
26. Councillor, 14/10/2019
27. Local campaigner, 13/10/2019
28. Councillor, 22/10/2019
29. Councillor, 07/10/2019
30. Councillor, 01/08/2019