



To: City Development
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Subject: Essential Evidence on a page No 53: Perceived barriers to public engagement with climate change

Top line: There is a need for UK policies and governance structures to initiate a systemic shift to a low consumption paradigm in order to move people out of their comfort zone of carbon-intensive living. Such a shift would have additional benefits, including fostering social justice and well-being, aside from climate change mitigation.

Public engagement with climate change is important in order to achieve the UK Government's carbon dioxide emissions reduction target and effectively mitigate climate change. This implies a need for a radical change in values, behaviour and institutions towards a paradigm of lower consumption involving genuine political and widespread social commitment, including at the individual level.

UK energy demand is rising in domestic and transport sectors, with 79 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO₂eq) emitted by the residential sector in 1990 versus 83MtCO₂eq of 2005. Similarly, calculations show road transport contributed 120 MtCO₂eq in 2005, 109MtCO₂eq in 1990. The emphasis on voluntary measures reflects the general reluctance by governments to regulate individual and industry behaviour in relation to environmental issues, and work towards 'removing red tape'. This reticence stems from fear of electoral protest, close relationship with industry, a focus on economic growth, and the short-term priorities of government which are linked to its limited period in office.

Three qualitative and quantitative method studies in the UK have identified a range of common barriers to engagement operating at both individual and wider social scales, reflecting findings in the wider literature.¹ Findings from the studies suggest widespread awareness and concern about climate change. However, this often does not translate into personal engagement, namely in terms of cognition, affect and behaviour. Indeed, many participants agreed that people have personal, social and/or moral responsibilities to address climate change, but often identified reasons for not taking action. The authors report that different barriers often overlap or work in conjunction to exacerbate the constraints to engagement. For instance, the perceived unavailability of efficient and accessible public transport, in addition to the convenience and habitual use of a car, are cited as reasons for continuing car use. Furthermore, not all barriers were mentioned by all participants; different barriers are experienced by different groups of people.

Individual barriers include: lack of knowledge; uncertainty and scepticism; distrust in information sources; externalising responsibility and blame; reliance on technology; climate change perceived as a distant threat; importance of other priorities; reluctance to change lifestyles; fatalism; and helplessness. Social barriers were subdivided into: lack of action by governments, business and industry; 'free rider effect'; pressure of social norms and expectations; and lack of enabling initiatives. In conclusion, the research highlighted the need for both targeted and tailored information provision, supported by enabling and equitable structural conditions, to foster public engagement. Engagement here meant a personal state of connection with climate change issues eg thinking through implications.

¹ Lorenzoni, I., Nicholson-Cole, S., Whitmarsh, L. 2007 Barriers perceived to engaging with climate change among the UK public and their policy implications, *Global Environmental Change*, 17: 445-459.