

Introduction to Transition Norwich

The Transition Movement is growing across the UK and the rest of the world, and has garnered a reputation as a vibrant grassroots movement for addressing climate change and preparing for a life beyond the age of cheap oil. But despite plentiful positive publicity about this popular low-carbon living movement, little is known at present about the composition of these community-based groups. In order to find out more about who participates, and why, this membership survey of Transition Norwich was carried out during February 2009. An invitation to participate in the online survey was sent to the 200-strong email list held by Transition Norwich's core group. Although not technically 'members' or even necessarily 'involved' with the initiative, these people have all indicated their interest at some point during the preceding few months, and receive emails about local actions and meetings - and some live further afield in Norfolk and may be engaged with other local Transition initiatives as well. This elicited 59 responses, a rate of approximately 27%. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data about the participants, their motivations and interests, their history of involvement in community or environmental groups, and how they perceived the Transition Movement in relation to other such initiatives. This report presents the survey findings, the first of their kind, offering important insights into the scope and potential of these groups to enlist wider support for behaviour-change activities than has hitherto been the case. Can the Transition Movement effectively engage communities in taking action to address climate change and peak oil?

Transition Norwich was formed by a group of individuals who came together searching for a new way of engaging public energy and action around climate change, the the imperative of moving towards low-carbon lifestyles. All the core group members had previously been involved in some form of community-based organisation before, and they brought their expertise, experience and contacts together to shape this new group. Norwich was the 50th Transition Initiative to gain official accreditation with the Transition Network, and following a year or so of preliminary awareness-raising and team-building activities, Transition Norwich was formally launched (or 'unleashed') during October 2008. This large public event drew a crowd of about 400 people, including Labour MP for Norwich North Dr Ian Gibson, to talk about how Norwich could prepare for a low-carbon future. Following this meeting, a range of themed sub-groups were formed to take forward community action on a variety of different agendas, including transport, food, housing, energy, children and families, and so on.



Transition Norwich's Great Unleashing,
St Andrew's Hall, October 1st, 2008

Who Joins Transition Norwich, and Why?

Demographic profile

A majority of Transition Norwich (TN) members who responded to the survey were female (58%), and half (50%) were aged between 45 and 64 (see Figures 1 and 2) - a significant over-representation of this age group compared with the general population, which has only 31% in this age range (comparison figures from the Office for National Statistics (2009) *Social Trends 39: 2009 Edition*). There were few participants under 25 (11%), compared with 15% of the general population aged between 16-24) and over 65 (only 3%, compared with 20% of the population). The sample were extremely well-educated, as shown in Figure 3: 46% held a degree or equivalent, and 37% had attained a postgraduate qualification, making a total of 83% holding at least a degree. While the categories are not wholly compatible, this compares with just 15% of the general population in the Eastern region (comparison data from the 2002 *Labour Force Survey*, Office for National Statistics). On the other hand, none at all had no formal qualifications (while 14% of the population fall into this category). The overall economic activity rates Transition Norwich members of working age were not very much more than the overall population (82% compared with 78%), but the composition was strikingly different: members were disproportionately likely to be part-time employed (24%) or self-employed (26%) compared with the general population (16% and 8% respectively), and considerably less likely to be full-time employed (27%, compared with 50% of the population).

However, these high levels of education and employment did not automatically translate into higher incomes. The income distribution of the Transition Norwich members is shown in Figure 5, with over a quarter (27%) having a gross weekly household income of less than £249 (£12,999/year), and 11% were from households with an income of under £100 a week. Only 16% had a household income of over £750 a week (£39,000 a year). The sample demographics can therefore be described as being disproportionately from lower income groups, but higher-education and employment groups than the average. To this extent, the members display the typical characteristics of 'post-materialists' who eschew high-status jobs and consumption in favour of personal fulfillment and (in particular environmental) activism.

Figure 1: Gender of TN members

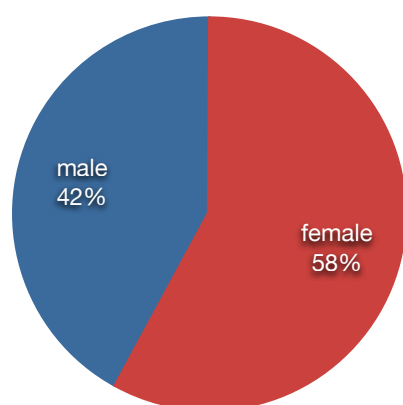


Figure 2: Age Distribution of TN Members

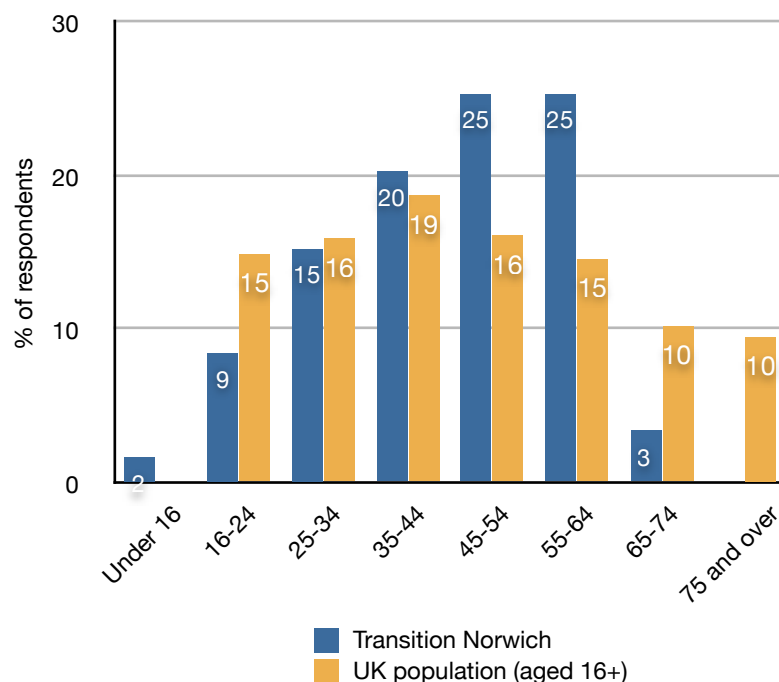


Figure 3: Educational Attainment of TN members compared with the general population

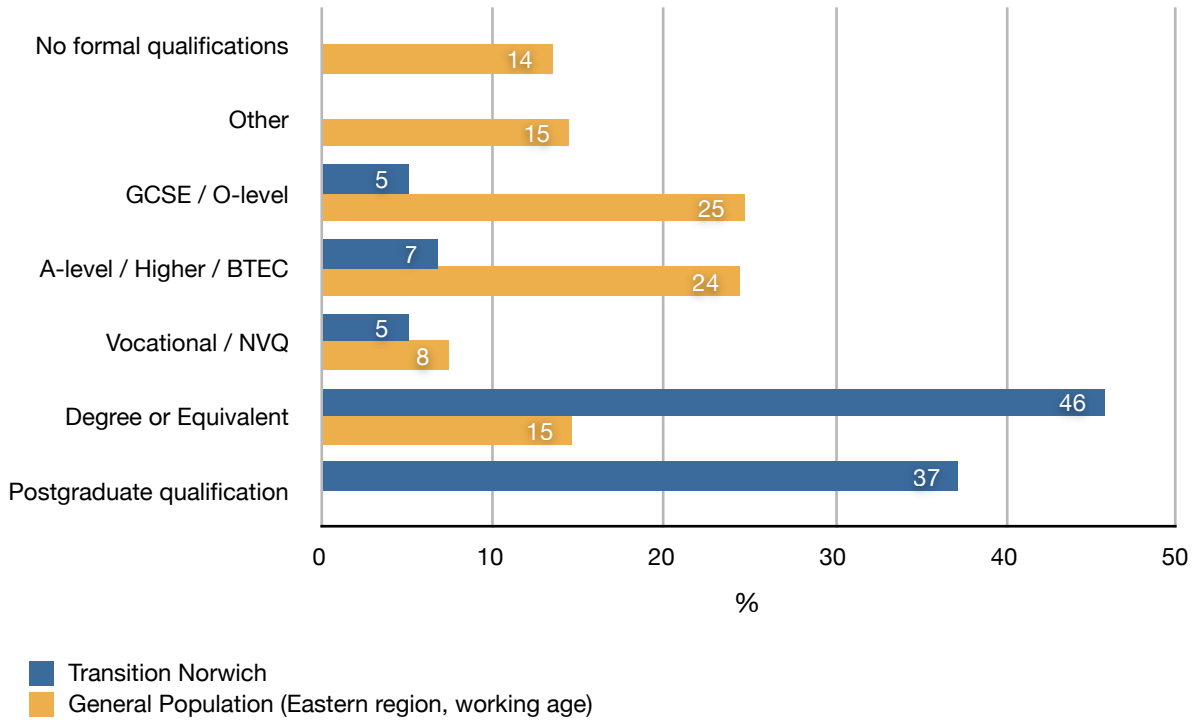


Figure 4: Economic Status of TN members (working age) and General Population

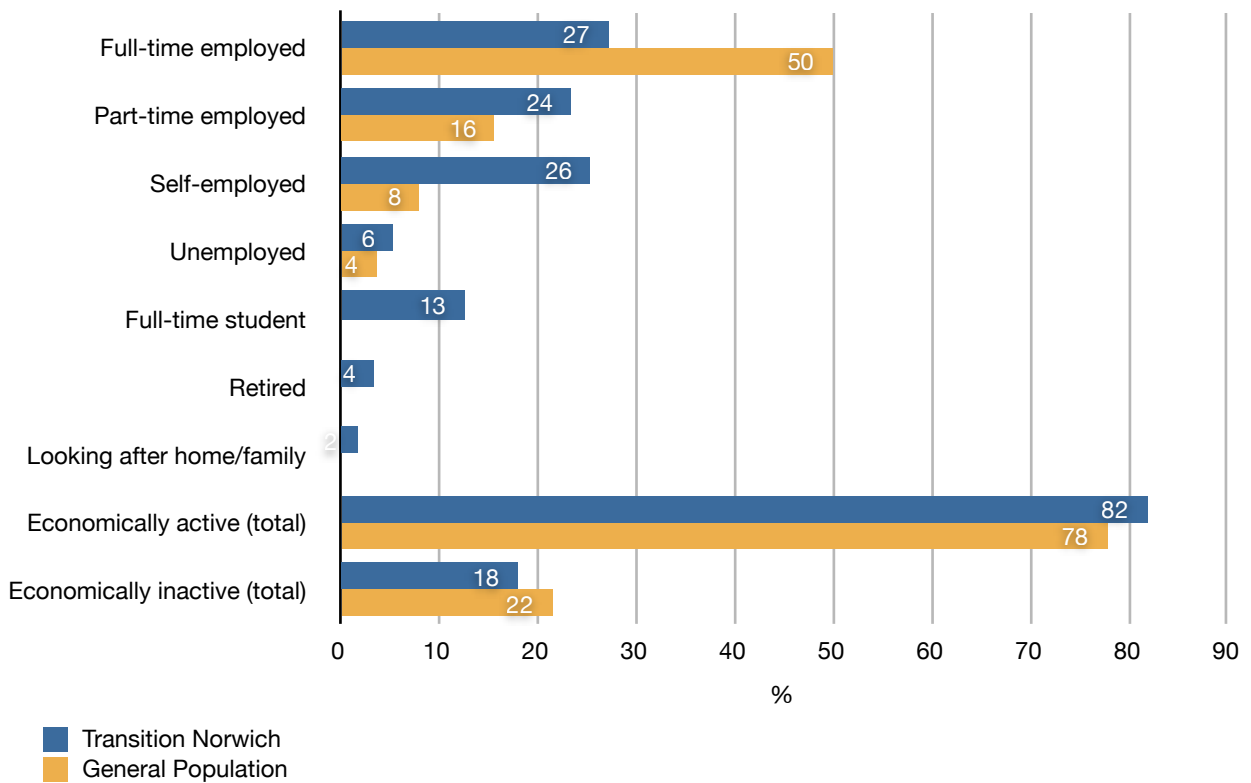
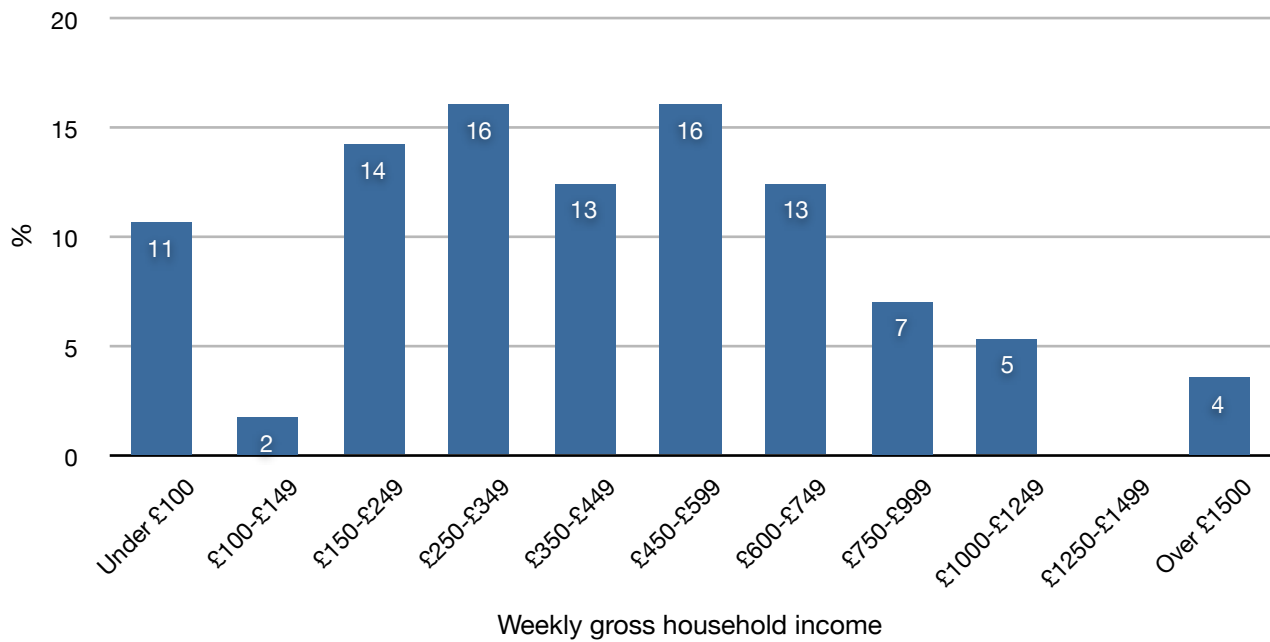


Figure 5: Income Distribution of TN members



Activism profile

Had these people been involved in similar sorts of organisations previously, or were they new to the community-based environmental movement? The survey revealed that for nearly a third of the members (32%), Transition Norwich was the first local environmental group they had been involved with (see Figure 6). A further 19% had previously been involved in similar activities, but were not involved with any other groups at present. This finding is significant as it demonstrates that the Transition Movement is capable of enrolling and engaging new people (or re-engaging ex-activists) in local environmental groups, rather than simply re-badging existing campaigns and activists (although it clearly does this as well). See Appendix A for further demographic breakdown of these newcomers.

A third (33%) were currently involved with other local environmental groups, and 16% were also involved in groups that were quite different to Transition Norwich. These included local permaculture groups, slow-food groups, local organic gardening groups, Freecycle, Farmers Markets, Green Party, etc; and also included organisations like RSPB, Friends of the Earth, Quakers, the Ramblers, Greenpeace, Rising Tide and so on, which have quite distinct goals and modus operandi to the Transition Movement.

The survey asked members what they thought differentiated Transition Norwich from other local environmental groups, and the responses indicated that there were three important distinguishing features (see Figure 7). The most frequently-reported of these (cited by 50% of respondents) was the interlinking of a broad range of issues under a single 'umbrella' brand, for example "I don't see it so much as a new group but as a process that can bring together a lot of pre-existing activity, catalyze new work, and create new interest in a range of seemingly disparate issues", and another said "it is a wide umbrella group of diverse interests, but with a common goal to act locally...", while this respondent felt "it is comprehensive in that it covers all the different themes in a separate but interlinking way" and another said "it has a wider vision, brings together many different strands". Second (mentioned by 29%) was the focus on positive practical action as opposed to negative-seeming protesting or campaigning, as explained by this respondent: "It's not about creating a 'them' and 'us' opposition, though it can and does challenge existing orthodoxies. Its primary means of motivation is offering a positive vision that inspires people to join in, rather than inviting people to join in with demonising and scapegoating a group or institution. 'What are we for?' is a much richer and empowering position than

‘who are we against?’ Another explained that it was about “doing things positively to make a difference, rather than campaigning”, and another said “it’s working for, rather than against something”. The third most-cited difference (21%) was the grassroots nature of the organisation, with its emphasis on community empowerment, such as “It focuses on doing it for ourselves, rather than persuading others”, “facilitates bottom-up change that does not rely on government”, “helping empower people to change and be catalysts for change” and “TN is grassroots therefore less exclusive or prescriptive”. Further features mentioned included the focus on local solutions (10%), the movement’s mass appeal (10%), the fact that the local group is part of a wider movement (8%) the community-building aspects of the group (6%), and the element of inner change which Transition highlights (2%). It is clear then, that Transition Norwich is seen as being different to other local groups, with specific characteristics (not single-issue, a focus on positive action, and bottom-up community empowerment) that make it complementary to existing initiatives, and an attractive proposition.

Figure 6: Are you involved with other local environmental groups?

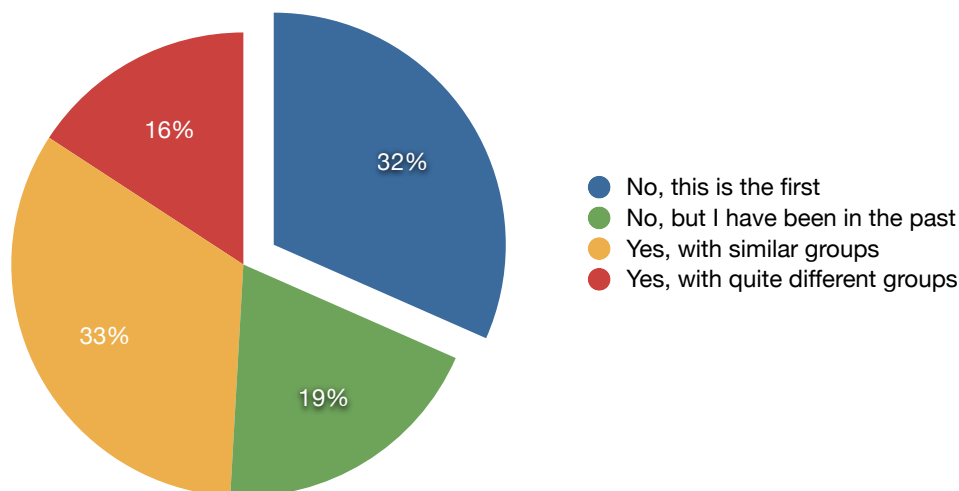
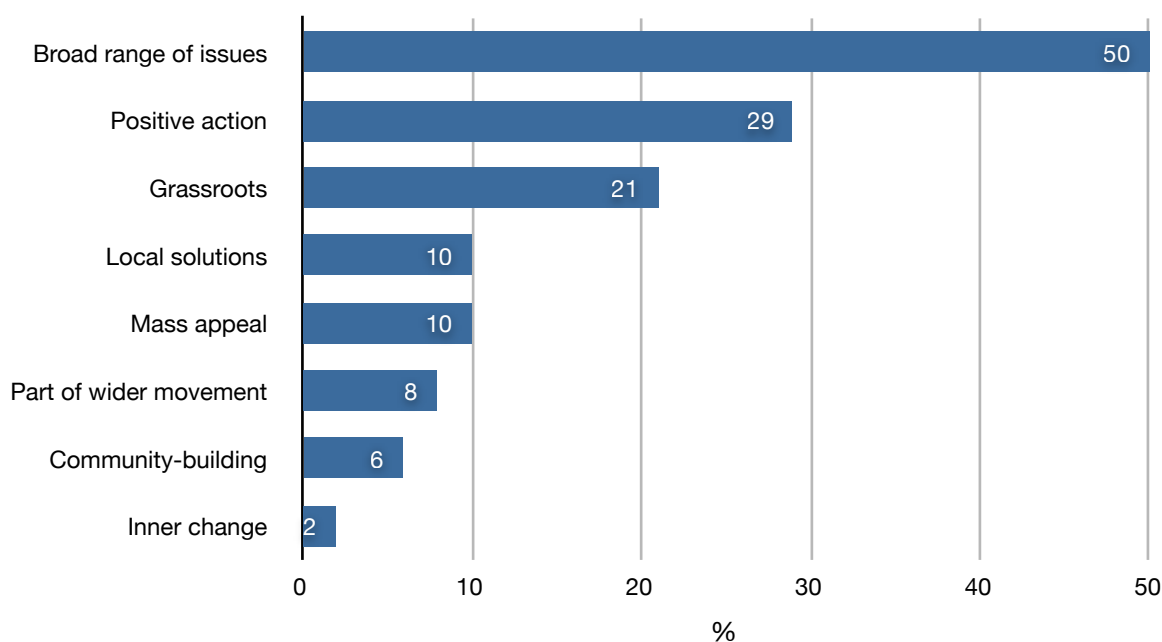


Figure 7: Factors that distinguish TN from other local environmental groups



Recruitment

Members were overwhelmingly introduced to Transition Norwich through word of mouth, being told about the group by friends and colleagues (54%), as shown in Figure 8. The next most successful recruitment method was advertising through leaflets and posters, which attracted a further 19% of members, followed by 15% who heard about the group through websites and online groups. Promoting the group through newspapers, TV and radio was considerably less effective, with only 2% of members first hearing about it through national media, and none at all reporting that local media introduced them to the idea. Ten per cent reported hearing about it through other means, primarily stalls and workshops at other events.

However, the recruitment method varied according to whether or not the participants were new to local environmental action, or whether they were already active in other local groups (see Figure 9). Among those people for whom Transition Norwich is their first local environmental group, word of mouth publicity was less effective (reported by 33% of these members, compared to 52% overall), and the more effective methods were national media (6% compared with 2% overall) and online publicity (22% compared with 16% for the whole membership). On the other hand, for those members also active in other local environmental groups, word of mouth advertising was by far the most effective method of spreading news about the group, reported by 72% of these members.

Figure 8: How did you first hear about Transition Norwich?

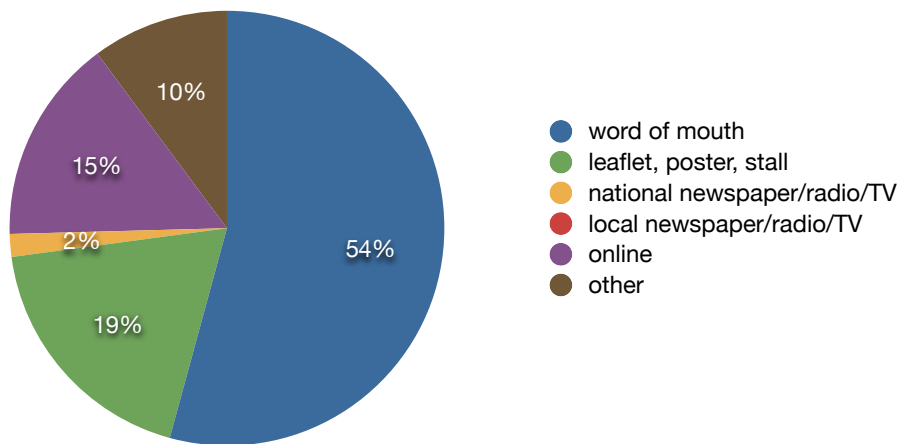
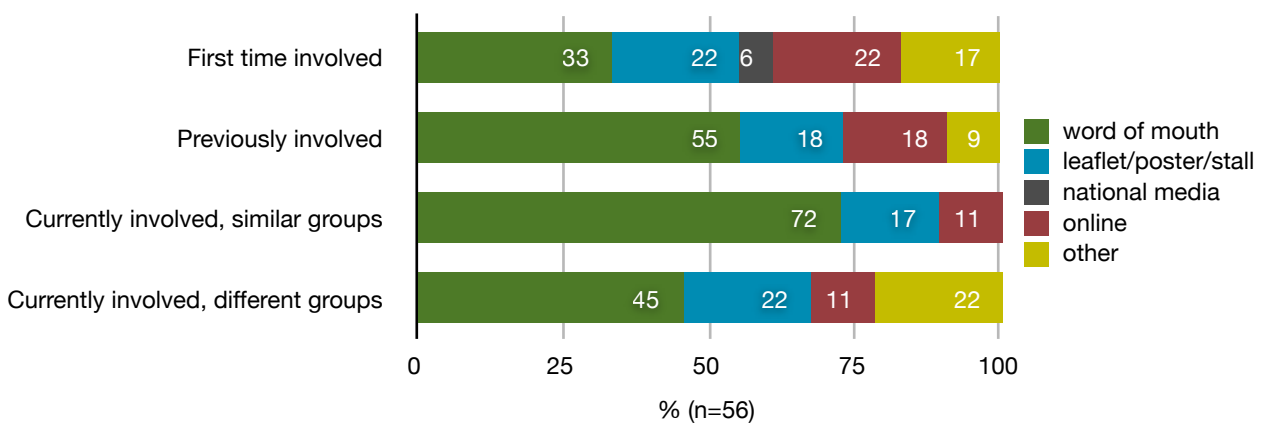


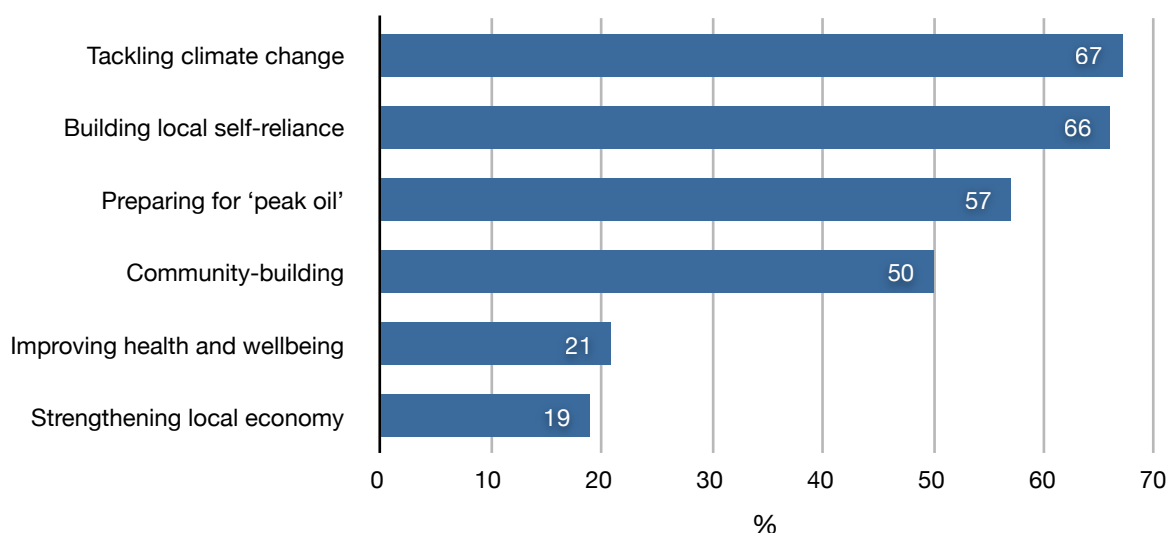
Figure 9: Source of information on TN by involvement in local environmental groups



Members' motivations

So, given this profile of members, and perception of what makes Transition Norwich different, why did they get involved? The members' principal objectives were: tackling climate change (reported by 67%), building local self-reliance (66%), preparing for 'peak oil' (57%), and community-building (50%). These priorities combine the overall objectives of the Transition Movement (peak oil and climate change) with more locally-focused motivations about economic resilience and social cohesion.

Figure 10: Motivations for joining TN



Engagement with Transition Norwich

The target sample were all on Transition Norwich's email list, so had clearly expressed some interest in the organisation previously. But to what extent were they involved with, or active within, the movement? The survey reveals a high level of engagement with the organisation locally, with reduced interest in the national movement (shown in Figure 11). For instance, 92% of survey respondents had visited Transition Norwich's website, and almost three quarters had attended the Great Unleashing. Levels of activity within the local group were high: 85% had subscribed to a themed email group, and 68% had attended a meeting organised around one of these themes. The vast majority (88%) had discussed Transition ideas with their friends or colleagues.

The survey also investigated the extent to which participants were familiar with the wider Transition Movement, and with its founder, Rob Hopkins, in particular (Rob is sometimes cast as the movement's leader and holds iconic status among some local groups). It found a lower level of engagement with the national movement, either through active participation or through familiarity with 'leading' contributions. Only 58% of the Norwich members had seen the national Transition Network's website, and none had attended any of the national Transition Network conferences or undertaken Transition Training (the centrally-coordinated training necessary to become an accredited, official Transition Initiative). Almost three-quarters (71%) had heard of Rob Hopkins, however, and 46% had read his book *The Transition Handbook*; but only 17% had read Hopkins' blog 'transitionculture.org'.

Respondents listed an average of 4 themed subgroups they were most interested in, and of the 14 in existence at the time, the most popular was food/farming (73% of respondents), followed by energy (58%), reskilling (40%) and transport (38%). However, compared to this overall spread of interests, the newcomers to local environmental organisations were more than averagely interested in food and farming (78%), reskilling (56%) and zero waste (44%), while they were notably underrepresented in energy (50% compared with 58%) and transport (22% compared with 38% overall) - see Figure 12 and Appendix. This gives some indication of the topics most likely to attract new people to the movement.

Figure 11: Level of Involvement in the Transition Movement

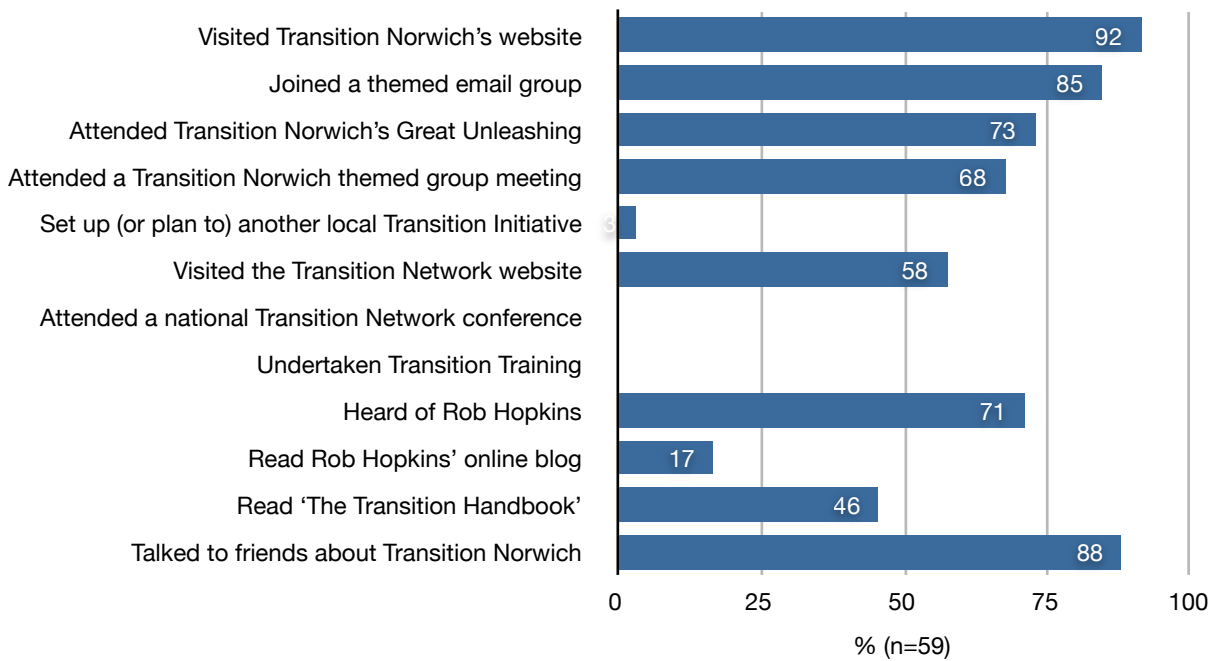
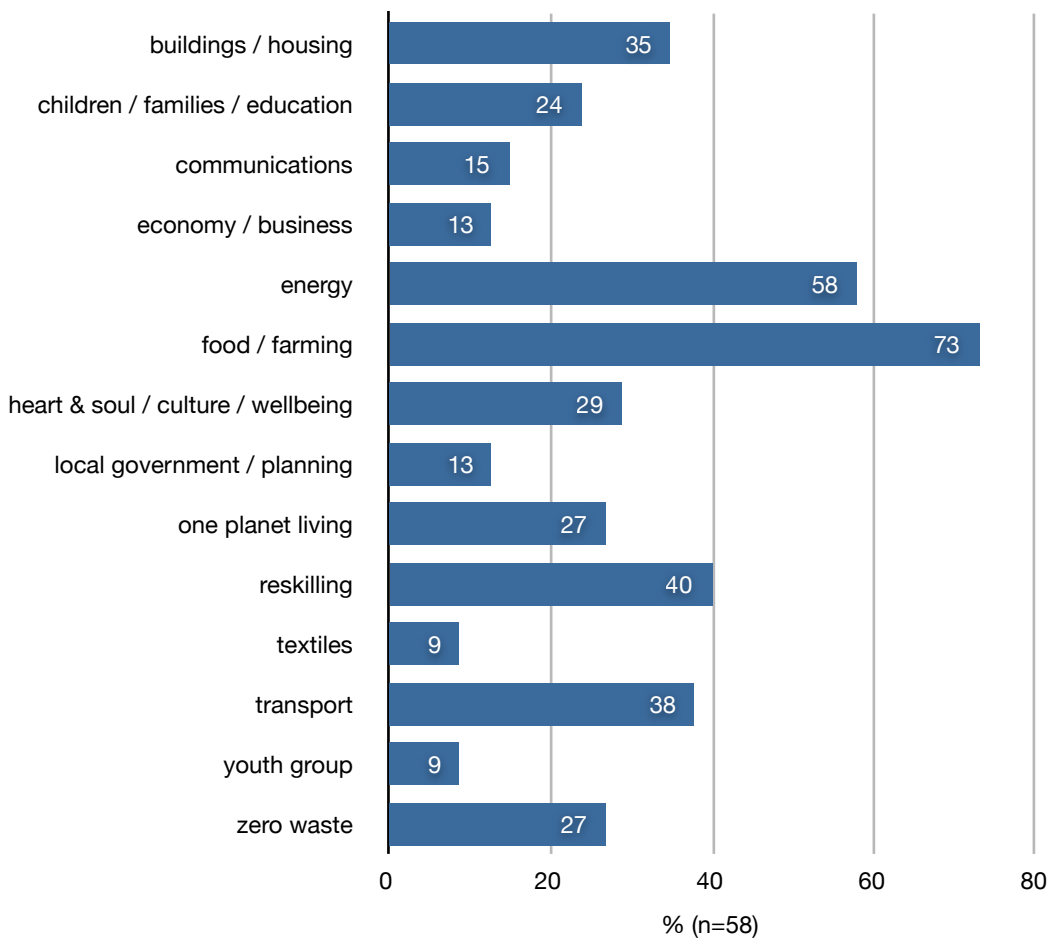


Figure 12: Interest in TN's themed Subgroups



Strategic Analysis of Transition Norwich

The survey asked members for their views about the strengths and weaknesses of Transition Norwich, or the Transition Movement more generally. These have been broken down into those factors which are internal to the organisation (strengths and weaknesses), and those which are in the external environment (opportunities and threats). The results are summarised below, along with a strategic analysis of how these relate to factors which are internal or external to the group.

Transition Norwich's Positive Attributes: Strengths and Opportunities

Most of the respondents (88%) offered some thoughts about what the strengths of Transition Norwich might be; these are shown in Figure 13, and it is unsurprising that they echo strongly the factors listed above about what makes Transition Norwich distinctive to other local environmental groups. The attribute most frequently-cited (by 50% of those who responded) is the group's commitment to community-building, and its ability to bring people together around a common agenda. Examples of this include: "s sense of common purpose", "community cohesion", "the community feeling", "inclusion of everyone", "creates networks of people who can gain mutual inspiration and support", "bringing people together from across environmental/progressive social movements", "bringing together the local community by combining ideas and moving forward with a united aim", and "by working together as a community we will not feel so afraid of the economic and climate changes ahead".

Following this, 21% felt the movement's positive, optimistic and hopeful message was a key strength, for example "Transition Norwich has something very workable, promising and positive about it", "it holds out a more positive vision of the future in a coherent manner", "it is a positive and active project", "it gives people hope", "it is very positive, it inspires hope", and so on. The same number described the empowering nature of the organisation as a core positive attribute, for example by showing how individuals can make a difference: "local empowerment - the feeling that we can make a difference", "a feeling that we can all play our part to make a lasting difference in our locality", "pulling people together and giving them the power", "taking the power back, taking responsibility for our lives/impacts", and "utilising the skills of a community, empowering people to get involved".

The next two characteristics were similarly well-reported, with 19% highlighting the grassroots, flexible nature of the organisation as a strength, as illustrated through these comments "change from the 'bottom-up', brought about by people who know the issues people face", and "working together at grassroots to tackle real problems in a practical way". Further, "another key strength is its 'bottom-up' organisational philosophy. This has yet to be fully worked out in terms of how the structure works, but there is a definite emphasis on 'power with' rather than 'power over'", and finally "it's open, to ideas, change, etc, and it's flexible, quick to adapt. Rob [Hopkins] may have planted the meme but now Transition is 'out', owned by all who participate", and "the nature of the organisation allows for different approaches in different locations rather than a uniform prescription determined at a national or international level" .

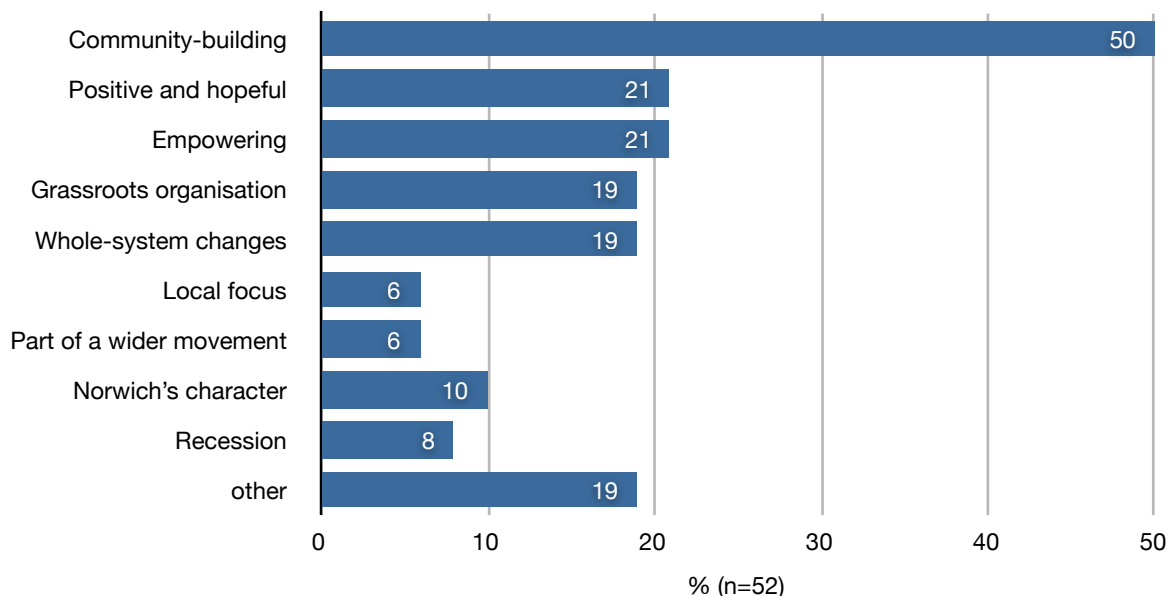
Also, 19% mentioned the fact that Transition Norwich offered support for whole-system changes in lifestyles, rather than piecemeal reforms. For instance, addressing wider issues like consumerism and "the belief that we can create a good life without the need for more", and "a return to meaningful living", " it focuses on a complete re-organisation of society", "attempts to support positive changes in lifestyle", and "can we reach a cultural tipping point when transition culture becomes embedded in a locality and becomes the norm?". Other factors mentioned included the shared learning and support from the wider Transition Network, and the local focus (e.g. "it is local. rather than countrywide, so provides focus and no overwhelm, as you get when hearing about global problems").

Two factors in the external environment were listed by survey respondents as being conducive to the success of Transition Norwich, thereby representing external opportunities. The first of these were the specific characteristics of Norwich, as a green city with high representation of Green Party members in local government, and a reputation for community-minded activities, as well as its proximity to the countryside and cycling-friendly topography! (10% of

respondents reported this factor). For instance, one member said “the country feel to the city within its agricultural surroundings, and the psychological feeling of being ‘out on a limb’ from elsewhere will help the ease of understanding local resilience. Do different, as we say here”, and another commented “Norwich (and Norfolk) is rather ‘out on a limb’ and has developed at its own pace and using its unique resources of people and raw materials. I feel that many people already lead an ‘alternative’ lifestyle and so are very open to the aims of TN”. Other comments included “there’s already a strong community spirit in Norwich, and thus TN can build on this”, “good size city and population, nearness of countryside; relative flatness to encourage cycling; long-standing ‘alternative’ tradition compared with some other places”, “the Green members within City Hall and our environmental aspirations for the City”.

The second opportunity for Transition Norwich was the economic recession, which several respondents considered made the movement more timely and relevant to people looking to save money and cut back on consumption. For example, growing your own food, repairing goods and so on might be activities that took on a new economic relevance for a wider section of the population during times of economic hardship, rather than being seen as fringe environmentally-motivated actions. This is shown in the following comments: “it encourages people to be environmentally-friendly in a financially difficult time”, “it has come at a good time, the move towards a greener future/ recycling”, and “impeccable timing, as the recession is beginning to make people wake up”.

Figure 13: TN’s Strengths and Opportunities



Challenges facing Transition Norwich: Weaknesses and Threats

When asked to consider the internal obstacles, problems and challenges to be overcome by Transition Norwich (or the Transition Movement more widely), there were again three factors which stood out above the rest on members’ minds (see Figure 14). First and foremost was a concern with various administrative and organisational aspects of the local group (listed by 20% of respondents). These were quite varied, and in many ways represent the other side of the coin to some of the benefits listed above - proving what a delicate balancing act community organisations must manage! Responses included a perceived lack of clear leadership, effective organisation skills, etc. Comments included: “In some ways its strengths are also its weaknesses. The ‘power-with’ principle could easily translate into a lack of effective leadership. Productive group process, consensus decision-making, and effective planning requires skilled facilitation... some are better at facilitating than others. How can we be inclusive and nonhierarchical, but also trust individuals to take on distinct roles in accordance with their particular gifts and strengths?”, “without leadership, it can falter because

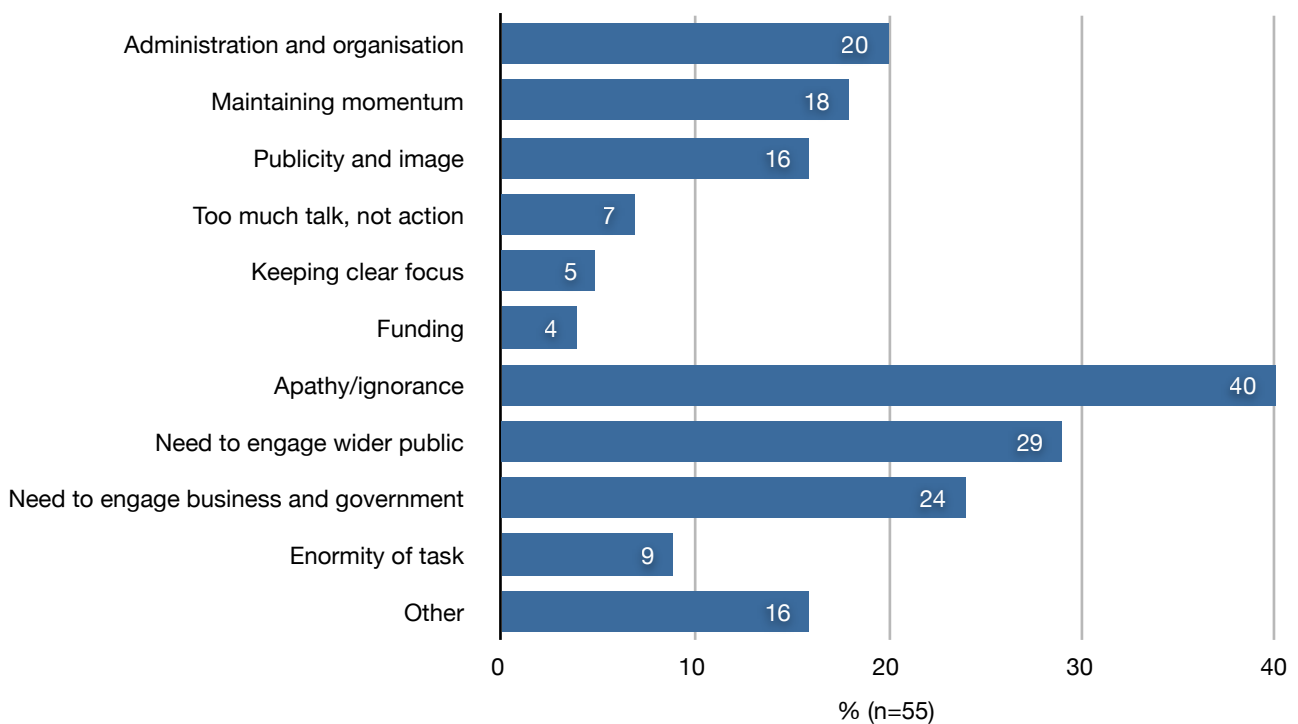
there is no one driving force”, “ensuring the group meetings are open to new members and do not become a clique”, and “poor organisational skills”, “the few meetings I have attended have been scattered and somewhat ineffectual... although I am very committed personally and professionally to the issues related to TN”. Finally, one said “ I realise it would be best if I support them when they have a little more ‘structure’ - aims, publicity, events, etc.”

Second was a concern with the need to maintain momentum - particularly in relation to activists finding time to devote to the movement (18% gave this response). For example one said a key issue was “the amount of time people have to put into such a project”, and another felt it was important to “maintain a sense of progress and achievement for all involved”, which is tricky, because as another mentioned “it appears many members (as with volunteers) cannot attend meetings regularly - so this loses some momentum”, and “if interest and enthusiasm wanes... all the work ends up on one small group of people”.

Third, two related issues have been grouped together as publicity and image, reported by 16% of respondents. These issues relate to the need for better external publicity about Transition Norwich activities, and improved internal communications between core group and members, and between the various sub-groups - in particular, not just using email. They also cover a perceived problem with having a ‘green’ or ‘hippy’ image, and the fact that this might alienate wider communities of the public. One respondent explained “If we are to make things happen, we have to be focused, organised, credible to the skeptics/ don’t cares. But this need for a businesslike approach (as if we were putting our own money into setting up a company) runs counter to a culture that dislikes any hint of corporate-speak”. Others thought that a “green image” would be off-putting or even a “cultish’ appearance” and that “it is necessary to ensure we are not seen as some ‘do-gooders’ and ‘eco-warriors’ like some see Friends of the Earth or Greenpeace, but simply offering an opportunity to local people with local needs, whilst looking at the bigger picture”.

Other minor issues mentioned were a concern for too much talking and meetings, and not enough practical action (7%), the need to keep a clear focus amongst so many disparate projects and groups (5%), and the need to attract funding to better resource group activities (4%).

Figure 14: TN's Weaknesses and Threats



On the other hand, the list of external threats to the movement’s success were much greater, and much more commonly cited by members, although they all relate to the struggle to grow the movement and get wider support for its aims. The biggest obstacle to be overcome was reported to be the widespread apathy or ignorance (or resistance/denial) of the majority of the population (40% of survey respondents listed this). Eg “the main obstacles are from a general population that neither know nor care very much about environmental factors and the speed at which peak oil is happening. Society could be accused of being complacent and will not take any notice of wider issues until it impacts on their own lives and pockets”. Other comments reinforced this view, for example “ignorance and apathy, it’s easier to stay in and watch Big Brother”, “unwillingness of the majority to recognise the seriousness of climate change and to change [their] lifestyle radically” and finally “the scale of denial amongst the mainstream”.

A related issue is the need to engage with wider communities outside the existing green activist groups (29% gave this answer). One member described it as “a lack of appeal to the non-middle classes”, and another said the challenge was about “reaching beyond the usual suspects”. Other comments on this theme were: “reaching others in Norwich”, “getting more local people to buy-in - the general public needs to support the movement for it to work”, and “getting wide community support”. For some, this came down to a need for “awareness-raising and reaching out to local people”; however, one noted “it appeals to a small group of people - maybe those who are already aware and motivated - which could be off-putting to those who don’t fit that description”.

Several members (24%) mentioned the need to engage more effectively with businesses and government (both local and national), and even to try and overcome the general profit-oriented consumerist culture which Transition attempts to counteract. For example “being acknowledged by the mainstream in local business and local government”, “possible lack of political will/power”, “local government activities not supporting the aims”, “the general belief that economic growth has to continue”, and “corporate interest in profit”. One respondent summed up the problems regarding power and governance: “In working at a local level, good work may be done in a number of places, but if national policy on coal-fired power stations and airport expansion remains adverse then the climate change battle will be lost even if there are some local victories”. Finally, a few (9%) reported being overwhelmed by the enormity of the task ahead, and felt that the potential for helplessness and despair was always present.

Conclusions: A SWOT Analysis of Transition Norwich

Considered together, these findings allow us to assemble a ‘SWOT’ strategic analysis of Transition Norwich’s objectives (of shifting towards a resilient, low-carbon future) in terms of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as shown in the Figure 15, and Table 1 below.



Figure 15: Diagrammatic representation of a SWOT analysis

Table 1: SWOT analysis of Transition Norwich

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Community-building Positive approach Empowering Grassroots organisation Supports whole-systems changes Local solutions-focused Part of a wider movement	Administrative and organisational issues Maintaining momentum and time Publicity and image Too much talk, not enough action Keeping a clear focus Funding
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Norwich's characteristics (green city, close to countryside) Recession	Apathy and ignorance Need to engage wider communities Engage with business and government Enormity of the task

Having identified the various factors in each quadrant of the matrix, the goal is then to

- build on existing strengths,
- address and overcome weaknesses,
- capitalise on opportunities, and
- mitigate threats.

It is hoped that this analysis will be of use to Transition Norwich as the group plans its future development, although the findings are presented with the caveat that this survey is unlikely to be representative of the full membership, and that it was conducted while the themed groups were getting underway - hence a follow-up survey would be useful to ascertain how the group has progressed, and met the challenges it faced back in spring 2009 in moving from the initial group-formation stages, to more practical action.

Appendix

Detailed analysis of newcomers to local environmental groups

It is significant that a third of the respondents to the survey have not previously been involved with local environmental groups. In the preceding text, there is some analysis of the differences between this sub-group of the membership and the overall profile of members. Here, I present a more detailed analysis of that sub-group's characteristics are discussed, to ascertain the type of people who have been attracted to this sort of community activism for the first time, by Transition Norwich, and their specific interests, level of engagement and motivations.

Some of the figures shown here are different to those presented in the main text: as these analyses rely on cross-tabulations, only those who answered both the 'previous involvement' question, *and* each particular question below, can be included. Consequently, there is a slightly lower response rate for each set of cross-tabulated data (n=54). With such a small sample size, it is unlikely that all these results are statistically significant, but nevertheless they provide an interesting perspective on who those who are attracted to join Transition Norwich as their first step into local environmental action. In sum, the charts below reveal that compared with the Transition norwich members who are or have previously been active in local environmental groups, the newcomers:

- are more likely to be female (61% compared with 56% of existing activists);
- are younger (45% are under 45 years old, compared with 25% of existing activists);
- have a different educational profile, being more likely to have lower educational attainment (22% up to vocational/NVQ level, compared to 17%; however, the proportion with at least degree-level education is about the same - 78% versus 83%);
- are more likely to be employed (61% compared with 41% of existing activists), and less likely to be self-employed (11% against 33%);
- have a lower household income (50% have income below £349 a week, compared with 34%);
- use online sources of information about the Transition movement (both national and local) more than previous or existing activists;
- are more interested in actions around food, wellbeing, reskilling and zero waste, and less keen on economy, energy, transport and youth groups.

Figure 16: Gender of TN members (n=54)

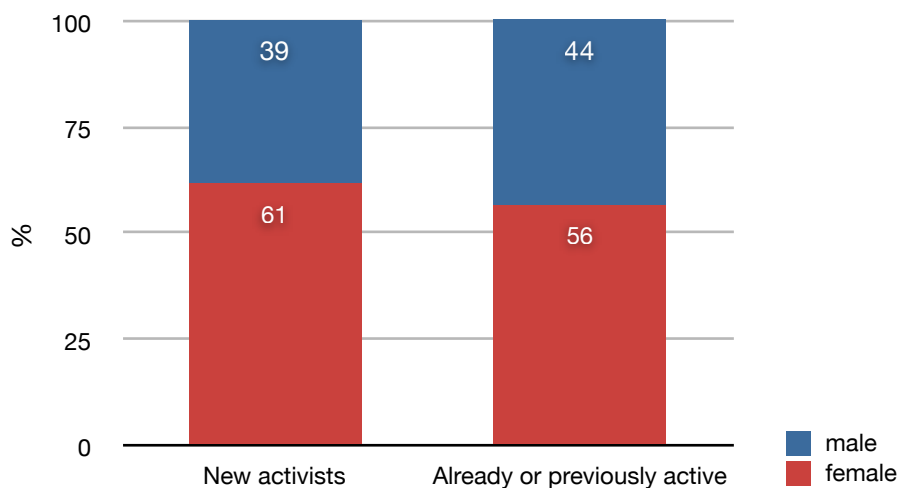


Figure 17: Age Distribution of TN Members (n=54)

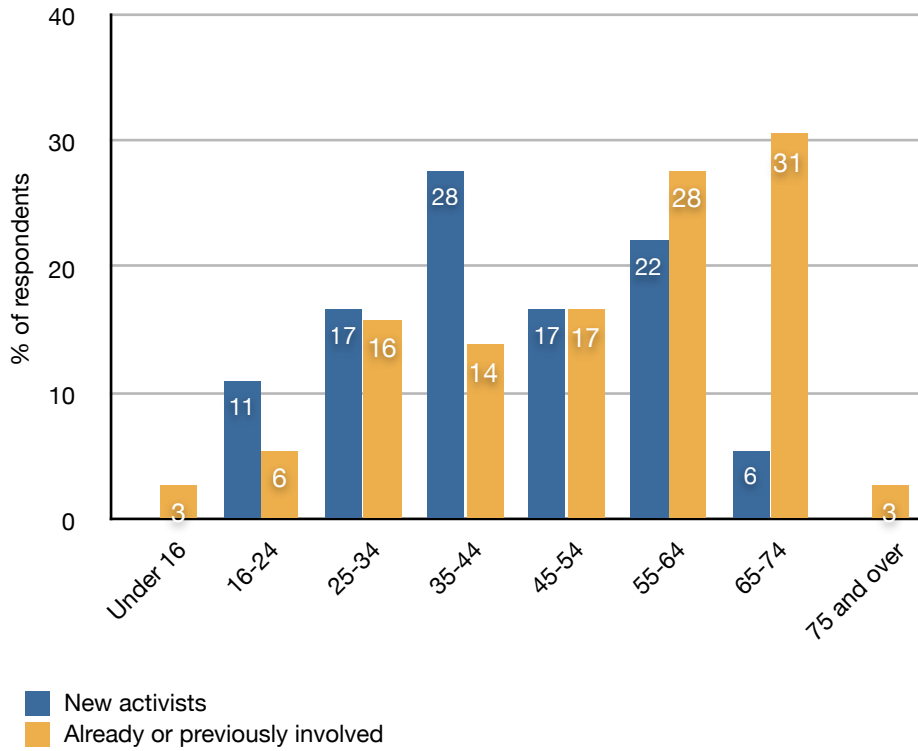


Figure 18: Educational Attainment of TN members (n=54)

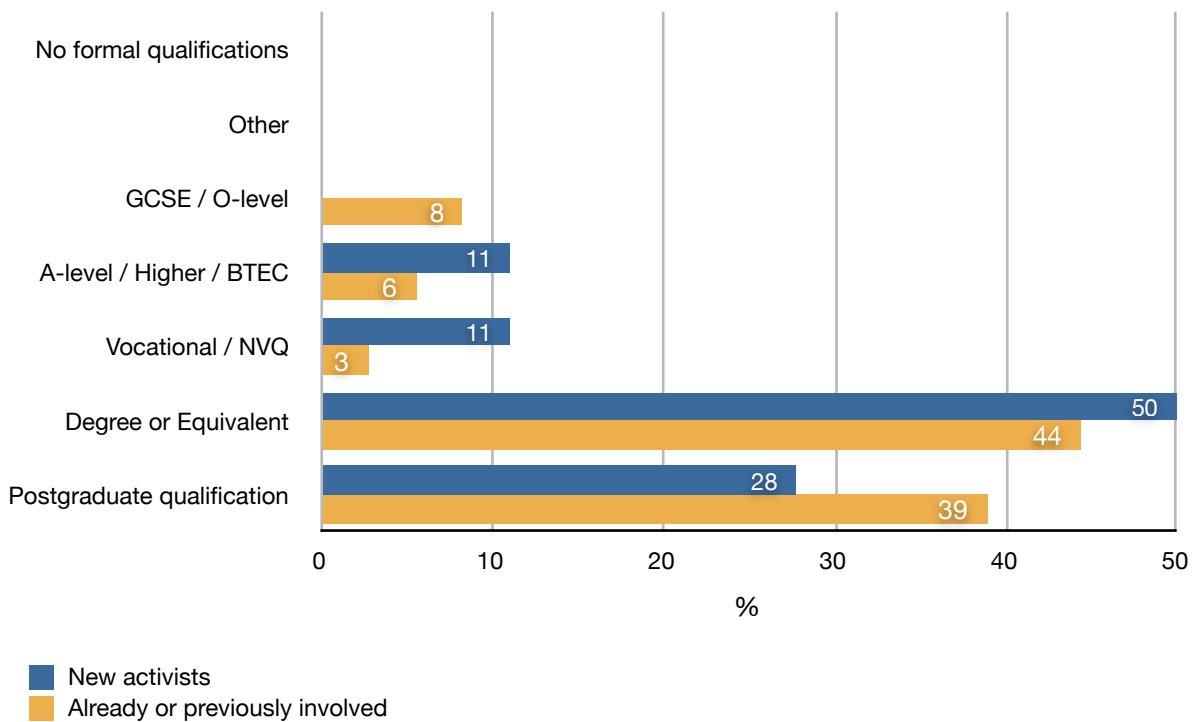


Figure 19: Economic Status of TN members (n=54)

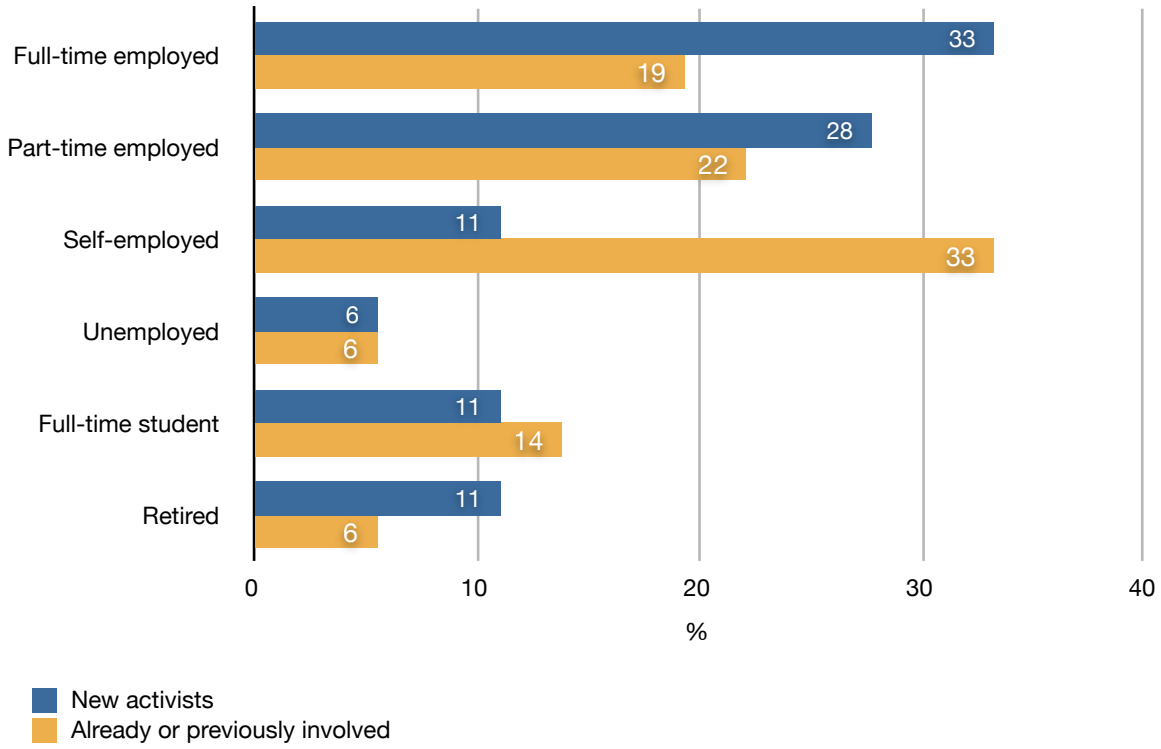


Figure 20: Income Distribution of TN members (n=54)

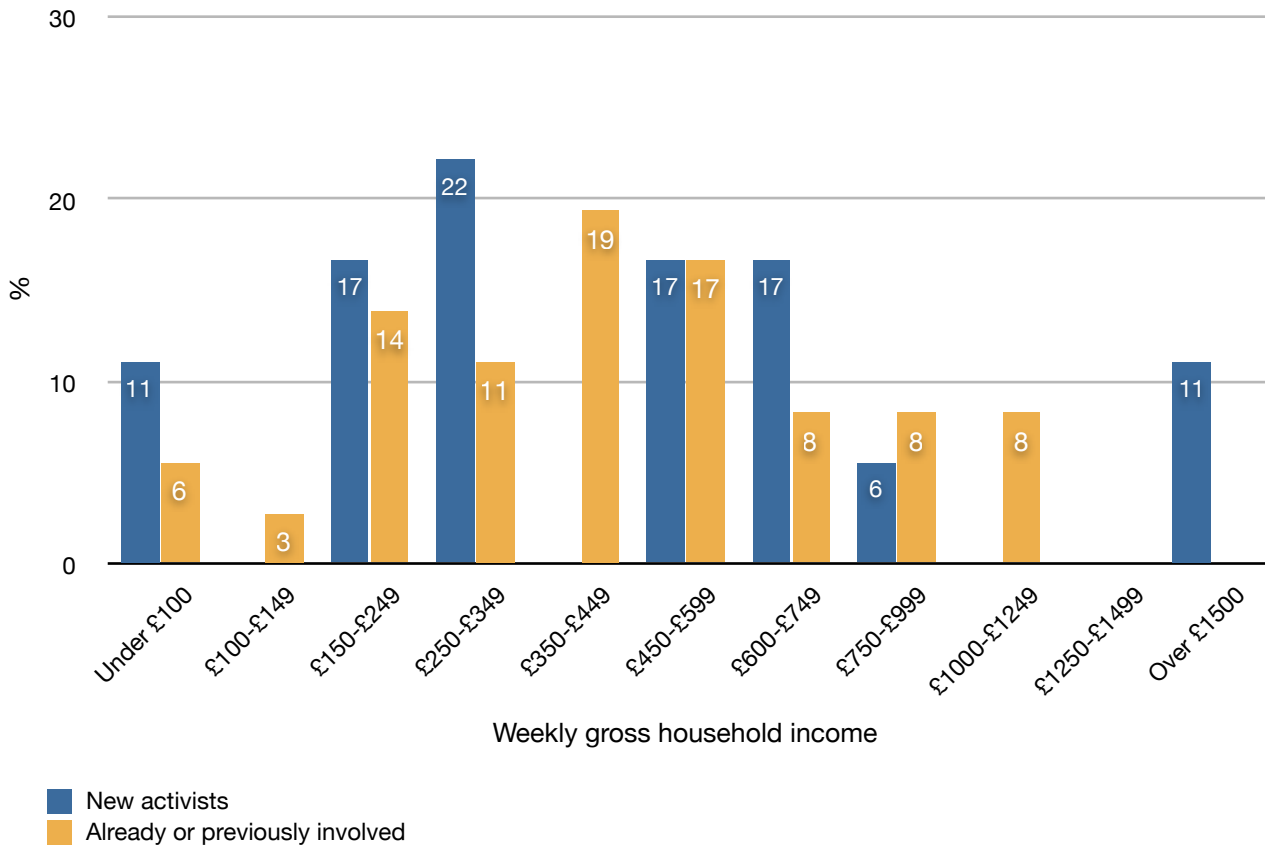
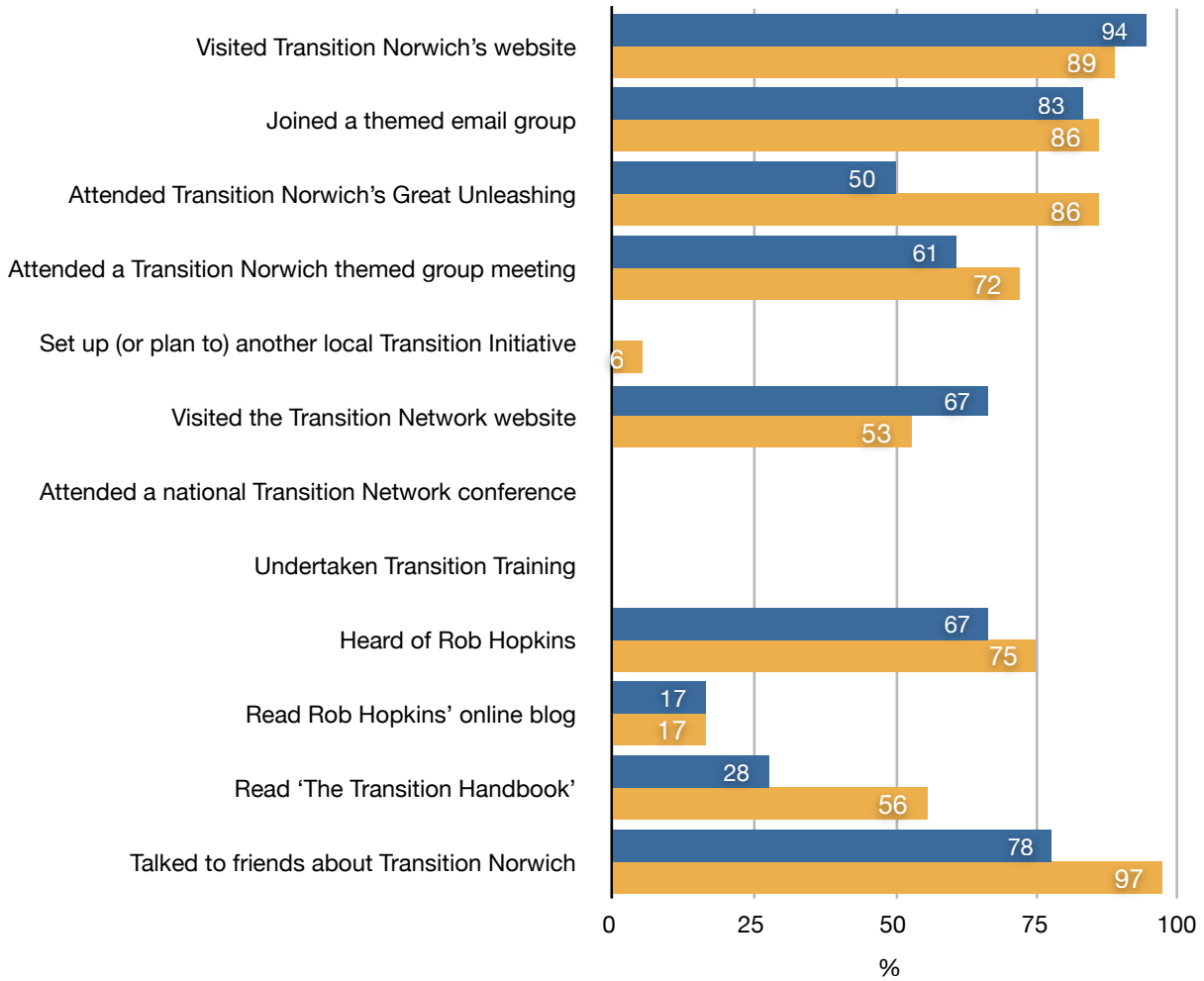
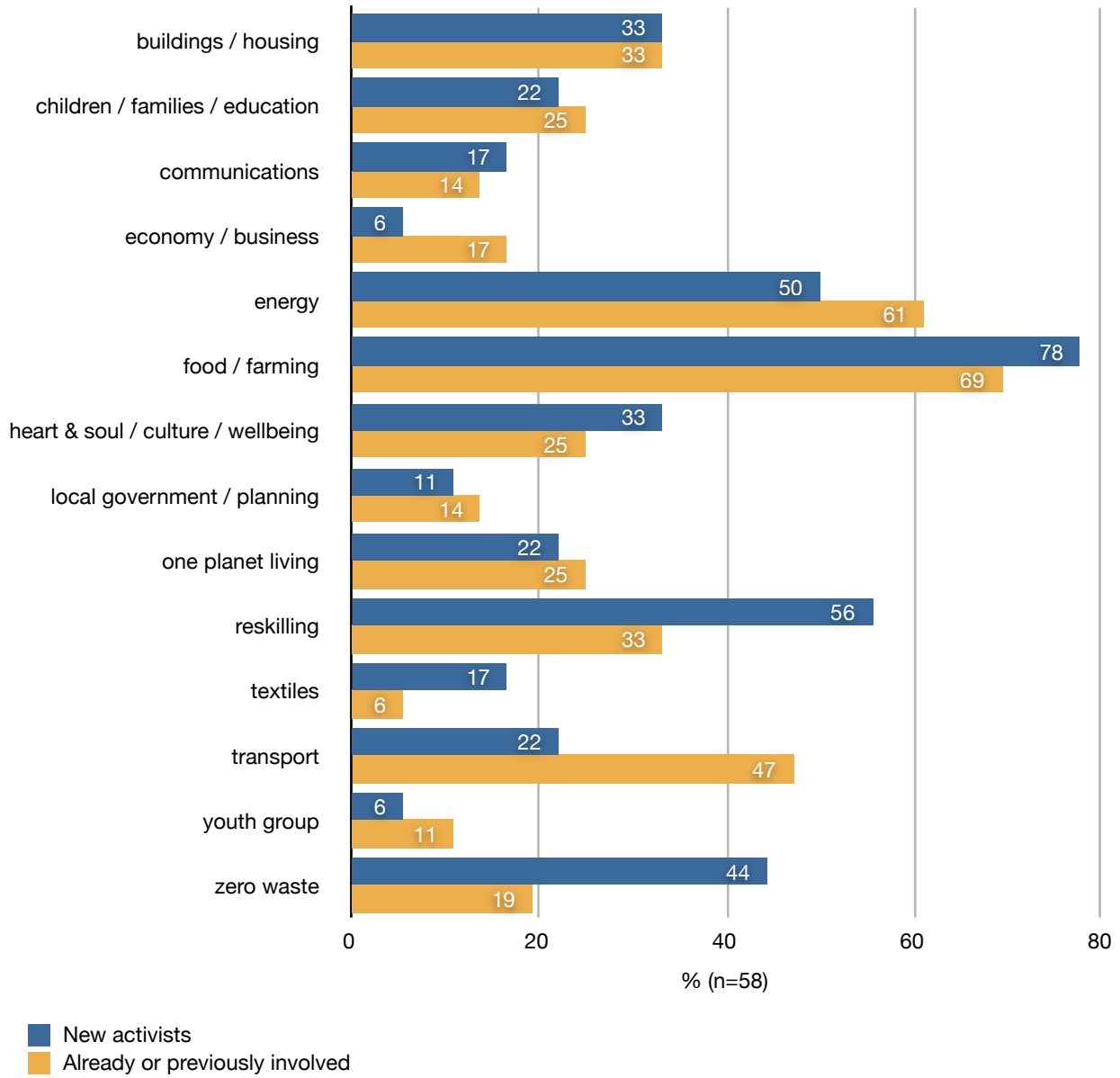


Figure 21: Level of Involvement in the Transition Movement (n=54)



■ New activists
■ Already or previously involved

Figure 22: Interest in TN's themed Subgroups (n=54)



Acknowledgements

This research forms part of a wider programme of research on grassroots innovations for sustainability (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Seyfang, 2009a,b), which aims to improve understanding of the ways that community-led initiatives for sustainability can develop and grow, diffusing their new ideas and practices into wider society. Thanks to Alex Haxeltine, Noel Longhurst, Tom Hargreaves and Richard Baldwin for collaboration around this broader research agenda, and for contributing to this report through discussions and debate. I am grateful to the UK's Economic and Social Research Council for supporting this research through an Academic Fellowship, and to the coordinators and members of Transition Norwich for participating in this survey. More information on this work, and other papers on our study of the Transition movement, can be found on the website below.

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